

COMMENTARY

The Promise of Post-Secondary Education in California

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[John Fensterwald](#)'s current [post on the Long Beach Promise offers a nice illustration of how a system of post-secondary education might work in California](#), if we actually had such a system. In reality, of course, we have three separate systems of post-secondary education—the [University of California](#) (UC), the [California State University](#) (CSU), and the [California Community Colleges](#) (CCC)—along with a host of private and independent institutions.

All of these systems act independently of one another, and often compete for resources. Within the UC and CCC "systems," moreover, individual campuses retain a great deal of autonomy, which further limits coherence and consistency across systems and institutions. As a result, students trying to navigate their route to college face confusion and other obstacles at every turn. In the midst of this chaos the Long Beach Promise stands out as an example of how CSU, CCC, and K–12 educators can work together to create a clearer and straighter pathway to college.

There are two key points to make about the Long Beach Promise, beyond those that John highlights.

The first is that the [Early Assessment Program](#) (EAP) is the linchpin of the program. The EAP serves as a common indicator of readiness for non-remedial, credit-bearing, baccalaureate-level coursework for all of the partners in the [Long Beach Promise](#). From the student's point of view the clear and consistent message that EAP provides about what it means and what it takes to be ready for college—any college—can serve both as a guide and incentive as she moves through high school. From the point of view of the "system," agreement that satisfactory performance on the EAP assessment means that a student is ready for college-level coursework can help to smooth transitions, not only from high school to college but within post-secondary education as well. It thus removes some key barriers to improved access and success.

The second key point is that the example set by the Long Beach Promise is being replicated in other parts of California. In the Inland Empire, for example, [PACE is working with the Federation for a Competitive Economy and other partners on a project to expand participation in the EAP and its use for placement in post-secondary education](#). The University of California–Riverside, Cal State–San Bernardino, Cal Poly–Pomona, several community colleges, and the County Offices of Education in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties have adopted EAP implementation as a shared strategy for increasing college access and success. They are working together to increase the numbers of students in the region who are eligible to take the EAP assessment, who perform at a satisfactory level on the test, and who are prepared to enroll in credit-bearing courses when they enter college or university. Similar initiatives have been launched in San Francisco and in Sonoma County. These regional initiatives, in which individual institutions are surrendering some autonomy to help construct a coherent education system that better serves local students, promise real progress on some of the most vexing educational problems facing our state.

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