



Executive Summary

California community colleges are, by design, the only entry point to four-year institutions for the majority of students in the state. Yet, many of these institutions perpetuate racial and class segregation, thus disrupting the California Master Plan for Higher Education's promise of access, equity, and excellence in higher education. This report is an exploratory and descriptive examination of the pipelines to and from Southern California's 51 community colleges. Two central questions guide our analysis and discussion in this report. First, how does high school performance relate to the levels of racial and ethnic segregation in receiving community colleges? Second, how do transfer outcomes relate to the ethnic and racial composition of the community college? We find evidence of a harmful cycle of segregation, whereby students from low-performing high schools are funneled into racially isolated community colleges, which in turn fail to transfer students at high rates. And at more integrated community colleges, a racial transfer gap persists.

We examine the flows of students in the region from the strongest- and weakest-performing high schools to community colleges by their levels of segregation. The high schools' performances are measured by three-year promoting power averages, or successful transitions from one grade to the next. Specifically, we look at the number of large pathways (flows of more than 50 students per year) to community colleges. These pathways can be thought of as large roads funneling students to specific community colleges year after year, and illustrate how certain community colleges in the region serve large numbers of students from weak-performing high schools, while others largely serve only those from high-performing high schools.

This report also assesses how transfer rates vary between community colleges that are the most- and least-segregated in the region. Colleges are divided into the following categories by their levels of segregation: intensely segregated (n=5), majority underrepresented minority (n=17), highly diverse (n=4), majority white/Asian (n=14), and majority white (n=11).

Five themes emerged from this analysis, summarized as follows:

- 1. *Students from weak high schools are concentrated in community colleges where Black and Latino students are overrepresented.*** At 114 high schools in the region, only 23 to 65% of freshmen persist to the senior year, referred to in this report as dropout factories. The majority (57%) of the 78 large pathways from these drop-out schools flows to majority Black/Latino or intensely

- segregated community colleges. All of the five intensely segregated colleges in the region are in the Los Angeles Community College District.
2. ***Students from strong high schools are concentrated in community colleges where white and Asian students are overrepresented.*** There are 115 high schools in the region in which 85 to 100% of freshmen persist to the senior year. The majority (64%) of the 98 large pathways from these schools are to majority white or majority white/Asian community colleges. Majority white schools draw especially heavily from high-performing high schools.
 3. ***Most of the lowest transfer rate community colleges are majority underrepresented minority or intensely segregated.*** The 13 community colleges with the lowest six-year transfer rates have rates ranging from 15 to 33%, with an average of 28%. The majority (85%) of these institutions are intensely segregated or majority underrepresented minority. These low-transferring community colleges are found throughout the region, but are concentrated in Los Angeles.
 4. ***Community colleges with the highest transfer rates are majority white or majority white/Asian.*** All of the community colleges in the upper quartile of transfer rates are majority white or majority white/Asian. At these 13 schools, the overall six-year transfer rates range from 45 to 58%, averaging 49%. Asian and White students have higher transfer rates, 60% and 51%, respectively.
 5. ***Many of these highest transfer rate community colleges have racial disparities.*** Several of the community colleges in the region that are in the upper quartile for the overall transfer rate have large discrepancies between the transfer rates by race. Specifically, there are eight schools in the region in which Black and Latino transfer rates are 12 to 20 percentage points lower than the overall transfer rate, and this group includes some of the institutions thought of as flagship community colleges.

To summarize, it is at the extremes that one sees the starkest differences in levels of segregation and educational opportunity. Students who live near and attend community colleges that are intensely segregated, or majority Black and Latino, typically are in colleges where a great number of fellow students come from weak promoting high schools. Students from weaker high schools tend to have weaker academic preparation and require more remediation, and their colleges and faculty tend to focus more on those needs. In contrast, students from majority white and/or majority white/Asian colleges largely encounter students coming from schools with high promoting power. In consideration of these challenges, we offer the following recommendations:

1. ***Recognize and reward success:*** Rewarding successful community colleges will provide an incentive for community colleges to improve their transfer rate among the students who are most in need of attention. Recognition for transfer equity by race should not only be defined by the aggregate transfer rate, but also by having more equal transfer rates across racial groups.

2. ***Streamline the transfer process:*** A uniform articulation agreement between the 112 community colleges in the state would be one step closer towards equal access.
3. ***Alignment across institutional sectors:*** Increased alignments between sending high schools and receiving community colleges can reduce the need for remediation. Dual enrollment programs for high school students can also begin to bridge the gap between the two sectors, but will only do so in a meaningful way if access is extended to a wide range of students, and not solely high-performing students.
4. ***Information and integration:*** Students and parents should receive much better information and there should be an expansion of magnet schools, as well as honors programs with serious pre-collegiate courses, in all high schools. Community college students should receive more information about the relative transfer success of various campuses, in addition to underlining their right to enroll in more successful campuses that may be further from home.
5. ***Increase funding:*** Current funding is not sufficient to meet the objectives set forth in the California Master Plan for Higher Education, and the severe reductions during the economic crisis have intensified these problems.