

YEAR ONE EVALUATION

California Reconnect Initiative

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About Education Northwest

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to building pathways and supports that guide any learner, at any age, to postsecondary success. Our team brings expertise in diverse areas—including student reengagement, college credit opportunities in high school, and rural students' college access and success—to help our partners identify and implement critical academic, financial, and social supports that empower all learners to fulfill their personal and professional goals.

ABOUT THE CA RECONNECT PARTNERS

InsideTrack is a mission-driven nonprofit organization that fuels positive change by empowering and advancing all learners to achieve their educational and career goals through the transformative power of coaching. InsideTrack has partnered with more than 380 institutions and organizations to directly improve enrollment, retention, completion, and career advancement—supporting learners at every stage of their journeys, especially those who face systemic barriers to postsecondary success. The organization helps people get the education they need to enhance well-being, create opportunity and secure meaningful employment—ultimately facilitating economic and social mobility.

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, policy, and advocacy organization committed to promoting postsecondary access and success for all students, regardless of race, background, or circumstance. Founded in 1993, IHEP has provided timely, evidence-based, and student-centered research to inform policy decisions and address our nation's most pressing higher education challenges for the past 30 years.

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Introduction

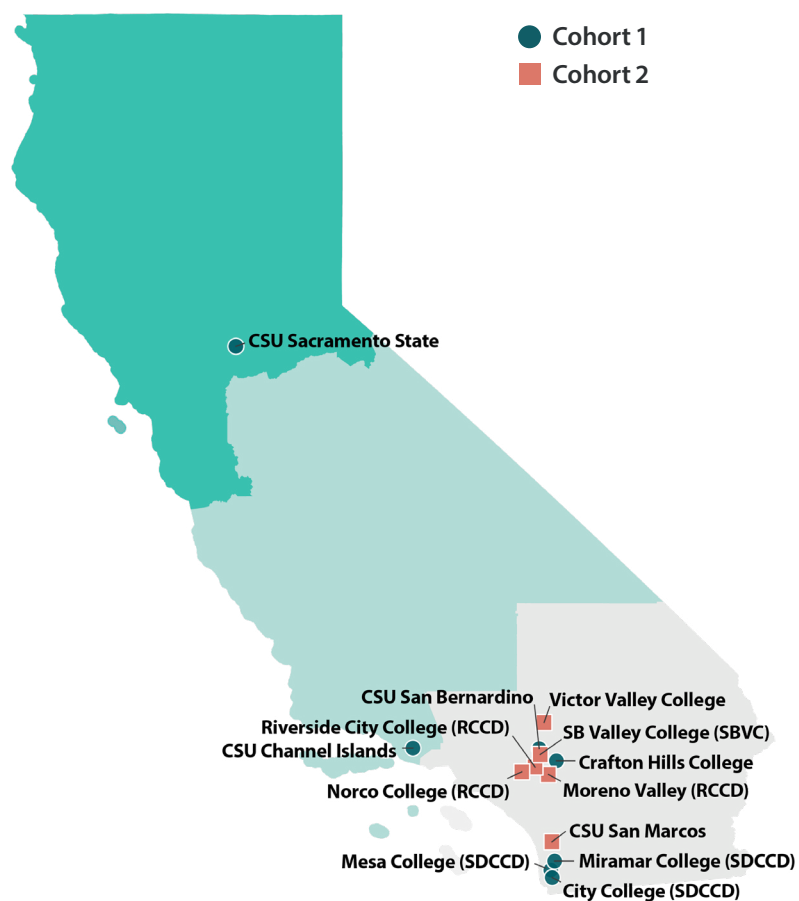
California Reconnect (CA Reconnect) is a three-year (2023–2026) pilot initiative led by InsideTrack in partnership with the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) to support the re-enrollment and success of learners who have some college experience but have not yet earned a credential or degree (some credit, no credential = SCNC learners). The current pilot serves as Phase 1 of the initiative, laying the groundwork for future expansions and impact. The goal of the CA Reconnect initiative is to work with California colleges and universities to offer coaching services that help SCNC learners re-enroll. The initiative also aims to assist these institutions in evaluating effective practices that reduce barriers for returning students.

In April 2024, InsideTrack partnered with Education Northwest to conduct a multi-year (2024–2026), mixed-methods evaluation of the initiative. The goals of the evaluation are to measure the initiative’s progress toward meeting its objectives, investigate its impact on SCNC learner’s re-enrollment and success, and document institutional processes and policies that might promote increased student re-enrollment across the California higher education system.

The CA Reconnect initiative helps partner institutions re-enroll SCNC learners through targeted outreach and personalized one-on-one coaching (e.g., facilitating hand-offs to campus staff members, navigating available resources and deadlines). The initiative also brings together cross-departmental staff members from participating colleges and universities into implementation teams. These teams take part in data coaching meetings and community of practices sessions to enhance institutional practices and policies, focusing on improving the re-enrollment process and making campuses more accessible for SCNC learners.

Thirteen institutional partners joined the CA Reconnect initiative during the first two years of the program (figure 1). Seven campuses joined

Figure 1. CA Reconnect higher education institutions



in the first year (2023-2024, Cohort 1), followed by six more in the second year (2024-2025, Cohort 2). The initiative is now in its third year, with additional schools continuing to join.

About this report

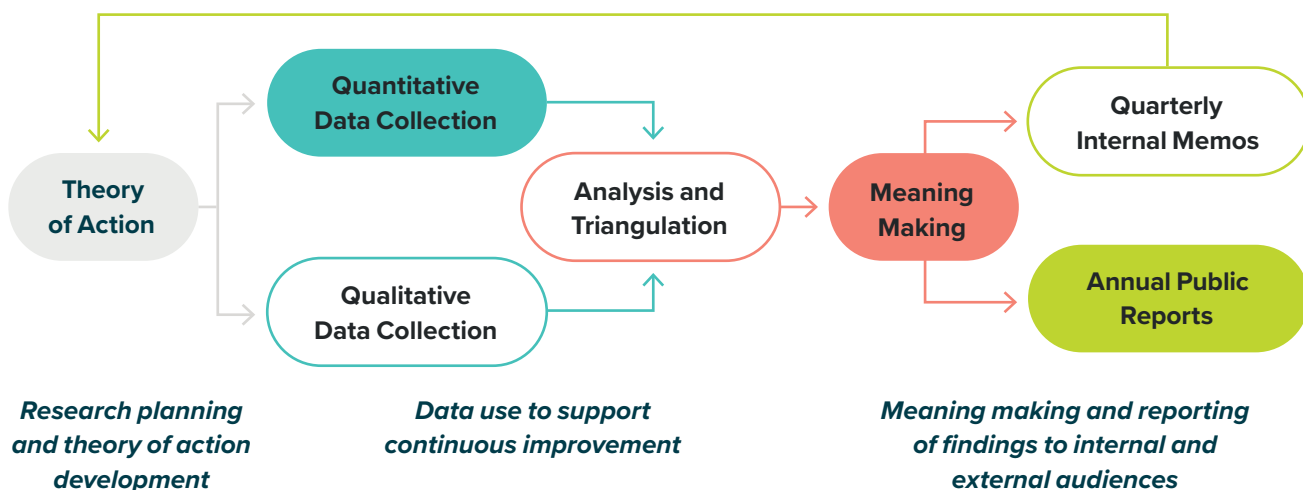
This first evaluation report presents emerging findings and progress from the first two years of the CA Reconnect initiative (2023-2024 and 2024-2025). Guided by the theory of action (see appendix A) that was developed in collaboration with the core partners, this evaluation will examine five key questions over the course of the CA Reconnect initiative (figure 2):

1. What is the nature of the program and what is most critical to engaging learners?
2. What is being learned about former students who are served by the program?
3. What is the overall impact of CA Reconnect on student enrollment and success?
4. What institutional factors have affected students and how are they being changed or improved by CA Reconnect?
5. What findings from the CA Reconnect initiative might influence institutional or state policy?

Evaluation activities and goals

During the second year of the CA Reconnect initiative and the first year of the evaluation (2024-2025), the evaluation team reviewed key program documents to better understand the nature of the initiative and facilitated focus groups with core partner teams, InsideTrack coaches, staff members from partner institutions, and SCNC learners who received services from CA Reconnect. Additionally, the evaluation team analyzed administrative student data from partner institutions and coach data to learn about the experiences of CA Reconnect participants and impact of the program.

Figure 2. CA Reconnect evaluation approach to iterative, convergent mixed-methods design



This report summarizes emerging findings related to the guiding evaluation questions, drawing from a diverse set of data sources to support the continuous improvement of the CA Reconnect initiative.

THEORY OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT AND REFINEMENT

The evaluation team worked closely with the core program team and partners to develop a theory of action that outlines the program’s unique context, activities, outcomes, and long-term impacts (see appendix A). Partner teams (i.e., InsideTrack, IHEP) participated in focus groups to discuss the initiative’s purpose, partner-level roles and responsibilities, and overall goals. Additionally, the evaluation team provided each partner team with an interactive model of the program theory of action to critically evaluate and refine for accuracy. The core evaluation team (i.e., Education Northwest, InsideTrack) conducted a debrief to further refine and enhance the model. The model will be further refined as the CA Reconnect initiative enters its third year.

QUALITATIVE DATA

The evaluation team collected qualitative data from key groups involved in the initiative—including InsideTrack coaches, staff members from institutional partner teams, and CA Reconnect participants who received coaching services—to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives on program improvement (table 1). Focus group with InsideTrack coaches focused on effective strategies for the coaching intervention, including how coaches support learners’ academic development and coaches’ perspectives on why students stop-out and decide to re-enroll or not. In focus groups, institutional staff members shared their experiences with and understanding of the CA Reconnect initiative, focusing on institutional practices and policies that shape students’ retention and re-enrollment decisions. Finally, in-depth interviews with CA Reconnect participants provided valuable insights into SCNC learners’ college experiences, decision-making processes, and the impact of the CA Reconnect program, specifically on services provided by InsideTrack coaches.

Table 1. CA Reconnect evaluation participants (2024)

Data source	Number of sessions	Number of participants	Groups represented
Core partner focus groups	3	7	InsideTrack, IHEP, and Project Attain
Coach focus groups	2	13	InsideTrack coaches, including those who work specifically with CA Reconnect participants
Institutional partner staff member focus groups	5	11	Crafton Hills College, CSU Channel Islands, CSU San Bernardino, Moreno Valley, Norco College, San Diego Miramar College, and Victor Valley College
CA Reconnect participant interviews	8	8	SCNC learners and re-enrolled students

Note: CSU = California State University.

Source: Education Northwest.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SCNC LEARNER DATA

Education Northwest analyzed administrative student data and InsideTrack coaching data to identify trends in the coaching intervention and re-enrollment patterns of CA Reconnect participants. To better understand the diverse experiences and pathways of SCNC learners, we examined Cohort 1 and 2 participants who responded to outreach communications (e.g., email, phone call) from InsideTrack coaches. Demographic characteristics for these participants are provided in appendix B.

To examine the impact of the initiative on student success, we examined those who re-enrolled as reported by their college or university and those who remained enrolled in the following term. This subgroup consists of students in Cohort 1 only. The demographic characteristics of Cohort 1 participants who re-enrolled and progressed are provided in appendix C.

We also explored institutional characteristics to better understand the factors that shape SCNC learner outcomes. Specifically, we examined the most recent institutional-level data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System for each partnering postsecondary institution (school year 2022–23).

Overview of the CA Reconnect initiative

Early in the evaluation, Education Northwest worked with InsideTrack partners to develop a theory of action to define the structure of the CA Reconnect program as it currently existed midway through the pilot phase of the initiative (see appendix A). This version of the framework outlines three interconnected interventions: direct student intervention, data intervention, and institutional policy and practice intervention. Each intervention is detailed below.



The direct student coaching intervention is designed to help SCNC learners re-enroll and persist in higher education.

The process relies on InsideTrack staff expertise, training, and data tools for targeted outreach and coaching. Activities guide SCNC learners through re-enrollment, clarify goals, and leverage campus resources. Outputs measure engagement, while short-term outcomes focus on awareness, goal setting, and applying coaching insights. Long-term outcomes aim for personal growth, self-efficacy, and improved educational experiences, leading to higher degree completion, economic mobility, and workforce readiness.



The data intervention is aimed at strengthening institutional support for SCNC learners.

This segment of the CA Reconnect initiative leverages partnerships and institutional implementation teams to analyze student data, identify SCNC learners, and refine degree auditing with IHEP support. Outputs include targeted student lists, a typology of stopped-out students, and best practices for degree mining that is contextualized for campuses. Short-term outcomes enhance collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and barrier identification, while long-term outcomes support sustained student success.



The institutional policy and practice intervention centers on enhancing institutional effectiveness to improve equity and completion for SCNC learners.

This intervention relies on IHEP expertise, facilitation tools, and postsecondary institutional partner experience to drive policy changes. Activities include community of practice sessions, student support assessments, and identifying best practices. Outputs include documented best practices, process improvement recommendations, and enhanced data sharing. Short-term outcomes deepen policy understanding and inform actionable changes, while long-term outcomes streamline re-enrollment and strengthen institutional capacity.



Promising practices to **re-engage SCNC learners**

InsideTrack coaches employ multiple communication methods and repeated outreach to cast a wide net and maximize engagement with SCNC learners. Coaches described first reaching out to SCNC learners via email, followed by texts and phone calls. Using different outreach methods helps to ensure accessibility to a wide audience of former students who may be detached from their college or university. Coaches noted that in addition to diversifying outreach methods, it was important to engage in continued outreach to nonresponsive learners. Repeated outreach helped to reinforce the message that coaches were available to support learners who are considering a return to their college or university.

“The amount of outreach that we do is important ... we get folks that reach out to say, ‘Hey, sorry I didn’t respond to your email at first, but I’m really thankful, and it did ultimately push me to reapply and potentially get back in and start classes.’”

– InsideTrack Coach

Indeed, CA Reconnect participants described that the coaches’ consistent communication about the type of supports available via the CA Reconnect program motivated them to consider returning to their college and gaining information and support for their re-enrollment. Some students suggested coaches use an expanded outreach approach to help learners respond more quickly, like using postsecondary institutional systems to send program information.

“With the periodic emails it was helpful to see, ‘Wow, they follow up with people.’ That was another push to enroll.”

– CA Reconnect Participant

The InsideTrack coaching methodology helps coaches to build rapport with SCNC learners, gaining insight into their challenges and identifying supports needed. Coaches shared that they use assessments in the forms of open-ended and scaling questions to understand SCNC learners’ experiences and perspectives on key domains (e.g., academics, school community, commitment to graduation, career, managing commitments, finances, health, and support). Additionally, coaches apply a holistic lens to understand the challenges learners faced previously that led to stopping out, where they are now, and how ready they are to return to their college or university and build goals for the future.

CA Reconnect participants expressed gratitude for the individual-level support provided by coaches. Importantly, learners identified emotional support and motivation as a consistent type of support from coaches and appreciated the opportunity to have a knowledgeable, accessible, and compassionate person to guide them throughout their re-enrollment journey.

“[My coach] really broke it down. She gave me direct links to the things that I needed instead of just general information. It was very specific. It gives me more stability. I now know I have other people to ask. I know if I can't get in with [college counselors] that I have my Reconnect coach to help guide me in similar directions.”

– CA Reconnect Participant

“The coach was very insightful, very caring and very aware. I wasn't just another number. Listening to my experience and where I'm trying to get to was very insightful, and it made me feel confident with moving forward. It boosted my confidence with going back to school and pushing forward for success.”

– CA Reconnect Participant

InsideTrack coaches provide personalized support, helping SCNC learners overcome complex challenges and succeed in their academic journey. Coaches noted that learners report varied reasons for stopping out, including personal challenges such as familial obligations, medical problems, and scheduling issues with courses and work. They also noted institutional barriers such as a lack of information or guidance on courses needed to complete degrees, issues with faculty and staff members, and indecisiveness about academic programs. Coaches' understanding of SCNC learners' life experiences allows for more tailored and specific services (e.g., warm handoff with college staff members, financial aid services).

Learners found the coaching services valuable and beneficial to their academic progress. Coaches helped them navigate the re-enrollment process by setting goals and milestones and connecting them with campus staff members when needed. Learners also appreciated being paired with coaches who shared similar life experiences. One learner, for example, highlighted how having a coach with a military background provided them with tailored support, opportunities, and information as a former service member.

“Once you are disconnected or no longer enrolled, it's kind of like you don't exist. With my new coach, it's a lot of moral support, and the fact that she's a veteran as well is very helpful. The moral support has been the biggest help so far.”

– CA Reconnect Participant

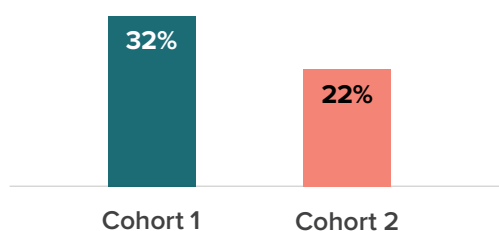
California Reconnect

participant experiences

To better understand SCNC learners' experiences in the CA Reconnect initiative, we examined coach outreach methods and SCNC learners' response patterns in cohorts 1 and 2. This section focuses on the early stages of the coaching program, including outreach methods, response rates, and learners' coaching experiences.

Up to thirty-two percent of SCNC learners across the two cohorts responded to outreach from InsideTrack coaches. A total of 14,062 SCNC learners from 13 postsecondary institutions in California received outreach communications from InsideTrack coaches during the first two years of the initiative. The overall engagement rate among CA Reconnect participants was 27 percent, though response rates varied across cohorts (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Engagement rate for SCNC learners in cohort 1 and 2



Note: Figure includes 4,474 SCNS learners in cohort 1 and 9,015 SCNS learners in cohort 2.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

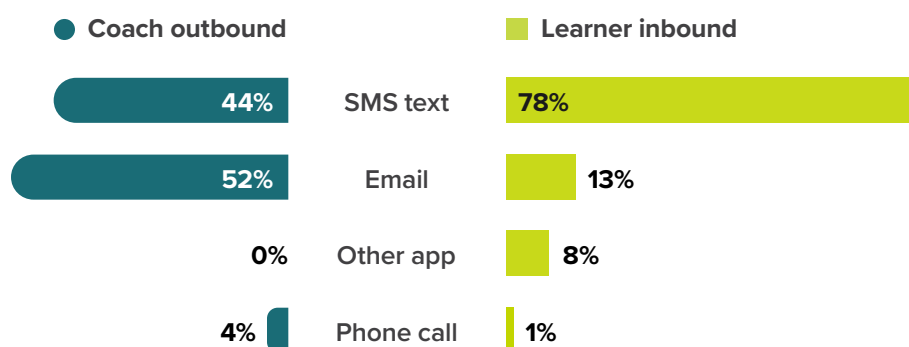
Coaches mostly used email and SMS texts, while learners primarily connected through SMS texts.

During the outreach and re-enrollment phase, coaches relied on both email and SMS texts to engage SCNC learners, ensuring multiple touchpoints for communication. However, as shown in figure 4, learners from both cohorts showed a strong preference for SMS texts likely due to their convenience and accessibility on mobile phones. In the figure, outbound communication methods involve coaches reaching out to learners, while inbound communication methods refer to learners initiating contact with coaches.

“Actually, the only way I really communicate is through phone. [My coach] sends out emails all the time. She's on it with those emails! But, if I have questions or anything, I just text and she gets me answers to my questions.”

– CA Reconnect Participant

Figure 4. Percent of communication methods used by InsideTrack coaches and SCNC learners in cohort 1 and 2



Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Higher outbound communication might be linked to greater learner responsiveness. We explored communication patterns between coaches and learners, focusing on outbound messages sent to learners who either engaged with or ignored coaching support. On average, learners who did not respond to coaching received 10 messages, whereas those who engaged with coaching support received an average of 15 messages. This suggests that coaches may have prioritized or increased communication with learners who showed responsiveness to coaching efforts. Alternatively, it could indicate that learners who received more messages were more likely to engage with coaching. Ultimately, once contact with a learner is achieved, the mode and frequency of communication is based on the needs and goals of the learner. That is, for some learners back-and-forth SMS or email messaging may be the best option, while for others, scheduling a single longer phone meeting may be preferred. Thus, further exploration of the quality of meetings would be needed to make more concrete conclusions.

California Reconnect participant pathways

To better understand the impact of the CA Reconnect initiative, we examined the re-enrollment and progression pathways of participants from Cohort 1. A summary of cohort 1 participant outcomes is provided in figure 5.

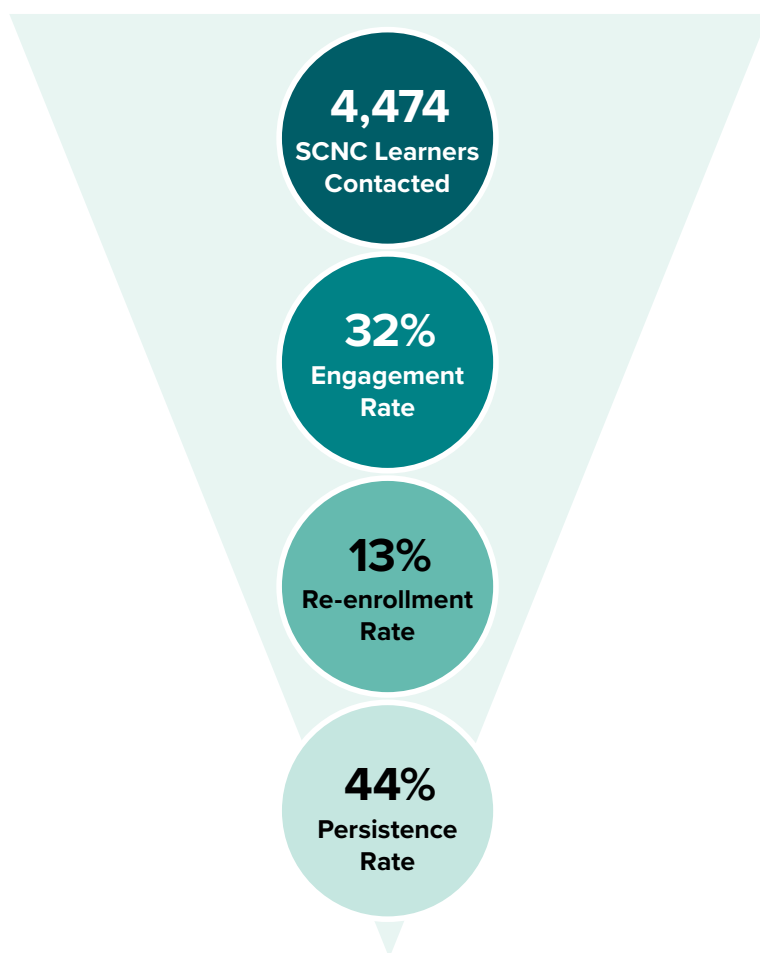
The re-enrollment rate for SCNC learners in the CA Reconnect program is six times higher than the national average.

This demonstrates a significant impact on student return rates. Among the 4,474 individuals who received outreach in Cohort 1, 13 percent successfully re-enrolled, a rate that exceeds the national average of 2.1 percent by more than six times. This substantial difference highlights the effectiveness of targeted outreach and support in facilitating student re-engagement with higher education.

Approximately 40 percent of SCNC learners who engaged with CA Reconnect coaches successfully re-enrolled in a partner institution of higher education.

A total of 1,438 SCNC learners in Cohort 1 responded to InsideTrack coaches, and 570 of them re-enrolled, resulting in a 40 percent re-enrollment rate among those who engaged. Overall, the re-enrollment rate for SCNC learners who received outreach and responded was 19 percent,

Figure 5. Overview of CA Reconnect cohort 1 participants



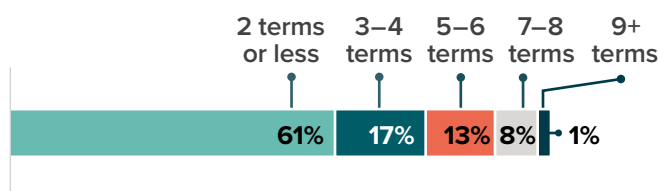
Note: Engagement rate = The percentage of cohort 1 CA Reconnect participants who responded to coaches after being contacted (1,438 out of 4,474). Re-enrollment rate = The percentage of contacted cohort 1 CA Reconnect participants who re-enrolled (570 out of 4,474). Persistence rate = The percentage of cohort 1 CA Reconnect participants who remained enrolled in a subsequent term, out of those who re-enrolled (350 out of 570).

further highlighting the positive impact of personalized support and outreach on a learner's decision to return to higher education.

Among CA Reconnect participants who successfully re-enrolled, 44 percent continued their studies into a subsequent academic term. This demonstrates a notable level of persistence among returning learners.¹ Specifically, of the 570 students who re-enrolled in a partner institution of higher education, 250 learners from Cohort 1 remained enrolled in the following term. This continuation rate suggests that beyond facilitating re-enrollment, the CA Reconnect program also supports students in sustaining their academic journey. The persistence of these learners underscores the importance of ongoing support services in helping returning students navigate the challenges of higher education and stay on track toward degree completion.

Re-enrollment is more common among SCNC learners who have stopped out for a shorter period. Specifically, 61% of students who had been out for two terms or less eventually re-enrolled in their studies (see figure 6). In contrast, the likelihood of re-enrollment decreased as the number of terms since learners last enrollment increased. This pattern suggests that the longer a student remains disengaged from their academic journey, the less likely they are to return, potentially due to increased life responsibilities, financial barriers, or a weakened connection to their educational plans.

Figure 6. Percent of re-enrolled students in cohort 1 by terms since stopping out



Note: Figure includes 570 students who re-enrolled. Assumes three terms per calendar year (fall, spring, and summer).

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

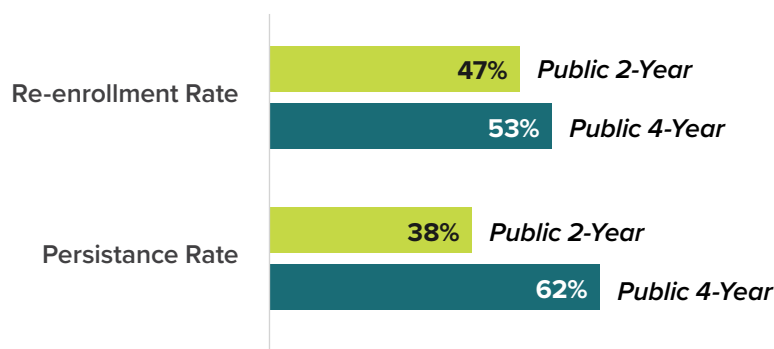
¹ Unfortunately, data are not available to determine whether CA Reconnect participants who re-enrolled completed a credential or degree. It is possible for a student who re-enrolled to not be in the “progressed” group because they obtained a credential or degree. Future analyses should explore this further by collecting and integrating additional data sources, such as National Student Clearinghouse records, institutional graduation records, or self-reported completion data from participants.

Institutional factors shaping learners' re-enrollment and retention

To better understand how institutional factors may shape SCNC learners' academic trajectories, we examined various institutional characteristics (e.g., level and locale, Minority Serving Institution status, percent of students who received a Pell grant) for CA Reconnect learners who re-enrolled in Cohort 1 (N = 570) and those who persisted into the following academic term (N = 250). The full results are presented in appendix D.

Retention and progression are higher among students in four-year institutions compared to two-year institutions. SCNC learners at public four-year institutions re-enrolled at higher rate (53%) compared to those at public two-year institutions (47%). Additionally, as shown in figure 7, they were more likely to progress (62% vs. 38%). While the coaching program can effectively support students in re-enrollment, these results suggest that additional targeted strategies based on institution type may further support student success.

Figure 7. Re-enrollment and persistence rates by institution type



Note: Figure includes 570 students who re-enrolled in 2-year and 4-year higher education institutions; of those 250 persisted to the following term.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Financial institutional characteristics (e.g., percent of Pell grant recipients, cost of attendance) may influence students' persistence. Results indicate that students enrolled in institutions with a lower percentage of Pell Grant recipients persisted at higher rates. Additionally, students were more likely to progress in institutions with higher cost of attendance. It may be that students in higher cost categories have more access to financial resources, more institutional support, or more personal stability that enables them to persist. To support student success, coaching programs should emphasize tuition assistance, emergency aid, and work-study opportunities, alongside financial literacy, proactive financial aid planning, and effective use of campus-based resources.

Focus group discussions indicate that SCNC learners encounter significant administrative barriers when attempting to re-enroll, which can discourage their return to higher education. Coaches and institutional staff members reported that certain institutional practices may unintentionally hinder re-enrollment efforts. For example, some colleges require stopped-out learners to submit a new college application or pay an application fee to re-enroll. Additionally, un-enrolled students lose access to critical information and services—such as access to academic records, course history, and academic advising—which further complicates the re-enrollment process. Without clear guidance on their remaining coursework and financial requirements, learners struggle to make informed decisions about their educational path.

In focus groups, institutional staff members recognized these practices as significant challenges that hindered SCNC learners from re-enrolling and progressing. Some staff members highlighted specific institutional barriers, such as complex re-enrollment procedures and financial aid roadblocks. However, a few also shared recent changes aimed at reducing these obstacles, such as streamlining administrative processes, improving communication with returning students, and expanding support services to make the transition back to school more accessible.

“We’ve worked on taking away some of the administrative barriers for [returning] students. Before it was a lot of forms and a lot of things that they had to do. So, now we’ve shortened that process. It is just one form and a meeting with an academic advisor, so they don’t have to come to a reentry event. They can still come at any time. The re-enrollment process is now smoother for them.”

– Postsecondary Institutional Partner



Postsecondary institutional **partner** **staff experiences and needs**

We conducted cross-campus focus groups with postsecondary institutional partner staff members to explore their institutional practices, experiences with the program, and the support needed for effective implementation.

Cross-departmental teams fostered stronger campus relationships and improved collaboration among institutional departments. In focus groups, staff members highlighted that collaborating with colleagues across functional areas—such as admissions, financial aid, academic advising, and student support services—within the implementation team helped break down silos and foster a shared understanding of challenges and goals. This enhanced collaboration enabled departments to streamline processes, identify and align resources, and create more comprehensive support systems for SCNC learners.

“Even though we’ve already strategized a lot on how to provide holistic support for our students, [the implementation team] motivated us to involve more people and shape those conversations and have it be a work group that’s strategizing re-enrollment efforts. We’re not working in silos anymore. We didn’t have a working group before, and now we do have a working group, a campus partnership.”

– Postsecondary Institutional Partner

Through data sessions with InsideTrack staff members and community of practice sessions, institutional staff members gained a deeper understanding of institutional best practices for supporting SCNC learners. Through the initiative, staff members gained insights into streamlined re-enrollment processes and ways to address common barriers such as financial aid complexities and transcript holds. Additionally, staff members learned about successful student support models, including cross-departmental collaboration to provide holistic assistance.

“While it has been challenging to make it to the [community of practice] meetings, due to scheduling conflicts, I do find them very insightful. I like the idea of having all the different campuses come together and share their strategies to engage students. It’s also validating to learn that other institutions are working through similar problems.”

– Postsecondary Institutional Partner

The community of practice was particularly beneficial, as it allowed staff members to learn from other institutions facing similar challenges. By sharing experiences and strategies, staff members discovered student-first practices that prioritize individualized support and flexibility. They also explored ways to foster a greater sense of belonging on campus, helping to improve student retention and ensure returning students feel welcomed and supported.

Implementation staff members need clear, practical guidance on applying best practices effectively.

Staff members who participated in focus groups highlighted the need for clearer guidance on how to apply best practices within their institutions. While they found the strategies and examples helpful, many were unsure how to adapt them to their own roles and departments effectively. Many staff members noted that their ability to influence institutional practices varies depending on their role. Frontline staff members, such as advisors and student services personnel, often felt limited in their capacity to drive systemic change, as key policy decisions are typically made at higher administrative levels. They expressed a desire for more support in advocating for change within their institutions and clearer pathways for communicating challenges and solutions to decision-makers.

“I’m kind of still figuring out our partnership with CA Reconnect, my role, and just having a better understanding of the partnership goals ... Feedback loops to support that partnership could be better. Also, support for how my team will achieve the grand goals of the program at the institutional level.”

– Postsecondary Institutional Partner



Institutional and state policy recommendations

INSTITUTIONAL

Create seamless re-enrollment processes to ease the burden on students. Many students who wish to return to school encounter bureaucratic obstacles such as reapplication fees, complicated paperwork, and unclear degree completion pathways. Institutions should remove these barriers and implement dedicated re-enrollment support teams that assist returning students with financial aid navigation, course selection, and degree planning. By creating a seamless re-enrollment process, colleges and universities can significantly increase student return rates and ensure that those who wish to continue their education can do so without unnecessary delays.

Expand personalized coaching and advising services to provide holistic support for returning students. Advisors should be trained in coaching methodologies that enable them to address both academic and personal challenges faced by SCNC learners. Additionally, institutions should develop peer mentorship programs, connecting returning students with others who have successfully navigated the re-enrollment process. These peer connections can offer motivation, guidance, and a sense of belonging, increasing the likelihood of student persistence.

Promote flexible learning and support services that acknowledge the reality of students' lives. Many returning students juggle work, family responsibilities, and other commitments, making it difficult to attend traditional in-person classes. Expanding online, evening, and hybrid course offerings will provide the flexibility these students need. Additionally, institutions should offer wraparound support services, including child care, transportation assistance, and mental health resources, to ensure that returning students have the necessary support to persist and complete their degrees.

Leverage public-private partnerships for student coaching and outreach. Expand collaborations with organizations that provide personalized coaching, guiding students through re-enrollment and degree completion. Additionally, fostering partnerships with employers can create tuition assistance programs and career-aligned pathways, ensuring that returning students receive both financial support and employment opportunities that align with their educational goals.

STATE

Expand statewide funding for targeted re-enrollment initiatives. Sustained investment in programs like CA Reconnect will allow more institutions to implement outreach and support services for returning students. Additionally, dedicated grants should be allocated for tuition assistance, emergency aid, and financial literacy programs to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent students from completing their degrees.

Lessons learned and considerations

This report highlights key findings stemming from the guiding evaluation questions. Using a range of data sources, we assessed progress, examined the experiences of the involved groups, and evaluated the program's impact. The findings underscore the importance of diverse outreach methods, ongoing coaching support, and institutional best practices in overcoming barriers to student success.

Recommendations for continuous improvement



CA Reconnect leaders should consider collaborating with partner postsecondary institutions to align outreach communication efforts and improve response rates.

Learner feedback revealed that many of them ignored outreach messages from InsideTrack coaches, often mistaking those messages for spam emails or calls. To address this, the initiative should collaborate with partner institutions to coordinate outreach efforts. Institutions can send preliminary communications informing learners about the partnership and upcoming outreach efforts from InsideTrack coaches. Standardizing messaging and communication practices across institutions will create a more cohesive approach, making it easier for SCNC learners to recognize and engage with outreach efforts. This strategy may be especially effective for recently stopped-out learners, who are more likely to monitor communication from their postsecondary institutions and seek support.



CA Reconnect leaders and institutional partners should strengthen their collaboration to better support re-enrolled students.

This could result in enhanced academic advising, streamlined administrative processes, and expanded access to financial and social resources. Additionally, ongoing data sharing and program evaluation can help identify successful strategies and areas for improvement, ensuring that re-enrolled students receive the support they need to continue their academic journey and achieve their educational goals.



Findings suggest that student retention strategies should be tailored to institutional characteristics rather than taking a one size-fits-all approach.

To enhance student success, CA Reconnect leaders and institutional implementation teams should align services for returning students. This can include integrating InsideTrack coaches for retention coaching alongside institutional initiatives such as peer mentoring, affinity groups, and networking events to help students reintegrate into campus life.



CA Reconnect partners should provide institutional staff members with clear, actionable guidance on implementing best practices and driving meaningful institutional change.

Program leaders working with institutional staff members, including InsideTrack and IHEP, should develop and offer more structured, actionable guidance to help staff members

effectively apply best practices within their institutions. This could include detailed implementation frameworks, practical tools, and institution-specific examples tailored to address unique challenges and needs.

To further empower and engage staff members, the initiative should support their ability to advocate for institutional policy changes. This includes establishing clear communication channels between staff members and institutional decision-makers and equipping staff members with the knowledge and tools to raise concerns, propose solutions, and influence policy decisions. Strengthening these pathways would boost staff members' confidence in their roles and enhance their ability to drive meaningful improvements in program implementation and outcomes.



To accurately assess the impact of the CA Reconnect initiative, it is essential to build on the current data infrastructure by incorporating additional measures of student success.

A key strength of the existing system is its ability to integrate data from multiple sources, allowing institutional data and coaching data to be connected. This interoperability provides a more comprehensive view of student engagement and progress. However, a significant limitation of the current data system is the lack of access to degree attainment information from colleges and universities. Without this critical data, program leaders cannot fully determine whether students who appear to have not progressed have, in fact, successfully completed their degrees. This gap in data limits the program's ability to accurately assess student outcomes and overall effectiveness. To address this challenge, strengthening partnerships with institutional implementation teams and updating data sharing agreements to access degree completion data should be a priority.

Next steps

The evaluation of the CA Reconnect program will continue into the final year of the pilot phase (2025–26). In its second year, the evaluation will build on emerging findings by documenting changes to the program's structure, with a particular focus on implementation supports. It will also continue tracking the initiative's progress across the three interconnected interventions, emphasizing efforts to strengthen support for CA Reconnect participants and postsecondary institution staff members. Additionally, the evaluation team will assess advancements in institutional practices aimed at improving outcomes for SCNC learners.

Appendix A. California Reconnect theory of action (2024)

California Reconnect (CA Reconnect) is a fully funded three-year initiative that involves InsideTrack, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, and participating institutions. The purpose of the initiative is to support the re-enrollment of “some college, no credential” (SCNC) learners in the California higher education system, putting them on a path to program completion, improved employment opportunities, and upward economic mobility.

Model Assumptions

The following assumptions ground the CA Reconnect work and approach:

- Participating institutions have a supportive environment for degree completion initiatives.
- Partner institutions will see the value of participating and engage in identifying areas for improvement and leading the implementation of recommended changes.
- Partners have ready access to student data from participating institutions and the quality of data is sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions.

External Factors: roles of institutional team members will vary; institutional calendars will shape engagement capacity; learners’ capacity to return; collective bargaining agreements

IMPACTS		
Learner	Institution	Community
Increased degree completion	Improved graduation rates for adult learners	Strengthened workforce ready to meet demand
Possibility for reduced debt burden	Closed equity gaps in graduation and retention	Thriving communities with increased equitable outcomes
Greater social and economic mobility for re-enrolled learners	Enhanced data driven decision making	Best practices inform the field of higher education
	Enhanced institutional effectiveness (enrollment, retention)	
	System level understanding of adult learners	
	Sustainable changes to policy practices at institutions	

Figure A1. California Reconnect Theory of Action

KEY DSI – DIRECT STUDENT INTERVENTION DI-DATA INTERVENTION IPP - INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE



Appendix B. Demographic characteristics of CA Reconnect participants

Table B1. Racial-ethnic characteristics of CA Reconnect participants by cohort

Race/ethnicity	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Overall	
	Outreached (N = 4,090)	Responded (N = 1,340)	Outreached (N = 9,015)	Responded (N = 2,025)	Outreached (N = 13,562)	Responded (N = 3,471)
Hispanic/Latinx	43.89%	41.31%	29.83%	31.72%	52.31%	49.58%
White	15.14%	14.15%	16.50%	14.93%	14.56%	13.73%
Asian	5.31%	4.78%	7.09%	6.79%	4.69%	3.65%
Black or African American	3.87%	3.80%	3.20%	3.13%	4.26%	4.40%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	2.83%	3.17%	4.30%	4.33%	2.19%	2.47%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.56%	0.35%	0.66%	0.52%	0.44%	0.25%
First Nation/Indigenous American/ Alaska Native	0.29%	0.23%	0.29%	0.22%	0.31%	0.25%
Not specified	28.00%	32.21%	39.12%	38.36%	21.23%	25.68%

Note. Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying group sizes across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table B2. Gender characteristics of CA Reconnect participants by cohort

Gender	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Overall	
	Outreached (N = 4,474)	Responded (N = 1,438)	Outreached (N = 9,015)	Responded (N = 2,025)	Outreached (N = 14,062)	Responded (N = 3,597)
Woman	47.07%	51.53%	53.03%	54.81%	50.01%	52.32%
Man	34.94%	31.71%	39.87%	33.53%	37.38%	32.19%
Other	17.99%	16.76%	7.10%	11.65%	12.62%	15.49%

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table B3. First-generation student status of CA Reconnect participants by cohort

Student status	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Overall	
	Outreached (N = 1,415)	Responded (N = 451)	Outreached (N = 5,131)	Responded (N = 1,085)	Outreached (N = 6,559)	Responded (N = 1,538)
First-generation student	51.73%	54.32%	57.38%	54.38%	56.18%	54.42%
Not first-generation student	48.27%	45.68%	42.62%	45.62%	43.82%	45.58%

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table B4. Distribution of CA Reconnect participants among postsecondary institutions

Postsecondary institution	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Overall	
	Outreached (N = 4,474)	Responded (N = 1,438)	Outreached (N = 9,015)	Responded (N = 2,025)	Outreached (N = 13,492)	Responded (N = 3,463)
Crafton Hills College	13.79%	11.06%	4.85%	4.54%	7.81%	7.25%
CSU Channel Islands	17.70%	19.40%	2.63%	4.99%	7.63%	10.97%
CSU Sacramento State	16.34%	15.23%	5.16%	5.83%	8.86%	9.73%
CSU San Bernardino	17.21%	15.37%	5.95%	9.38%	9.68%	11.87%
San Diego City College	9.72%	12.17%	6.87%	7.60%	7.81%	9.50%
San Diego Mesa College	14.80%	16.48%	11.03%	11.75%	12.27%	13.72%
San Diego Miramar College	10.42%	10.22%	5.14%	5.78%	6.89%	7.62%
CSU San Marcos	—	—	5.89%	6.47%	3.94%	3.78%
Riverside-Moreno Valley College	—	—	6.48%	4.15%	4.34%	2.43%
Riverside-Norco College	—	—	5.76%	4.49%	3.85%	2.63%
Riverside-Riverside City College	—	—	17.70%	9.83%	11.84%	5.75%
San Bernardino Valley College	—	—	12.18%	14.12%	8.15%	8.29%
Victor Valley College	—	—	10.38%	11.06%	6.94%	6.47%

Note: CSU = California State University. Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Appendix C. Demographic characteristics of re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants

Table C1. Racial-ethnic characteristics of re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants in Cohort 1

Race/ethnicity	Re-enrolled (N = 511)	Progressed (N = 250)
Hispanic/Latinx	36.59%	35.43%
White	16.05%	12.11%
Asian	4.70%	4.04%
Black or African American	3.13%	3.14%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	3.72%	4.04%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.78%	0.45%
First Nation/Indigenous American/Alaska Native	0.59%	0.90%
Not specified	34.44%	39.91%

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table C2. Gender characteristics of re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants in Cohort 1

Gender	Re-enrolled (N = 570)	Progressed (N = 250)
Woman	47.02%	49.20%
Man	41.23%	36.40%
Other	11.75%	14.40%

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.

Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table C3. First-generation student status of re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants in Cohort 1

Student status	Re-enrolled (N = 115)	Progressed (N = 56)
First-generation student	64.35%	62.50%
Not first-generation student	35.65%	37.50%

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.
Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Table C4. Distribution of re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants among postsecondary institutions in Cohort 1

Postsecondary Institution	Re-enrolled (N = 570)	Progressed (N = 250)
Crafton Hills College	15.26%	16.00%
CSU Channel Islands	20.18%	25.20%
CSU Sacramento State	4.91%	2.40%
CSU San Bernardino	7.02%	9.20%
San Diego City College	12.81%	8.80%
San Diego Mesa College	20.53%	24.80%
San Diego Miramar College	19.30%	13.60%

Note: CSU = California State University. Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.
Source: Education Northwest analysis of administrative student data.

Appendix D. CA Reconnect partner institutional characteristics

Table D1. Institutional characteristics among re-enrolled CA Reconnect participants in Cohort 1

Institutional characteristic	Group	Re-enrolled (N = 570)	Progressed (N = 250)
Level	Public, 4-year	53%	62%
	Public, 2-year	47%	38%
Locale	City	65%	59%
	Suburb	15%	16%
	Rural	20%	25%
Minority Serving Institution Status in 2023	Not an MSI	13%	9%
	MSI	87%	91%
Student of color enrollment share in 2023 (12-month enrollment)*	54% to 79%	93%	91%
	80% to 100%	7%	9%
Mean race/ethnicity identity at institutions in 2023	American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0%
	Asian	12%	11%
	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%
	Black or African American	6%	5%
	Hispanic	47%	49%
	White	27%	26%
	Two or more races	6%	6%
	Race/ethnicity unknown	2%	2%
Mean gender identity at institution in 2023	Man	44%	42%
	Woman	56%	58%
Percent received Pell grant*	0% to 27%	68%	63%
	40% to 57%	32%	37%
Undergraduate average cost of attendance in 2023			
<i>In state on campus*</i>	\$24,001 to \$33,600	100%	100%
<i>In state off campus, not living with family*</i>	\$23,651 to \$30,610	15%	16%
	\$30,615 to \$43,210	85%	84%

Institutional characteristic	Group	Re-enrolled (N = 570)	Progressed (N = 250)
<i>In state off campus, living with family*</i>	\$1600 to \$12,089	68%	63%
	\$12,090 to \$17,769	32%	37%
Mean total undergraduate 12-month enrollment at institutions in 2023		18158	17323

*The categories were created by calculating quartiles from a continuous variable using the entire IPEDS dataset (prior to restricting to the CA Reconnect sample). Quartiles divide the data into four equal parts, ensuring each category represents 25% of the data.

Note: Discrepancies in data shared by partner institutions result in varying size across demographic characteristics.
Source: Education Northwest analysis of IPEDS data.