



CALIFORNIA

STATE SUMMARY
2025

California at a glance

THE STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX combines research-backed strategies for improving education-to-career outcomes with benchmarking measures to track progress for all 50 states, giving policymakers and institutions a framework for strengthening the link between education and opportunity.

For each state, the Index reports the percentage of students who experience a positive return on investment and summarizes progress in five key areas for improving success beyond completion: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. States are grouped into four categories: Leading (at the forefront, demonstrating strong progress); Advanced (substantial progress); Developing (early stages of improvement); and Foundational (just beginning their journey).

Positive ROI

75%



State
Opportunity
Index

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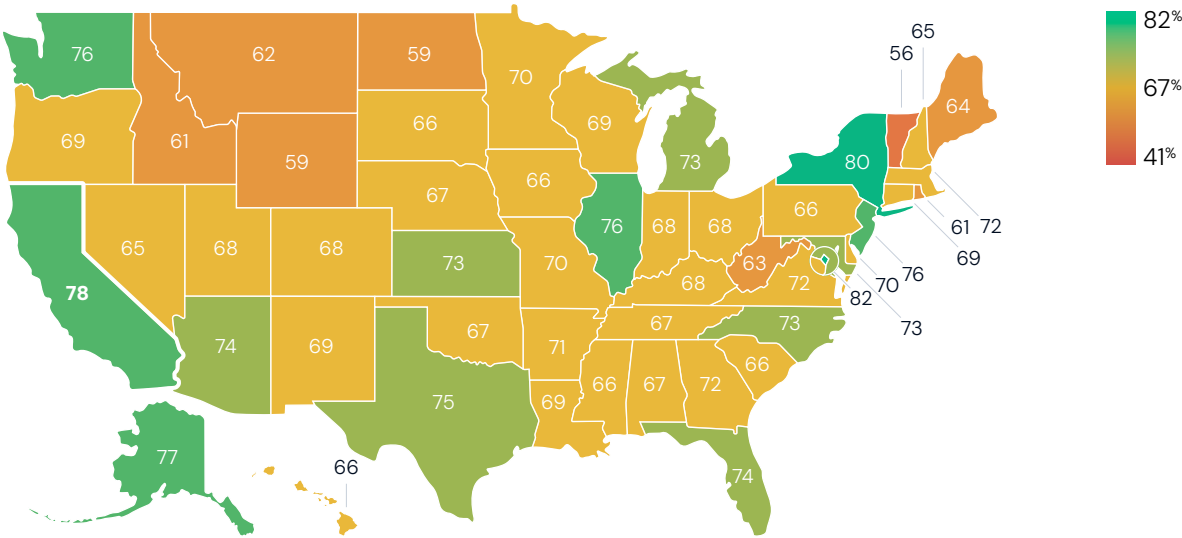
Positive ROI

California

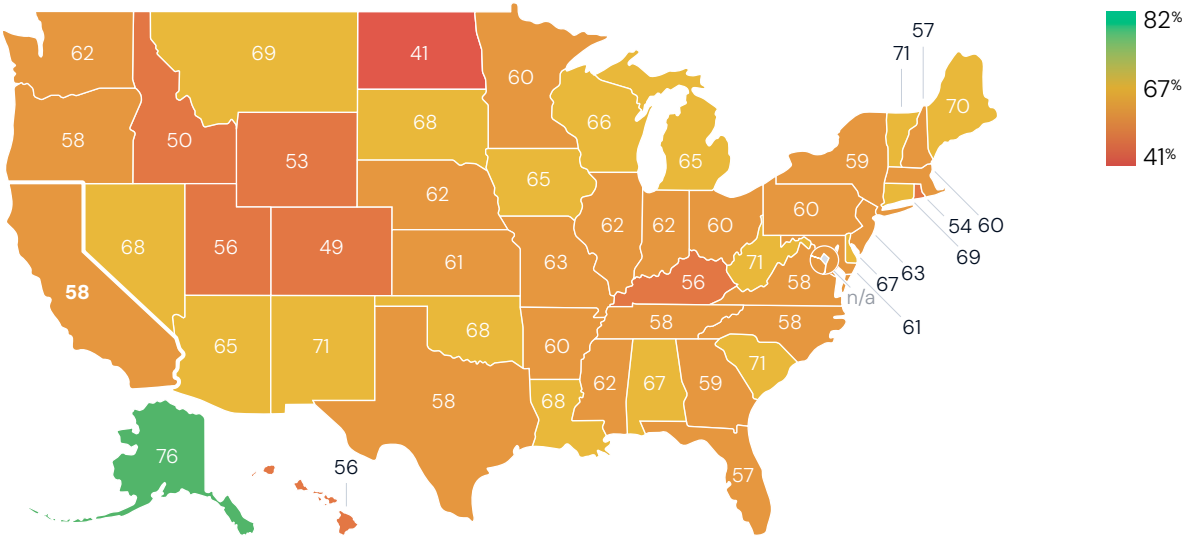
The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of public college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years.

	California	U.S.
Overall	75%	70%
Bachelor's	78%	73%
Associate	58%	60%

Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – bachelor's degrees



Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – associate degrees





Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. The Clear Outcomes measure is based on 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity.

COLLECT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
1 Includes learner-level and program characteristic data for nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs	California implements extensive collection of enrollment and credential outcome data from nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs. The state's nondegree and noncredit collections include: (i) college-issued, for-credit nondegree credentials ; (ii) college-issued, noncredit nondegree credentials through occupational training; (iii) WIOA-eligible training providers; and (iv) other third-party credentials, namely apprenticeships . California's Workforce Development Board links college-issued, noncredit nondegree credentials to employment outcomes . California's SLDS (Cradle-to-Career, or C2C) links college-issued, for-credit nondegree credentials to employment outcomes and is exploring linking other nondegree credentials to employment outcomes.	LEADING
2 Examines earnings by occupation, pay rate, and work location	In 2022, California enacted State Bill 755 , requiring the California Workforce Development Board and Employment Development Department to develop and implement a plan to collect all three elements. In 2025, California proposed SB 575 , authorizing the California Franchise Tax Board to share personal income tax records with the Cradle-to-Career Data System, providing the SLDS with home residence.	DEVELOPING

INTEGRATE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
3 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after postsecondary education and training completion, and over time	California has extensive integration of postsecondary education and employment data, including: (i) public four-year institutions to employment, (ii) community colleges to employment, and (iii) WIOA-eligible training providers to employment. Employment outcomes for public four-year institutions are available with a public interactive reporting tool through California State University system's calstatepays.org and the University of California system's Information Center . Employment outcomes for community colleges are available with a public interactive reporting tool through the California Community Colleges LaunchBoard site . Data on private independent nonprofit institutions are integrated with employment data on a case-by-case basis. Employment outcomes for public four-year institutions and community colleges are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and family income or economically disadvantaged status through the Cradle-to-Career Data System's Pathways to College in California data story . WIOA-eligible training providers to employment data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender.	ADVANCED
4 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after high school completion and over time	In 2025, the Cradle-to-Career Data System published the Pathways to College in California data story , integrating information on learners' earnings and employment after high school completion. These employment and earnings outcomes are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and family income or economically disadvantaged status.	LEADING
5 Partners with national and multi-state initiatives to assess education-to-opportunity outcomes for graduates and non-graduates of postsecondary education and training programs who relocate or work outside the state	California partners with Multi-State Data Collaborative and State Wage Interchange System.	ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.



Leading
Fully present



Advanced
Partially present



Developing
In development



Foundational
Not in development



PROVIDE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
6 Provides comprehensive and timely open data files containing anonymized education-to-opportunity statistics that anyone can access, download, and otherwise use	California has downloadable datasets from a public interactive reporting tool containing aggregate education-to-opportunity statistics for (i) public four-year institutions; (ii) community colleges; (iii) nondegree credentials; and (iv) high schools.	LEADING
7 Publishes robust, timely, and easily understandable interactive resources informing education-to-opportunity decision-making by learners, families, and institutions	California has interactive tools containing education-to-employment outcomes available for (i) public four-year institutions (Universities, Cal State); and (ii) community colleges . In addition, CaliforniaColleges.edu provides interactive tools and resources for high school students to identify college and career pathways.	ADVANCED
8 Gives researchers access to individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets	California is developing a process for researchers to request deidentified, individual-level data that is linked to postsecondary education and workforce data summaries.	DEVELOPING

(..) IMPACT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
9 Enables learners and earners to access and utilize their own verified data, unlocking opportunities for college and career advancement	In statute , the California Cradle to Career (C2C) Data System is charged with scaling eTranscript California. An eTranscript Taskforce, facilitated by C2C, published concrete, actionable recommendations for how to leverage eTranscript California to reduce administrative burden for students, clarify complementary systems and processes that are necessary for a Career Passport that would support skills-first hiring, and document specific steps to advance this vision in the next three years. C2C is also facilitating the effort to develop the Governor's vision for a Career Passport, which would include validated academic and nonacademic skills when people apply for a job. Additionally, Golden West College has been awarded an LER Accelerator grant to develop and implement an LER system to document and standardize student competencies across disciplines, aligning them with skills taxonomies to enhance workforce readiness and credential transparency.	DEVELOPING
10 Designates a unit with responsibility and dedicated, full-time capacity for generating education-to-employment insights to inform state policymaking and resource allocation decision-making	California's labor agency hosts the Labor Market Division , which produces reports and dashboards. The California Community Colleges system funds a network of Centers for Excellence for Labor Market Research . California Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Data System's first dashboards display disaggregated data on the journey from high school, through postsecondary education, and into careers. C2C is a neutral source of trusted information that can be used to inform policy, although C2C is not involved in the policymaking process.	DEVELOPING

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.

- **Leading**
Fully present
- **Advanced**
Partially present
- **Developing**
In development
- **Foundational**
Not in development



Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, chart a path, and navigate challenges. Graduates who receive such guidance are more likely to land a job that requires a degree and feel satisfied with their career trajectory. The Quality Coaching measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported receiving personalized guidance, timely labor market information, and support to create a plan and overcome barriers.

Personalized guidance		Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who report receiving personalized coaching or guidance to help select the education that will help prepare them for a successful career.		25% FND./DEV.	47% DEV./ADV.
Timely labor market information		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive timely labor market information, across the various types below, before enrolling or during their first year.		20% FOUNDATIONAL	32% DEVELOPING
	Education-to-career paths that might be a good fit for student's strengths and interests	25%	43%
	Job opportunities that a particular education program could lead to	23%	36%
	Potential earnings in different careers related to student's education program	16%	27%
	Career outcomes of students from their own institution	15%	23%
Support		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive at least some support in setting goals and in overcoming obstacles.		64% ADVANCED	72% ADV./LEAD.
	Setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve these goals	62%	72%
	Identifying and overcoming barriers	66%	72%
CATEGORY KEY			
When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.		Leading ≥75%	Advanced 50% to <75%
		Developing 25% to <50%	Foundational <25%
National results		Four-year	Two-year
Personalized guidance		34%	45%
Timely labor market information		21%	33%
Support		71%	74%



Affordability

California

FOUR-YEAR

ADVANCED

TWO-YEAR

LEADING

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. The Affordability measure is based on how many hours a week the average student would need to work to cover the in-state net price (total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships), how many hours a student from a low-income family would need to work to cover their typical in-state net price, and the percentage of students that complete their degree on time – a critical factor in the cost of a degree.

Student hours of work needed	Four-year	Two-year
Average student hours of work needed	ADVANCED 17 hours per week Average annual net price, four-year institutions: \$11,902	LEADING 1 hour per week Average annual net price, two-year institutions: \$5,838
Low-income student hours of work needed	LEADING 5 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, four-year institutions: \$7,186	LEADING 0 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, two-year institutions: \$4,991
CATEGORY KEY ● Leading ≤10 hrs ● Advanced 10 to <20 hrs ● Developing 20 to <30 hrs ● Foundational ≥30 hrs		

On-time completion rate	Four-year
On-time completion rate	DEVELOPING 49%
CATEGORY KEY	
	● Leading ≥65%
	● Advanced 50% to <65%
	● Developing 35% to <50%
	● Foundational <35%



Work-Based Learning

California

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

FOUNDATIONAL

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that are linked to higher earnings, greater job satisfaction, and lower underemployment. The Work-Based Learning measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported participating in at least one of the following types of paid experiences: paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op, paid practicum, or paid undergraduate research experience.

Quality Work-Based Learning	Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who participated in at least one of five types of quality paid work-based learning experiences	38% DEVELOPING Paid internship participation: 31% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 69%	14% FOUNDATIONAL Paid internship participation: 11% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 30%

CATEGORY KEY

When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
50% to <75%

● **Developing**
25% to <50%

● **Foundational**
<25%

National results	Four-year	Two-year
Any quality paid work-based learning experience	43%	17%
Paid internship	37%	14%
Any work-based learning experience (paid or unpaid)	72%	33%



In addition to student self-reporting of apprenticeship participation, states have other sources of information on participation in registered apprenticeships via the U.S. Department of Labor. In California, **0.40 percent** of the state labor force is made up of active apprentices, for a total of **77,774 apprentices**. Across the country, this number ranges from 0.9 percent (Hawaii) to 0.12 percent (Oklahoma). In countries with leading apprenticeship systems, such as Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and England, apprentices constitute about 2.5–3.0 percent of the labor force, so all states in the U.S. have substantial room for improvement.



Employer Alignment

California

ADVANCED

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. The Employer Alignment measure is based on the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 25–34 employed in a college-level job as well as the supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state.

College-level employment

The percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who are employed in college-level positions

ADVANCED

Supply/demand ratio

The overall ratio: the average of the entry-level supply/demand ratios for these nine opportunity occupational groups

ADVANCED

Information technology and business

Data analytics

LEADING

Finance and accounting professionals

ADVANCED

Finance and accounting support

FOUNDATIONAL

Information and cybersecurity

LEADING

Software development and engineering

LEADING

Health care

Health care technicians and technologists

DEVELOPING

Nursing

FOUNDATIONAL

Manufacturing and engineering

Engineering

LEADING

Manufacturing/Trades technicians and technologists

ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
60% to <75%

● **Developing**
50% to <60%

● **Foundational**
<50%