



As Californians work to rebuild the world's fifth-largest economy from the pandemic-induced recession, the state's workforce will need access to flexible and affordable pathways to degrees, credentials, certificates, and career opportunities. We must also ensure an equitable recovery that addresses systemic racism in our education and workforce systems.

Our state's economic success has been fueled by highly skilled labor for decades, and successful recovery from COVID-19 will ultimately require [millions of new workers](#) with degrees, credentials, and certificates. As our economy remains stalled and millions of Californians see their career opportunities evaporate, state leaders need new tools to promote economic gains and close educational gaps—especially for those most at risk of falling further behind.

We need new ways to meet these challenges.

It's time for California to build a postsecondary and workforce-training system that recognizes high-quality learning, regardless of where that learning takes place. By implementing **competency-based education**, Californians can participate in postsecondary learning that accommodates their schedule at a pace they set. And with learning pathways that begin by giving Californians credit for what they already know and can do, we can **validate the knowledge and skills they've already attained**—whether on the job, in past education experiences, or from valuable industry training. This dual approach can accelerate millions of hard-working, highly skilled Californians on the path to a valuable credential that certifies their ability to do the job.

Simply put, we believe it's time to Give Californians the Credit They Deserve.

[California Competes](#), [The California EDGE Coalition](#), and [The Education Trust–West](#)—three members of the California Higher Education Equity Coalition—are partnering to launch a statewide campaign. Together, we're working to inform state leaders about two innovative approaches: Credit for Prior Learning and Competency-Based Education, which assess valuable knowledge and skills to accelerate the attainment of valuable postsecondary credentials.

It's time to put an end to “lost learning.”

[In California, there are 4 million adults who have some college credits but no degree and are not currently enrolled in school.](#) For many, the traditional higher education system made it too difficult to juggle life, learning, and work. As a result, they've chosen to forgo a degree in favor of a job. And although their formal educational experience came to an end, their learning did not. Many have achieved valuable learning and skills while on the job and through employer-led training—most of which will go unrecognized by formal educational institutions. By working to recover this “lost learning,” we can validate hard-won knowledge and skills and count them towards degrees, credentials, and certificates that lead to in-demand careers. And by creating personalized, competency-based learning options, these Californians can find the optimal time and pace to complete their education.

This is how we build a system that works for everyone.

The way we measure learning is outdated. We give credit through a centuries-old approach that relies on classroom time and credit hours—privileging students who can afford to navigate more traditional pathways while reinforcing inequitable barriers for those not well served by a time-based approach. Here’s how two new approaches—if done with a focus on equity and quality—can help us build systems that recognize the most important educational outcome: *learning*.

Credit for Prior Learning

When an experienced student chooses to pursue a degree, credential, or certificate they shouldn’t have to start from scratch. Their relevant prior learning—no matter where it happened—should be validated and given credit. This can happen in numerous ways, from improving credit transfer to creating rigorous means of assessing what they already know. Credit for Prior Learning saves students valuable time and money by accelerating their path to a degree, credential, or certificate.

Competency-Based Education

This approach enables students to progress in their education based on demonstrations of their knowledge and skills instead of the amount of time they spend in a course.

Competency-based education models that include credit for prior learning enable students to demonstrate knowledge and skills they already have and then only take coursework to gain the remaining learning needed to demonstrate mastery.

This work advances racial and economic justice in our education and workforce systems.

Creating a system where all learning counts directly addresses systemic injustice and creates a more equitable workforce. It ensures that barriers—such as structural racism and access to financial aid—are removed in favor of a new approach that emphasizes knowledge and skills over ability to navigate an overly complex system. As our state confronts racial injustice, this work is an essential component of building a more fair and equitable economy.

If you believe Californians Deserve Credit, join us.

The time for action—to rebuild a more equitable system, to fuel our recovery, and to give Californians the credit they deserve—is now. We’re working to convene a diverse group of partners throughout the education and workforce system to tackle the challenge of introducing, further testing, and refining these approaches. We’re collaborating with students, educators, employers, workforce and labor leaders, and community-based organizations to learn from each other and prompt urgent action on this important issue. We’ll work to develop and disseminate research about what works, host listening sessions and briefings, and highlight the life-changing impact of these approaches.

Our Partners:

