



Regional Variation in Community College Student Outcomes in California

JESSE ROTHSTEIN, ELISE DIZON-ROSS, JOHANNA LACOE

The California Community College (CCC) system serves a large student body, diverse in backgrounds, experiences, and educational goals. In our accompanying report we use data from the CCC system's records to measure variation in achievement across the state's Strong Workforce Regions. We consider a range of achievement measures, including initial enrollments, progression through community college (CC); successful completion of community college with a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year public institution in the state; and time between initial enrollment and successful completion. We link this data with high school records from the California Department of Education (CDE) to explore the extent to which regional variations in CCC outcomes can be attributed to variations in students' characteristics and college readiness prior to CCC enrollment. We also explore a range of contextual factors, including population and student demographics, to further contextualize the variation in student outcomes across regions.

Though California's 116 community colleges are connected to one another as part of a larger system, each individual college and campus faces unique dynamics based on the geographic regions they are serving and the needs of their students. are subject to their local contexts and the residents of the regions they serve. In the accompanying report, we discuss characteristics of the populations in each region, as well as the students enrolled in the regions' colleges, to help illuminate the diverse circumstances faced by colleges in the state. The report uses Census data to describe the overall populations and student populations in each region, followed by a deep dive into student characteristics and college readiness among the sample of California high school graduates who subsequently enroll in a California Community College.

For more detailed findings and information about the methodology, please consult the accompanying report, "[Regional Variation in Community College Student Outcomes in California.](#)"

KEY FINDINGS

- Some CCCs mostly serve students enrolling directly out of high school, while others serve a larger share of nontraditional or older students. It follows that regions vary in the educational goals of their students. For example, larger shares of students in the Central Valley, Greater Sacramento, and South Central regions seek to earn a degree or transfer to a four year college, while Northern Inland, North Bay and Mid-Peninsula CCs serve larger shares of students who aim to complete credits for a high school diploma or GED or improve basic skills. In Santa Cruz and Monterey, students are more likely to be focused on career advancement than students in other regions.

- Across most measures of academic progress and achievement, the South Central micro region (on the Central Coast) has strong performance relative to other regions, with one of the highest rates of transfer and/or degree attainment and persistence into the second year, with and without adjustments for pre-college preparation.

- While the Silicon Valley micro region rates lowest across most outcome measures, the results suggest that a large share of students in this micro region are enrolling in CC to fulfill goals other than degree attainment or transfer and their success may not be well captured by the specified outcome measures.

- Within the Bay Area, the Santa Cruz & Monterey micro region outperforms the rest of the micro regions across almost every measure of progress and achievement.

- CCCs in rural micro regions – Mother Lode, Northern Inland, and Northern Coastal – show similar outcomes to other micro regions despite being geographically distant from high schools in the region and CSUs and UCs.

- Most of the patterns in outcomes are consistent between the unadjusted and adjusted results, suggesting that controlling for prior student preparation does not substantially change how outcomes vary across regions. One important exception is the Inland Empire. Without adjustments, the Inland Empire micro region rates quite low across all measures, particularly in transfer or degree attainment and earning 60 plus credits in the first two years. After adjusting for student characteristics and pre-college preparation, the outcomes for the micro region look more aligned with other regions.

FIGURE 1. Strong Workforce Regions and Community Colleges



Macro region	Micro region	Colleges
Northern	Northern Coastal	2
	Northern Inland	5
	Greater Sacramento	8
Bay Area	North Bay	4
	East Bay	10
	Mid Peninsula	4
	Silicon Valley	7
Central Valley	Santa Cruz/Monterey	3
	Mother Lode	1
South Central Coast	Central Valley	13
	South Central	8
Inland Empire	Inland Empire/Desert	12
	Greater L.A.	Los Angeles
Greater L.A.	Orange County	9
	San Diego	San Diego/Imperial

CONCLUSION

California's community colleges serve a diverse set of students in a wide variety of contexts, and colleges in different regions are faced with different sets of challenges and opportunities as they educate and train their students.

The Silicon Valley micro region rates lowest across most outcome measures, both among the Bay Area micro regions and overall. These results suggest that a large share of students in this micro region are enrolling in CC to fulfill goals other than degree attainment or transfer and may not be best captured by the specified outcome measures. Within the Bay Area, the Santa Cruz & Monterey micro region outperforms the rest of the micro regions across almost every measure.

Most of the patterns in outcomes are consistent between the unadjusted and adjusted results, with the exception of the outcomes for Inland Empire. Without adjustments, the Inland Empire micro region rates quite low across all measures, particularly in transfer or degree attainment and earning 60 plus credits in the first two years. After the adjustments for student characteristics and pre-college preparation, the outcomes for the micro region are (or appear) more aligned with other regions.

As this report makes clear, the state's community college regions each face different challenges, serve different student populations, and vary in their performance along measures of persistence and attainment. The information here should be helpful in deciding which dimensions of performance require the most attention in each region

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