



LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S NEGLECTED MAJORITY

(Re)Defining True Success for High School
Students in Los Angeles County

March 2023



Re(Defining) True Success for High School Students in Los Angeles County

Los Angeles is one of the most well-known cities in the world. Primarily, because of the relatively short distance between beaches, mountains, and the desert. Not to mention its highly desirable weather, theme parks, and of course, Hollywood stars and famous TV and movie studios. However, did you know Los Angeles County is the first in the nation to reach 10 million residents?¹ With that many residents, one would assume its education system is the best.

Given the size of Los Angeles County, there is a particular interest in knowing how high school students are performing, if they are graduating, and what success follows high school.² While graduating high school is a significant accomplishment for students, parents, and educators, it isn't - and it shouldn't be - the end goal.

Have you ever thought about what happens to students after graduation day? This research brief will examine available data to answer the following questions:

- How many students pursue dual or concurrent enrollment and receive college credit early?
- How many students earn advanced placement (AP) credit?
- How many high school students earn college credit (early) via articulated courses?
- How many students graduate high school and enroll in college?
- How many students complete a baccalaureate education?
- Does immediately pursuing a 4-yr degree result in financial success for most students?
- How many students receive commensurate employment after college graduation?

¹ Gazzar, Brenda. "Los Angeles County first in the nation to 10 million people." Los Angeles Daily News, Dec. 2013.

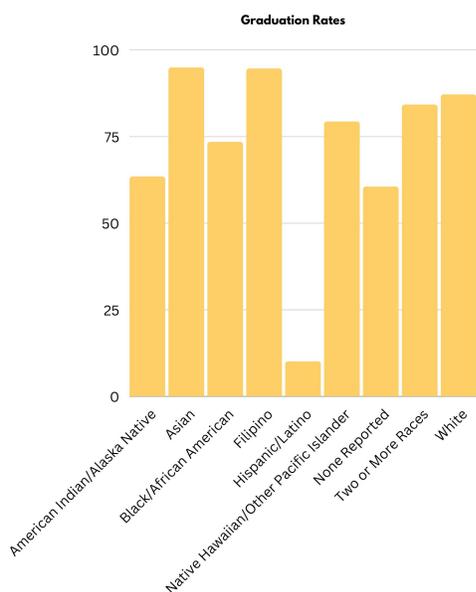
dailynews.com/2013/12/12/los-angeles-county-first-in-the-nation-to-10-million-people/.

² Although the focus of this brief is Los Angeles County, limited data does require us to place attention on state and national figures as well.

High School Students

Los Angeles County enrolled 1.49 million students across all schools in 2017-18.^{3,4} Of these students, approximately 472,364 were in grades nine through twelve. Fast-forwarding to 2020-21, the number of students in the 4-year adjusted cohort was over 116,000, with nearly 96,000, or 82.4% of 9th grade students who started in 2017-18 graduating in 2021. Overall, there were more female student graduates than male students, with 85.9% female student graduates versus 79.1% male student graduates.

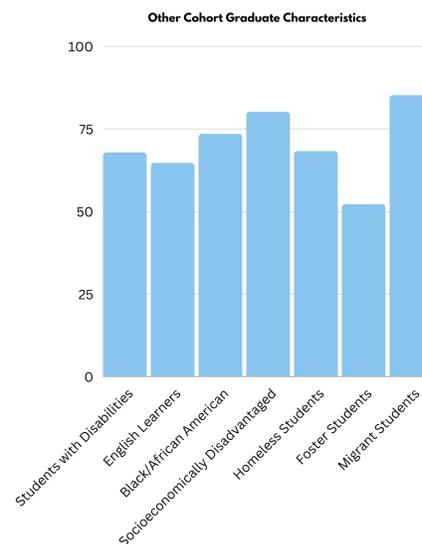
Among racial subgroups, Asian (including Filipino), white, and mixed-race students graduation rates higher than the county’s rate of 82.4%. Notably, graduation rates for American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, and students who did not report a race/ethnicity were between 60.5% and 73.4%.



- American Indian/Alaska Native, 63.4%
- Asian, 94.9%
- Black/African American, 73.4%
- Filipino, 94.6%
- Hispanic/Latino, 80.5%
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 79.3%
- None Reported, 60.5%
- Two or More Races, 84.2%
- White, 87.1%

Other Cohort Graduate Characteristics

- Students with Disabilities, 67.8%
- English Learners, 64.6%
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, 80.1%
- Homeless Students, 68.2%
- Foster Students, 52.1%
- Migrant Students, 85.1%



Historical data shows that since 2016-17, the Los Angeles County graduation rates have only increased, going from 80.8% to 82.4%. While this growth should be celebrated, there is still room for improvement since this means 17.6% of Los Angeles high school students (initially) do not complete high school. It should also be noted that the cohort graduation rate for Los Angeles County is slightly below the state’s graduation rate of 83.6%, and the nation’s public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate was 85.8%, according to the most recent data available.⁵

³ Enrollment data includes charter schools.

⁴ California Department of Education (CDE) through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), ed-data.org/county/Los-Angeles.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR).



UC/CSU Course Requirements

A growing number of high school graduates are encouraged to complete all requirements for University of California (UC) and/or California State University (CSU) systems. Often referred to as A-G, this common institutional focus has resulted in a majority (58.7%) of graduates in Los Angeles County completing all the courses required for UC and/or CSU entrance; this proportion has fluctuated over the years, with the most recent increase going from 53.6% in 2019-20 to 58.7% in 2020-21.⁶



While this represents only a portion of the entrance requirements for UC or CSU, this metric does seem to indicate that a majority of high school graduates are able to enroll directly into state 4-year institutions. Simultaneously, many high school students are opting not to complete all requirements for University of California (UC) and/or California State University (CSU) systems. This balance (41% of high school students) may pursue other interests, start a small business, enroll in a community college, or seek employment with whatever career-readiness skills they garnered in high school.

Understanding the Impact of Local Data

Since 82.4% of high school students in Los Angeles County are graduating, it is natural for us to wonder about the rest - in this case, 17.6% of high school students. Where do these students end up? If we turn to publicly available data, we find about 11,000 or 10% drop out.⁷ No additional data points are provided to explain what happened to the other 7.6% of students (potentially unemployed, incarcerated, in the workforce, etc.). Thus, we may consider thinking of the 17.6% as “non high school graduates.” If we consider the dropout rate as the benchmark for the next five years, it could be estimated that there will be over 55,000 high school dropouts in Los Angeles County.

For those students who successfully navigated high school to experience graduation, national data shows that of the 2.7 million who graduated in 2021, about 1.7 million (61.8%), were enrolled in colleges or universities by that Fall.⁸ Similarly, the latest available data indicates that 61.9% of Los Angeles County high school completers enrolled in college.⁹ The information below indicates the percentage of students who attended the various institution types.

In State

- University of California, 13%
- California State University, 26%
- California Community College, 48%
- Private 2-year and 4-year College, 5%

Out-of-State

- 4-Year College (Public/Private), 8%
- 2-Year College (Public/Private), 1%

⁶ California Department of Education (CDE) through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), ed-data.org/county/Los-Angeles, [Cohort Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Course Requirements](#).

⁷ California Department of Education (CDE) through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), ed-data.org/county/Los-Angeles, [Cohort Dropouts](#).

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, The Economics Daily, 61.8 percent of recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2021, [bls.gov](https://www.bls.gov).

⁹ California Department of Education (CDE) through DataQuest, 2019-20 College-Going Rate by Postsecondary Institution Type.

Latest national data indicates that about 43% of high school completers immediately enrolled in 4-year institutions, and 20% immediately enrolled in 2-year institutions.¹⁰ If we do the math starting with 100 9th graders, of the 82 who graduate from Los Angeles County (since 82.4% graduate), 51 enroll into any type of postsecondary education (since 61.9% of graduates pursue any type of higher education). When considering the in-state, public institutions where high school graduates of Los Angeles County schools are attending, we see that of these 51 college students, 20 would enroll in a 4-year institution, and even more (24 students) enroll in a 2-year community college.¹¹



Local data indicates that half of all high school graduates (51 out of 100) enroll in any post-secondary education.

Are the other 49% adequately prepared for work (gaining skills, certifications, and training in high school) to be able to competitively contribute to our economy?

Advanced Placement

Since more high school graduates in Los Angeles County are enrolling in a 2-year compared to a 4-year institution, it is important to recall that higher education and “college” does not necessarily mean a traditional 4-year university degree. Many of the fastest-growing career fields actually require credentials other than a bachelor’s degree. New and emerging occupations in every industry now require a combination of academic knowledge and technical ability, often requiring one or two years of higher education. Many well-intentioned parents, students, and educators might wish to increase pathways into higher education by utilizing conventional methods such as Advanced Placement (AP). But it is important to review students’ performance in core and AP classes before determining the “best” course of action forward.

According to data from the Education Data Partnership, which uses state department of education information, nearly 30% of all advanced placement students in California are in Los Angeles County (105,386 out of 383,274). By diving deeper into the data, one discovers that while more than 105,000 students were administered one or more AP test, approximately 51% of all tests received a score of “3” or higher. At first glance, it may seem students’ passing score will translate into college credit, but unfortunately, most universities accept only “4” or “5” AP scores. Ultimately, only 28.6% of all AP exams administered in the county earned a “4” or “5” AP score. (As a point of comparison, 34% of all AP tests administered in California received a similar score.)

If we assume a one-to-one relationship – meaning one AP test per student – then for every 100 students in the county, 51 students would earn a passing score of 3+, and even fewer students (29) would earn a score of 4+.¹²

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, Immediate College Enrollment Rate. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpa.

¹¹ Due to data limitations, only In-State, public, 4-year institutions and 2-year colleges are considered here.

¹² This calculation assumes students have taken only one AP test. We, however, know students often take more than just one AP test. This means calculation is overstated.



So what do these data mean? It appears that AP is not fulfilling its promise to most students in Los Angeles County in helping them gain a competitive advantage and save money by passing their AP exams in order to secure college credit early. Data indicates that 49% of all AP tests failed. Those students who paid for, and took the tests, will not receive any college credit, potentially at a great expense of time, money, and emotional toil.

For many families, the primary goal of AP is to gain an advantage and earn college credit early. So let's compare AP pass rates to the higher percentage of high school students earning college credit in other programs, such as articulated courses, concurrent enrollment, or dual enrollment.

Articulation

Articulation agreements between high schools and local community colleges are an effective way to give students a head start on earning college credits before finishing high school.

For students, the benefit of articulation agreements is enormous—and obvious.

- Students earn college credit while in high school, for free.
- Students won't have to repeat the same coursework in college.
- Students will be able to finish up their college career sooner and start careers earlier.
- As a result of bypassing certain courses, students save money on tuition and textbook fees.

For community colleges, these agreements create a healthy stream of students who will enroll after graduating from high school. Thus, increasing enrollment figures and hopefully retention and completion as well.

Similar to AP, the goal of articulation agreements is to increase college completion rates for college-bound students by making the transfer from high school to college easier. For many students, this transition is difficult to face on their own. Navigating administrative paperwork, completing prerequisites, and affording tuition are challenges that cause many students to take much longer to make the transfer. Articulation agreements are a response to these barriers.¹³

Articulation agreements are very successful in Los Angeles County. There were over 625 articulation agreements that yielded over 3,665 high school students with college credit in 2022.¹⁴ These students didn't pay for college tuition, did not have a stressful, high-stakes test such as Advanced Placement, and secured a college transcript prior to high school graduation. The problem is very few students are aware that such agreements exist.

There is one powerful question to ask your local school district to better understand the hidden benefits of Articulation agreements: Ask for a list of all articulated courses with their completion/pass rates. (Recall that 49% of all AP tests failed). Which approach yields more students to secure early college credit?

¹³ Barrington, Kate. "[What is an Articulation Agreement and Why Should You Care?](#)" *Community College Review*. May 2022.

¹⁴ Los Angeles County Career Pathway Partnership Data 2017-2022. Locally collected sample. Los Angeles Regional Consortium.

Dual and Concurrent Enrollment

Like articulation agreements, dual and concurrent enrollment programs enable students to earn the high school credits they need to graduate along with getting college credit, too. In both cases, a high school enters a partnership with a local community college (or even a 4-year university) that will allow their students to take college-level courses. Most often, these students are required to have completed the 10th grade in order to enroll in either program.

Often, in education literature and related reports, “dual enrollment” and “concurrent enrollment” are used interchangeably.¹⁵ Nevertheless, both programs accomplish the same outcome: High school students are able to earn college-level credits that will enable them to skip entry-level technical courses or general education requirements helping them advance more quickly during their college years – leading to clear and immediate savings of both time and money.

Generally, a huge benefit is that dual enrollment programs are free to students. Seventy-eight percent of funding for most dual programs is provided most often by the school, district, or state. Even the costs of things like textbooks and other supply fees are usually covered – although this may vary from school to school.¹⁶

In 2018, 82% of public schools with students enrolled in any of grades 9–12 offered some kind of dual or concurrent enrollment opportunities for their students. This number continues to increase annually due to recent legislation and passionate educators collaborating on pathway development.

In Los Angeles County, 1,197 CTE dual enrollment classes yielded nearly 11,000 students with college credit, and 3,789 non-CTE dual enrollment classes (such a general education courses) yielded 26,215 students with college credit. Combined, these 37,215 students represent only 7.8% of enrolled high school students.¹⁷

There is one powerful question to ask your local school district to better understand the hidden benefits of dual and concurrent enrollment: Ask for a list of all dual enrollment courses with their completion/pass rates. (Recall that 49% of all AP tests failed). Which approach yields more students to secure early college credit?

Does Graduation Equate to Career Readiness?

For every 100 students in Los Angeles County, data shows that 82 will graduate high school and 51 will seek any form of higher education. Said another way: Over half of LA County students complete high school, are deemed college-ready, and head straight to college. Without concrete data, we could assume that the remaining 31 students who graduated high school, but did not attend any college, and must have entered the workforce (or the military, remain unemployed, moved abroad, etc.).

¹⁵ Dual enrollment programs provide students with an opportunity to take courses for college credit at their high schools. These courses are generally taught by high school teachers who have been approved by the college to teach these courses (sometimes hired as college faculty). Concurrent enrollment programs typically take place on an actual college campus instructed by a college faculty member. A student registers at the college as a non-degree-receiving student while concurrently enrolled as a high school student.

¹⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, Dual or Concurrent Enrollment in Public Schools in the United States.

nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020125/index.asp

¹⁷ 37,215/472,364



The reality is that many students would immediately like to pursue a postsecondary education. But, with high gas prices, inflation, rising interest rates, expensive tuition, and significant student debt, the university is no longer perceived a financial option for many. This just underscores the misalignment between awarded degrees, the available employment opportunities that someone qualifies for, and the lack of real-world job skills.

In fact, changes in the economy, the automation of many current work processes, and local demographic issues, mean that jobs of the future may require more technically prepared workers.¹⁸ The technical workforce gap in America is currently estimated at 1 million by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. “There is a skills gap...it is technical skills that aren’t so much four-year college skills...” Chris Tilly, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, told InsideSources. “They’re more hands-on skills that you might get through apprenticeships, or through community college training.”¹⁹ Training at a two-year college, and not necessarily a four-year or graduate degree, may be the most lucrative initial decision for Los Angeles County’s economic future.

So, do all those that enroll in college then graduate with a degree? And how many are actually successful once they complete their degree? Recent data shows that even once being accepted and starting higher education, only 64% of students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year institution completed that degree at the same institution within 6 years. Noteworthy, the 6-year graduation rate was higher for females than for males (67 vs. 60 percent).²⁰ The national college dropout rates average at 40% for undergraduate students²¹. Similarly, throughout California the overall six-year college completion rate is 53%.²² Applied to the 51 students who enroll in the university, we can project that between 20 and 24 Los Angeles students dropout. In calculating this ratio specially to the 51 LA County students who graduate high school and enroll in any form of higher education, we can calculate that approximately 27 students out of 100 in Los Angeles County will graduate with their Bachelors.²³

Some might then assume that those 27 college graduates are then gainfully employed after commencement...but they would be wrong. Due to a variety of factors (including lack of skills, and oversaturation of some majors in the workforce) 41.4% of recent university graduates find themselves not unemployed, but underemployed.²⁴ Four-in-ten alumni accept “gray-collar jobs” - taking positions that neither need nor require the university education they received. From among LA county’s 27 ninth graders that earn a college degree, data indicates that 11 will be underemployed.

¹⁸ “L.A. and Orange Counties Community Colleges: Powering Economic Opportunity”, Center for a Competitive Workforce, www.competitiveworkforce.la.

¹⁹ Wolf, Connor D. “Fighting the Workforce Skills Gap.” InsideSources, 20 June 2017, insidesources.com/fighting-workforce-skills-gap

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Graduation Rates component. nces.ed.gov.

²¹ ThinkImpact, College Dropout Rates, thinkimpact.com/college-dropout-rates/.

²² Huie, F., Ryu, M., and Shapiro, D. (February 2020), Completing College State Report, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

²³ The Public Policy Institute of California confirms this report’s findings that only about 30 percent of California ninth graders are expected to earn a bachelor’s degree. Gao, Niu, and Hans Johnson. “Improving College Pathways in California.” Public Policy Institute of California, Nov. 2017, www.ppic.org.

²⁴ Statista. Published by Statista Research Department. Percentage of recent college graduates in the United States who are underemployed from January 2017 to February 2022, statista.com.

Five Steps to (Re)Define Success

Given this reality of underwhelming college completion rates and high underemployment for university graduates, we must ask how we can help all our students be prepared for high-paying and in-demand occupations in Los Angeles County.

Five recommendations are:

1

Let us shift our thinking about preparing all students for the 4-year university. Some high school counselors, administrators, teachers, legislators, parents, and school board members may assert that all students will/should go to the university. Well-intentioned, they promote a “one size fits all” approach to college-prep high school curriculum (often referred to as A-G) and emphasize AP courses over other college credit bearing options. In reality, a majority of graduates will immediately find themselves enrolling in high-quality community colleges immediately after high school. More appropriate may be conveying a sentiment like the State of Utah which has successfully branded a “1-2-4-or more” campaign placing all post-secondary options equal and within reach.

2

We know that a 4-year university is not a good fit, or necessary, for every single student. We also know that earning 4-year degree does not mean they will earn more money than those with a 2-year degree. However, is this something we actively discuss within our community? Do students feel it is OK to pursue trade school or a two-year degree? Do they understand the range of earnings by educational attainment? We need more strategic efforts to destigmatize community college and trade schools while (re)educating all stakeholders about the realities of a 4-year degree. Just getting into the university is not the goal as on average only 53% of Californians enrolled in college will complete their degree. Moreover, graduating with a bachelor's degree is also not the end goal; as 41.4% of recent college graduates are underemployed. If a 4-year education is not required for a student to secure their initial career of choice, then we should not push for something that will only add to an already high education price tag. Rather, we should be focused on ensuring that all our students, at any educational level, both graduate and find purpose-aligned commensurate employment. This will require earlier career exploration, intentional work-based learning opportunities, and aligning the individual student's abilities and aptitude with their initial career choice.

3

Let us recognize that “college-prep” and career and technical education are in fact complementary, not competing, goals. Providing both the academic rigor and technical preparation required for our students to be successful (and gainfully employed) in the 21st century workplace means that all local students need to secure industry credentials and employability skills in tandem with a rigorous general education. Yet most high schools in our county removed any career education, technical training, or work-based learning requirement for graduation. CTE pathways are a viable path for all Angelenos to both college and career.



4

We know that high schools follow strict curriculum guidelines often focusing more on teaching theories and concepts than on real-world life skills such as money management, goal setting, proper nutrition, time management, and social/emotional intelligence. In many cases, graduates find themselves not knowing how to budget their money, secure an internship, pay bills, or knowing coping skills for anxiety and depression. Suddenly, it is time for college and they realize how far behind they are from the rest of their classmates. We cannot expect our public schools to satisfy every need. It takes a village. Thankfully, we have many community groups and non-profits ready to partner with our schools/families.

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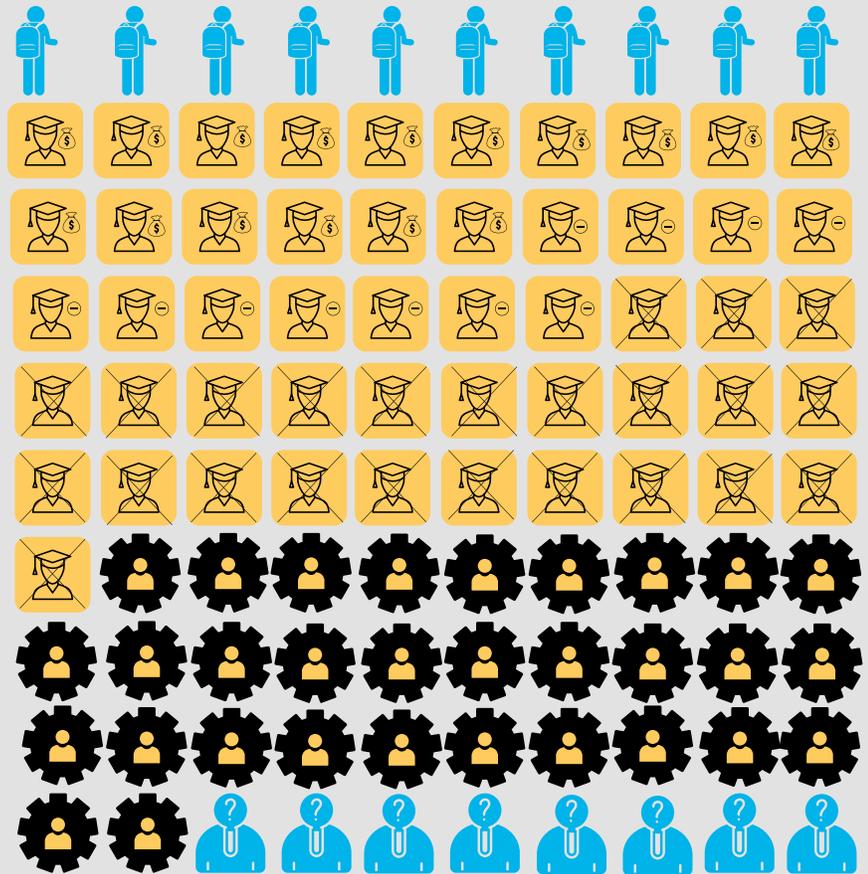
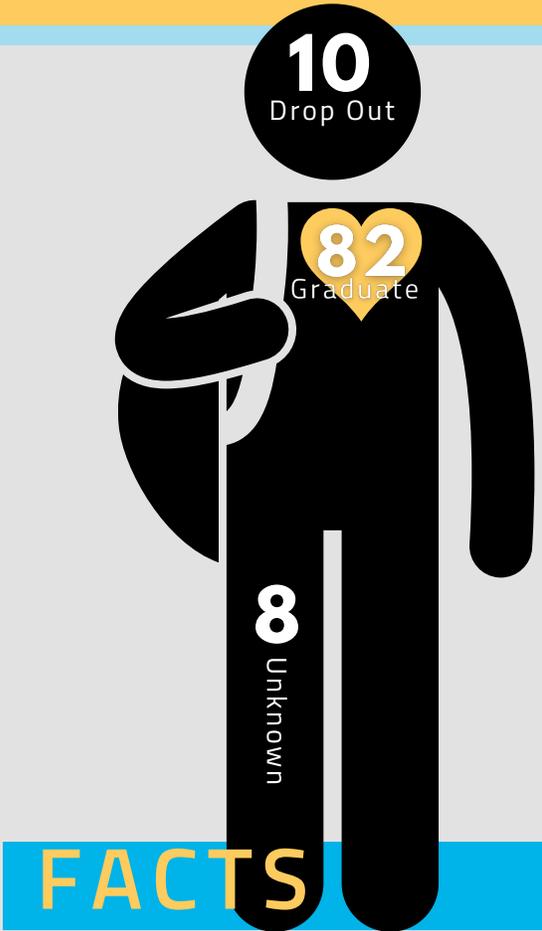
Let's consider embracing the "train-the-trainer" model to expand awareness. Many communities gather and train teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and other community stakeholders in order to align efforts to help students with goal-setting, selecting appropriate career paths, college major selection, understanding articulation agreement, and expanding dual and concurrent programs. Through a compact training program that focuses both on specific training content and on how to teach this training content to others, stakeholders can consistently deliver information about the many paths to career success as well as the many ways to earn college credit while in high school.

There are many paths to success. Our collective goal should be to match students with the right fit for them to gain a competitive advantage - whether that's an articulation agreement, AP test, dual enrollment, apprenticeship program, university, trade school, the military, community college, or a gap year for travel or work. We should stop the "university for all" rhetoric with false pretenses and unrealistic expectations that it is the only path to success.

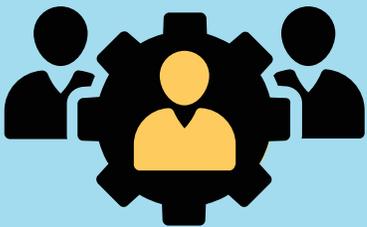
Our local community colleges are in the ideal position to provide Los Angeles County's future workforce with a general education combined with early college credit, applied technical skills, industry driven credentials, and specific preparation for employment. It is time to (re)define success for the neglected majority of our students throughout Los Angeles County.

OUT OF 100 LOS ANGELES 9TH GRADERS...

18% are non-high school graduates



Of the 82 that graduate:



31 Immediately Enter
the Workforce



51 Immediately Enroll
in Higher Education

Of the 51 who enroll
in Higher Education

24 Dropout

11 Graduates are Underemployed

16 Graduates secure
Commensurate Employment

16

Students win the "one way to win" game
and secure living-wage employment after
graduating from college.

84 DON'T!

Access the full report at losangelesrc.org



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