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***Higher Education Experts Agree: California Needs Greater, More Targeted Financial Aid Investments to Support College Affordability, Equitable Attainment***

A new report released today by The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) documents clear agreement among higher education experts that college affordability challenges have a wide range of negative implications for California students, and low-income and underrepresented students in particular. [Unpacking California College Affordability: Experts Weigh in on Strengths, Challenges, and Implications](#) summarizes interviews with 22 experts representing a broad array of experiences and perspectives.

“There is resounding consensus that unaffordable college costs are holding students back,” said Debbie Cochrane, vice president at TICAS. “Experts agree that greater and more targeted investments in financial aid are needed to close inequities in our system and help students from all backgrounds graduate from college.”

The 22 individuals interviewed include experts throughout the state of California, including student and institutional representatives from public and nonprofit colleges, independent research and policy organizations, and the state legislature and administration. They all agreed that affordability challenges contribute to inequities in college enrollment, completion, and student debt burdens. Data show that low-income students and students of color, in California and nationally, are less likely to enroll in or complete college and more likely to have borrowed for college.

All 22 experts recognized that existing state financial aid programs do a much better job supporting students’ ability to pay for tuition than other college costs, and agreed that improving college affordability in California requires better supporting lower income students’ ability to pay for non-tuition costs such as housing, food, transportation, and textbooks. According to the California Student Aid Commission, students’ non-tuition costs of college often exceed \$19,000 a year.

Most experts identified community college students as a population particularly impacted by unaffordable college costs. Many specifically highlighted how critical it is for the state to better support college affordability for nontraditional and underserved students, including older and returning students, former foster youth, and first-generation students.

The expert voices chronicled throughout the report corroborate other forms of evidence about the locus and scope of college affordability challenges. As TICAS has previously documented, low-income students face [particularly high](#) college cost burdens, including at [community colleges](#) despite low tuition charges, and are [most likely](#) to graduate from college with debt.

“While important incremental improvements to California’s state financial aid have been made in recent years, much work remains to ensure that state financial aid policy supports equitable student attainment,” said Cochrane.

In addition to the need for better targeted financial aid investments, many experts underscored the need to reduce the complexity of the financial aid system and address other barriers to timely college completion, such as lengthy developmental education requirements or the lack of availability of needed coursework. While the report is geared to California policymakers, experts also emphasized the need for improved federal policy and greater investments in targeted need-based scholarships and public higher education.

### **Experts Interviewed**

- *Dr. Lande Ajose*, Chair, California Student Aid Commission
- *Julie Bruno*, President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges
- *Chris Carter*, Director, Student Financial Support, University of California Office of the President
- *Dr. Scott Cline*, Vice President of Enrollment Management, California College of the Arts
- *Courtney Cooper*, President, Student Senate for California Community Colleges
- *Youlonda Copeland-Morgan*, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, University of California Los Angeles
- *Lupita Cortez Alcalá*, Executive Director, California Student Aid Commission
- *Judith Gutierrez*, President, University of California Student Association
- *Mónica Henestroza*, Higher Education Advisor, Office of California Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
- *Dr. Hans Johnson*, Director and Senior Fellow, Public Policy Institute of California Higher Education Center
- *Anita Kermes*, Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships, California State University Sacramento & President, California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- *Dean Kulju*, Director, Student Financial Aid Services and Programs, The California State University Chancellor’s Office
- *Sylvia Lopez*, Student, Mount Saint Mary’s University
- *Laura Metune*, Vice Chancellor for Governmental Relations, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office
- *Colleen Moore*, Assistant Director, Education Insights Center
- *Dr. Christopher Nellum*, Senior Director of Higher Education Research and Policy, The Education Trust—West
- *Christian Osmeña*, Former Principal Program Budget Analyst, California Department of Finance
- *Dr. Rob Parisi*, Dean of Student Services, Allan Hancock College
- *Kimberly Rodriguez*, Education Consultant, California State Senate
- *Jessie Ryan*, Executive Vice President, The Campaign for College Opportunity
- *Maggie White*, President, Cal State Student Association
- *Jeannette Zanipatin*, Legislative Staff Attorney, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

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*An independent, nonprofit organization, The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Our Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. For more information see [www.ticas.org](http://www.ticas.org) and [www.projectonstudentdebt.org](http://www.projectonstudentdebt.org) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/TICAS\\_org](http://www.twitter.com/TICAS_org).*