

# California's Neglected Majority:

## The Case for Skilled Technicians

There has been a long held belief that a completed postsecondary education correlated to a greater gross income. Evolving for almost forty years, this “college for all” philosophy created a paradigm that directed parents and educators to encourage high school graduates to enroll in college in pursuit of potential job security, social mobility, and financial prosperity.

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Following this philosophy, California's institutional "One Way to Win" paradigm focuses its efforts towards educating students in preparation for graduating from high school and enrolling directly into a university in pursuit of a degree. In line with this paradigm is that a high school's state and federal measure of success is based on its rate of college bound students. To this end, a majority of a middle and high school's time and resources are focused on college applications, A-G courses, and producing the greatest number of enrolled university-bound students. But a problem arises when this accepted institutional paradigm is subjected to shifts caused by changing social and economic forces. And like any hard structured mind-set, it avails little latitude. That is, taking into consideration an individual student's interests, talents, capabilities, and deficiencies.

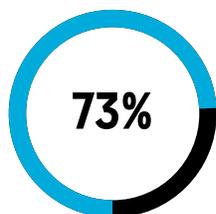
From 2001 to 2011 in California's fourteen educational regions, 68.7% of all high school students who began as freshman graduated within four years<sup>i</sup>. We can assume then that 31.3% of California's students had not graduated from high school and are not enrolling into any university. Put another way, the 31.3% dropout rate translates to over 1.66 million students over a ten year period<sup>ii</sup>. We can then assume that these individuals immediately joined the local workforce, remain unemployed or, sadly, may have become incarcerated.



WE CAN ASSUME THEN THAT 31.3% OF CALIFORNIA'S STUDENTS HAD NOT GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND ARE NOT ENROLLING INTO ANY UNIVERSITY.



Available data shows that from 2002 to 2009 the state's high school graduation rate averaged 70%.<sup>iii</sup> Of this 70%, an average of 45.7% enrolled as first time students in either one of California's community colleges or public four-year universities (namely one of the 23 California State Universities or a campus of the University of California).<sup>iv</sup> These percentages indicate that of the 3,104,161 graduating high school students between 2002 and 2009, 1,418,601 will enroll as first time college students.<sup>v</sup> This calculates to only 33.6% of California's ninth graders enrolling into any postsecondary education the year immediately after high school graduation. This leaves 54.3% (or 1,685,560) California high school graduates to avail themselves to whatever life and career readiness skills they may have garnered from high school. Added to this number are those 1,437,941 ninth through twelfth graders who had already dropped out.



**73% OF NINTH GRADERS WILL NOT IMMEDIATELY ATTEND COLLEGE . HERE THEN IS CALIFORNIA'S "NEGLECTED MAJORITY"**

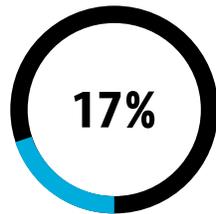
These numbers may seem shocking when one considers all the attention given towards pushing ninth through twelfth graders to enroll directly into the university. With those high school graduates that decide not to attend the university, plus the number of dropouts from ninth through twelfth grade, we have a total of 3,123,501, or 73% of those originally enrolled ninth graders who will not immediately attend college. Here then is California's "neglected majority." They require alternatives to the "college prep" curriculum, A-G requirements, and the pervasive "one way to win" mindset and paradigm that is so popular among today's middle and high schools.<sup>vi</sup>

For many students, the university may be the right answer, but the year immediately after high school may not be the right time. Many are not adequately prepared, emotionally or intellectually equipped, or occupationally focused to succeed. In addition, many students stop attending classes for personal, family, medical or other reasons – and these students equally deserve an opportunity to provide for their families and have a meaningful career.

Yet, just applying and getting into college isn't the end goal (at least it shouldn't be). Research shows that many teens are simply not interested or ready for postsecondary education immediately after high school. Even among those high school graduates that do enroll as first-time freshman into California accredited four year institutions, only an average 58% will graduate with a baccalaureate within six years.<sup>vii</sup> Comparatively, freshmen that emerge with a certificate or associates degree within six years from one of California's Community Colleges is 8%, with an average of 41% transferring to four-year institutions after acquiring twelve credits or more.<sup>viii</sup>

Of the 377,538 California high school students that graduated in 2009, 58.3% (220,004) enrolled as first time freshman into an accredited two or four-year educational institution. Of these freshman, 40.1% (153,154) enrolled into one of the California Communi-

ty Colleges, while 7.2% (27,231) entered the University of California system, and 10.5% (39,619) enrolled into one of the California State Universities. It should also be noted that in 2009, 8.0% of California's college bound freshman enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions outside the state.<sup>ix</sup> This increases the state's total 2009 college bound freshman by more than thirty thousand. Additionally, throughout California we know that just over 58% of full-time college freshman complete a bachelor's degree within six years. This means that 26% of the originally enrolled ninth graders that graduate from high school and enter university as freshman, only 17% will complete their bachelor's degree.



**ONLY 17% OF NINTH GRADERS WHO GRADUATED FROM FROM HIGH SCHOOL WILL COMPLETE THEIR BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN 6 YEARS.**

California's young people have additional, and very real, concerns even after graduation. Far too few start exploring career paths that will, hopefully, take advantage of the education they had worked so hard to acquire. It is only after they search for employment that they realize their 4-year degree may not have prepared them for entrance into the workforce. The federal departments of education and labor report that there are fifty-seven predicted jobs requiring a four-year degree for every 100 individuals that earns one.<sup>xi</sup> This misalignment between awarded degrees and real-world job skills forces 43% of university graduates to be under-employed in what are called "gray-collar jobs" - taking positions that neither need or require the education they received; resulting in their earning less than expected and adding the additional burden of affecting their ability to pay down any accrued student loan debt. Still, even in the face of rising education costs, a shrinking job market, and a oversaturation of some academic majors in the local workforce, California's educators continue to hold onto a shifted paradigm that wrestles with contemporary workforce needs and realities.

California's public education system has made great and headlong progress in turning out high school graduates. The impressive increase in graduation rates from the 1960's through 2000 were made when California had established itself as one of the top-ten economies in the world. But since 2000, the world has changed. The university degree is no longer the guaranteed path towards financial success it had been in the days of California's burgeoning and vibrant economy. And even if a college degree is attained, that education may not be enough. Yet California has a large number of high paying technical jobs going unfilled; jobs which require only a 1-year certificate or 2-year degree.<sup>xii</sup> For example, local manufacturers are scrambling for bright and hard working personnel to replace their increasingly aging workforce.<sup>xiii</sup> These potential employers are more interested in knowing what skills an individual has, and that they have an interest in growing and doing well; not what degree hangs on their wall.

There is no immediate or recognized solution that fully addresses the "neglected majority" in California. What the numbers do illustrate, however, is:

1. We should always promote open access and provide the opportunity for students to fulfill their highest potential. But deluding ourselves into believing that everyone has the ability and desire to be successful in the university right after high school (at the expense of those that do not enroll) is simply not logical.

2. There is a very real need to shift California's educational system paradigm about preparing all children for the university. Most high school counselors, administrators, teachers, and school boards (with good intentions) assert that all students "will go" to the university, as they create and promote a "one size fits all" approach to college-prep high school curriculum. But currently, all that has been achieved is setting up 74% of ninth graders for failure while starving them of the tools they need to be successful in a highly competitive global workforce.

3. California, for all its fine efforts, does not adequately prepare the 74% of ninth graders that will directly enter the workforce with work-readiness skills. Since the 1970's California has stripped most public schools of vocational programs - and where they are present, these career and technical education courses are chronically underfunded.

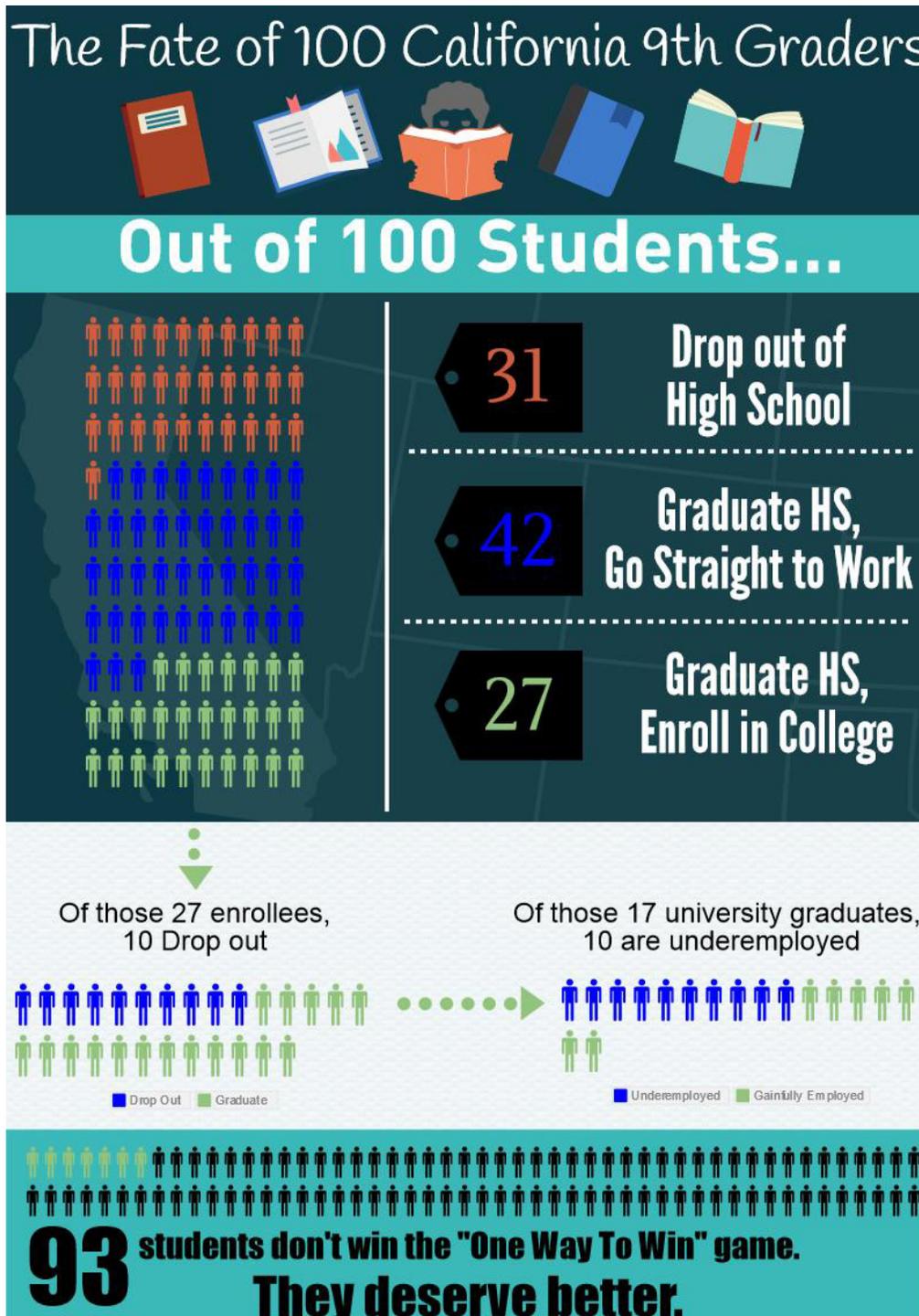
4. We need to educate counselors, parents and students about the realities of a 4-year degree. Just getting in is not the goal. Just graduating with a bachelor's degree is also not the end goal; as 43% of college graduates are underemployed. Rather, we should be focused on ensuring that those who enroll in college both graduate and find commensurate employment. This requires directing students with planning and foresight into fields that not only have projected openings, but are aligned with the individual student's abilities and interests.

5. "College-prep" and Career & Technical Education are in fact complementary, not competing, goals. The Tech Prep approach (sometimes also called a 2+2 pathway or Linked Learning) is a progressive structure that provides both the academic rigor and technical preparation required for our students to be successful in the 21st century workplace. Both community colleges and high schools should embrace both the "college-ready" and "career-ready" approach by investing in strong career and technical education programs articulated with local colleges.



6. In fact, California Community Colleges are now in the ideal position to provide over 70% of tomorrow's workforce with an education combined with applied technical skills, industry driven credentials, and specific preparation for employment.

Current circumstances show that California should not simply direct our youth to get a 4-year degree in "something" under the false pretenses and unrealistic expectations that it will lead to success. While still valuable in a number of areas, the obtainment of a 4-year degree is no longer the golden ticket to financial success that it was decades ago. Associate Degrees laden with technical skills and industry certifications are the new currency, and a realistic pathway to the restructuring of a new paradigm, in the 21st century.



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## National Center for Supply Chain Technology Education

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION & INDUSTRY

### ENDNOTES

i. Data compiled from California Department of Education – “Statewide Enrollment Reports,” and “Enrollment, Graduation, and Dropouts.” According to a CDE news release, a new formula was implemented and has served as a baseline in 2011. The new graduate and dropout “... completer rate did not account for students who transferred into or out of schools over four years and overestimated the graduation rate. The new cohort rate takes students mobility into account.” CDE New Release, Release: #11-54, August 11, 2011.

ii. Compiled from a report from the CDE, the actual number is 1,661,415. To further illustrate: The dropout number translates to 4.4% of California's estimated current population of 38,041,430.

iii. California Postsecondary Education Commission. Regional Graduation Rates, 2001-2009. California educational regions, and their aligned average graduation rates for the years 2001 to 2009 are: North Coast Region (70.3%); Superior Region (70.3%); Upper Sacramento Valley Region (74.1%); San Francisco Bay region (72.9%); Sacramento Tahoe Region (72.9%); Monterey Bay Region (65.4%); No. San Joaquin Valley Region (65.2%); Central Coast Region (72.5%); So. San Joaquin Valley Region (69.9%); Inyo Mono Region (75.8%); Los Angeles Region (59.0%); Inland Empire Region (65.1%); Orange County Region (73.0%); San Diego/Imperial Region (73.2%).

iv. California Postsecondary Education Commission. College Going Rates Options: College Going Rates to Public Colleges and Universities.

v. It should be noted that the numbers for first-time college attendees did not include those students who may have moved out of the state and elected to attend university in states outside of California. So, one could reasonably add a slight margin of error to the calculation (about 8% as noted on the next page), but the overall theme of this chapter remains.

vi. Quotes taken from: Dr. Dale Parnell, *The Neglected Majority* (Washington D.C.: Community College Press, 1986). Full credit is extended to Dr. Parnell for the term “The Neglected Majority” – modified with permission.

vii. Extrapolated from California Postsecondary Education Commission, Graduation Rates: Graduation Rates for Students Starting College in 2001. Here 2001 freshman enrollment and graduation rates were compiled and extracted from the University of California, California State Universities, accredited non-public 4-year institutions, and state approved institutions. California Community Colleges and other two year institutions were not included.

viii. Nancy Shulock and Coleen Moore, *Divided We Fall: Improving Completion and Closing Racial Gaps in California's Community Colleges* (Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, University of California Sacramento, 2010).

ix. California Postsecondary Education Commission, Migration of Students, 2001 to 2009. The basis for these calculations from: Nancy Shulock, *The Grades Are In 2008: Is California Higher*

x. Education Measuring Up? (Sacramento: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy, University of California Sacramento, 2009). Those California freshman who had enrolled into out-of-state postsecondary education institutions were not incorporated into the “graduation” equation.

xi. Kenneth Carter Gray and Edwin L. Herr, *Other Ways to Win: Creating Alternatives for High School Graduates* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006), cited from the Federal Departments of Education and Labor.

xii. 2012. Sharon Epperson, CNBC.com, No College Degree required for These \$100,000 Jobs, USA Today, August 28,

xiii. Economics & Statistics Administration, United States Department of Commerce, April Jobs Report: The Impact of Education and Age on Manufacturing Employment, May 6, 2011.



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