

BACKGROUND: NONCREDIT STUDENTS

Noncredit students represent a unique population of adult learners served by the California Community Colleges (CCC) who take adult education (noncredit) courses in the areas as listed in [Ed. Code, § 84757\(a\)\(1-9\)](#). Included are courses for parenting, basic skills, high school diploma and equivalency, English as a second Language (SL) and citizenship, adults with disabilities, short-term vocational, older adults, and health and safety.

In 2018-19, there were almost half a million adult learners enrolled in noncredit community college programs. Although these students are resilient and committed to learning, they frequently face significant barriers to enrollment and challenges in completing coursework. Some of these barriers are: limited English language, residency issues, low literacy, low income, mental health issues, unemployment, underemployment, previous incarceration, homelessness, single parenthood, and lack of childcare and transportation. Ages range from 18-70+ and there is significant enrollment into noncredit programs by people of color and other minoritized individuals. For example, according to the statewide metric system Adult Education Pipeline, in 2018-19, 40% of noncredit students declared low income; 34% students indicated low literacy as a barrier, and over half (53%) indicated being unemployed long term, i.e., for more than 27 consecutive weeks.

PROBLEM

For over 50 years, community colleges have been providing *free* noncredit education and robust student support to underrepresented adult learners through short-term, competency-based coursework aimed at preparing students for immediate employment, career ladders, and higher education. Noncredit programs also offer the most vulnerable populations, such as undocumented immigrants, adults with disabilities, and older adults, resources and skills attainment needed to navigate and thrive in their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already disproportionate impact on noncredit students and resulted in significant declines in noncredit enrollment. According to the Community College Datamart system, reported noncredit enrollments decreased by more than 60% from fall, 2019 (450,371) to fall, 2020 (178,044). Thousands of adult learners experienced unforeseen emergencies and crises during the pandemic that impacted their lives, such as an unexpected loss of job or income, displacement, eviction, or homelessness, loss of family members due to COVID-19 and medical emergencies. Many students did not have the financial means to meet their basic needs, such as food, gas, hygiene, or clothing. The CCC State Chancellor's Office recognized the unique challenges faced by noncredit students and included them in the emergency assistance funding that could support basic needs as well as continuity of enrollment in classes.

Similar to other underprivileged groups, the digital divide among adult learners widened during the pandemic and continues to exist as distance education expands. Noncredit students are likely to have inadequate technology and be lacking in the skills necessary to navigate online learning. Moving forward, it will take time and ongoing intentional investment in expanding the capacity of noncredit education to offer equitable access to education leading to economic mobility.

SOLUTIONS

- Ensure noncredit students have fair access to all relevant funding streams, including categorical programs aimed at promoting student equity, assisting with basic needs, mental health services, programs and services to support students with disabilities, and access to technology.
- Ensure noncredit programs are eligible for new funding streams focused on closing equity-gaps (i.e., ZTC Program funds and Guided Pathways).
- Maintain and expand flexible learning options including distance education, competency-based education, and work experience for noncredit students.
- Make additional attendance collecting funding models, such as census-based attendance available for noncredit classes offered in person and online.
- Fund all 10 noncredit instruction areas at the same apportionment rate.
- Revise eligibility criteria for Learning-Aligned Employment Program (LAEP) funds to include noncredit students.
- Allow pre-apprenticeship programs to receive Related and Supplemental Instruction (RSI) funds.
- Involve noncredit practitioners in the design of the systems for onboarding students, such as CCCApply, and systems for collecting data to reduce barriers and ensure meaningful accountability.
- Integrate noncredit institutions and noncredit course offerings fully in the California Virtual Campus (CVC) initiative by developing a noncredit landing page and granting the home-college status to SDCCE and NOCE.

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