

Increasing California’s Postsecondary Attainment Rate to 70% for All Demographic Groups by 2035 Would Generate \$4.4 Trillion in Net Monetary Gains for the State and Its Residents, Georgetown University Report Says

The monetary impact from increasing attainment would be large regardless of whether Californians earn four-year degrees or shorter-term credentials.

(Washington, DC, April 28, 2026) Increasing postsecondary attainment is critical to ensuring individuals are adequately prepared for the workforce of the future. California is a case in point. In 2022, state officials set a goal to increase the statewide postsecondary attainment rate to 70% by 2030 in order to meet projected demand for college-educated workers; roughly 56% of working-age Californians currently hold a postsecondary credential. While the state’s goal is ambitious, current attainment patterns reveal troubling disparities by race/ethnicity, economic background, age, and geography that put large segments of Californians at risk of being left behind. Given these inequalities, College Futures Foundation set a more aspirational goal of raising attainment rates to at least 70% for all groups of working-age adults in California, including underserved learners, by 2035.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW), with support from College Futures Foundation, determined how California and its residents would benefit from achieving this goal. In *The Golden Ticket: How Raising Postsecondary Attainment Rates to 70 Percent for All Demographic Groups Would Unlock Decades of Prosperity in California*, CEW finds that achieving the 70% attainment goal across all demographic groups would require historic levels of public investment but would result in \$4.4 trillion in net monetary gains for the state and its residents over the next 50 years. This anticipated impact is greater than the size of the entire state economy today.

“Over the entire 50-year payback period we model—covering the full career arcs of all young adults who earn a credential over the next decade—the state and its residents would see \$4.4 trillion in net monetary gains, equivalent to \$214,000 per working-age adult. After just five years of significant investment, the average annual net gain over the next five years would total \$65.5 billion for the state of California and its residents due to higher earnings, increased tax revenues, consumption-driven economic expansion, and savings from reduced public spending,” said Zack Mabel, lead author and director of research at CEW. “Importantly, although bachelor’s degrees would deliver the highest total monetary gains overall, attainment gains at all levels would be transformational.”

CEW researchers modeled potential monetary gains across all postsecondary credential levels. The most realistic scenario assumes Californians earn a mix of postsecondary credentials over the next decade, which would result in a monetary impact of \$4.4 trillion. But in a scenario in which all new credential holders earned only non-degree credentials—such as certificates, certifications, and occupational licenses—or solely associate’s degrees, the anticipated impact would still be around \$4 trillion. If, however, all demographic groups reached the 70% goal by earning a bachelor’s degree, the total impact to California and its residents would be \$4.8 trillion.

