

March 12, 2019

California State University
Board of Trustees
c/o Trustee Secretariat
401 Golden Shore Long Beach, CA 90802



The Education Trust–West

Dear CSU Board of Trustees,

RE: CSU Exploration of Requiring Four Years of Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning for Incoming Students

The undersigned 39 educational equity and civil rights organizations appreciate the California State University’s interest in addressing incoming students’ academic preparation. We are eager to work closely with your team to answer a number of critical questions (see a full list of questions below) as the CSU explores requiring a fourth year of mathematics/quantitative reasoning for applicants and incoming students.

Although the CSU indicates that 75% of students entering the system already complete four or more years of mathematics, high school students across the state experience substantial gaps in access to rigorous, college preparatory coursework (i.e., “A-G” coursework). Research conducted by The Education Trust-West has shown, for instance, that a smaller percentage of math courses are A-G approved in low-income high schools than in more affluent high schools.¹ While academic preparation for college is crucial for student success in postsecondary institutions, we are cautious about recommendations that, while well-intentioned, could very well exacerbate the existing barriers to eligibility students face from the unequal access to A-G courses along lines of race, ethnicity, and class.

In 2017, California’s State Auditor concluded that the state can do a better job of preparing students for college. Specifically, in its comparison of three districts, the Auditor found that completion of the college preparatory coursework sequence was lower in districts where more than half the students were Black or Latinx.²³ There are many reasons for these gaps in access, but the fact that they remain increases the likelihood that any changes to the admissions requirements will further marginalize students of color and low-income students who should have access to the courses and preparation needed for eligibility to the CSU.

For students who do matriculate, CSU leaders say that they believe the change will help more students be academically prepared. Given that 75 percent of matriculated students already take four years of mathematics, it is unclear what issue the CSU is trying to solve with this approach. Surely, academic preparation is crucial for student success at the CSU and Dr. Christopher Nellum, Ed Trust-West’s Senior Director of Higher Education, served on the CSU’s Graduation Initiative 2025 Academic Preparation

¹ <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/the-steep-road-to-resource-equity-in-california-education/>

² <https://www.bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2016-114.pdf>

³ <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/the-steep-road-to-resource-equity-in-california-education/>

Workgroup to support those efforts. Many of our organizations have also been supportive of other CSU policy changes that evidence shows will increase opportunity and close equity gaps. Additional explanation may go a long way in making the case for what problems the proposed A-G mathematics/quantitative reasoning change actually solves.

To better understand these issues and opportunities for improvement, it is also critical that the CSU work with K-12 educators and leaders, researchers, nonprofit partners, and other advocates to assess the severity of inequities in access to college preparatory coursework - particularly for students of color and low-income students. In addition, we urge the CSU to address other critical equity issues and questions, including:

Teacher Shortage / K-12 Alignment

- There is currently a teacher shortage in California, especially in STEM fields - and research has found that marginalized students are the least likely to have access to a fully prepared STEM teacher. What sort of assessment has the CSU done to ensure that we have the K-12 teacher workforce to accommodate such a policy change, particularly in our highest-need schools and districts?
- What proportion of California high schools currently do not offer four years of a-g mathematics/quantitative reasoning? What proportion of California high schools currently do not offer a-g computer science courses? What is the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of those high schools?
- What kinds of support will CSU offer to K-12 schools and districts in crafting additional a-g math courses?
- How does CSU plan to collaborate with K-12 students, schools, and districts to ensure students are offered ample supports to succeed in four years of math, including opportunities for remediation and credit recovery?

Potential Applicant Pool

- What is the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background of CSU applicants without four years of a-g mathematics/quantitative reasoning?
- If the CSU moves forward with this proposal, and in subsequent years, data show a decline in the percentage of students of color and low-income students who are eligible, what will be done to address these inequities?

Matriculants

- What is the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background of the 25% of students who enroll at the CSU without four years of mathematics/quantitative reasoning?
- Among the 75% of students who already take four years of mathematics/quantitative reasoning, what proportion of those students were placed into remediation (i.e., old system) or identified for extra support (i.e., new system)? What is the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background of those students?
- Among the 75% of students who already take four years of mathematics/quantitative reasoning, how does their academic success differ from the 25% of students who do *not* already complete four years of mathematics?

- Is there a clear connection between an additional mathematics/quantitative reasoning and success in academic majors?

We commend the CSU’s commitment to more deeply explore the academic preparation of incoming students. We believe that the above questions must be addressed, answered, and findings or plans be made publicly available before the system moves forward with further consideration of the recommendation to require a fourth year of mathematics/quantitative reasoning for applicants and incoming students. Many of our organizations possess a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the areas of access to rigorous courses, remedial pathways, and equitable student success initiatives, and are happy to speak with you more on these issues, as well as to provide additional research and data if helpful. Please be in touch with us if you have additional questions or if we can partner with you more closely as you continue to explore these ideas.

Sincerely,



The Education Trust-West



Alliance for a Better Community



Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles



Barrio Logan College Institute



California STEM Network



Californians Together



The Campaign for College Opportunity



Canal Institute



Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR)



Children NOW



Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth



Community Coalition



Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement



Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM)



Ed100.org



Faith In The Valley



Families in Schools



Full Circle Fund



GO Public Schools



Inland Empire - Immigrant Youth Collective



InnerCity Struggle



Latino and Latina Roundtable of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valley



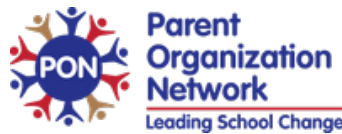
Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation/Kid City Program



NAACP Pomona Valley Branch



The Opportunity Institute



Parent Organization Network



Partnership for Los Angeles Schools



Public Advocates



Reading and Beyond



SOMOS Mayfair



Southeast Asia Resource Action Center



Southern California College Access Network



Stockton Schools Initiative



Students Making a Change



UC Student Association



UnidosUS



United Way of Greater Los Angeles



United Way's Young Civic Leaders Program



The Village Method