



Tim Rainey,  
Executive Director

**CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING NOTICE**

Gavin Newsom,  
Governor

Angelo Farooq,  
Chair

**Wednesday, November 3, 2021  
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

Meetings of the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) are open to the public except when specifically noticed otherwise in accordance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. The board may take action regarding any item listed on the agenda, unless listed as information only. Times are approximate and subject to change. Agenda items may be taken out of order to accommodate speakers and to maintain a quorum. This meeting may be cancelled without notice.

A full packet with additional details regarding the scheduled agenda items will be available at least 24 hours prior to the meeting at: <https://cwdb.ca.gov/meetings/>.

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The meeting will be livestreamed for public viewing on the CWDB YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8j2IMLyol-6ifdLHGTXLiQ>.

The public is welcome to comment on any agenda item. Therefore, consistent with [Executive Order N-29-20](#), public comments may be made by:

- Sending an email to [BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov](mailto:BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov). Emailed comments should be submitted by 8:00 a.m. on the meeting date. In the subject line, please identify the agenda item being addressed.
- Posting on YouTube during the meeting. Posted comments should identify the agenda item being addressed and be submitted prior to or during the discussion of the agenda item.
- If unable to submit comments electronically, please mail written comments to the address listed below. All mailed comments should be received by close of business the day before the scheduled meeting.

California Workforce Development Board  
800 Capitol Mall, Suite 1022  
Sacramento CA 95814

Public comments timely received will be read aloud during the public comment period for the agenda item specified. Failure to submit a timely comment or identify the agenda item being addressed may prevent your comment from being read at the meeting.

Any and all written comments provided to CWDB, including all contents of emails, will be available to the public in compliance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, Government Code section 11125.1.

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### **Contact Person**

If you have any questions concerning the agenda, you may contact:

California Workforce Development Board  
800 Capitol Mall, Suite 1022  
Sacramento CA 95814  
T: 916-657-1440  
[BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov](mailto:BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov)

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**CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA**

**Wednesday, November 3, 2021  
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

**1. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

**2. Action Items**

- a. Approve August 11, 2021 meeting summary

PUBLIC COMMENT

**3. Updates and Discussion**

- a. Labor Agency Update
- b. CWDB Staffing Update
- c. Youth Policy Update

PUBLIC COMMENT

**4. Initiative Updates**

- a. High Road Field Team – overview of work
- b. Program Implementation Team
- c. Policy, Legislation & Research Team

PUBLIC COMMENT

**5. Other Business**

**6. General Public Comments**

**Adjourn**

**Item 2a****Actions:**

**Approve the Executive Committee meeting summary from August 11, 2021.**

**CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY  
(August 11, 2021)**

**Meeting Livestreamed on CWDB YouTube**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8j2IMLyol-6ifdLHGTXLiQ>

**Members Present:**

- Dr. Angelo Farooq, Chair
- Mr. Jamil Dada
- Mr. Bob Redlo
- Mr. Bruce Stenslie
- Ms. Diane Factor
- Mr. John Brauer
- Mr. Joseph Williams
- Mr. Mike Gallo
- Ms. Rita Saenz
- Mr. Jeremy Smith
- Shenui Weber for Mr. Eloy Ortiz Oakley
- Stewart Knox for Sec. Natalie Palugyai

**1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Chairman Angelo Farooq opened the meeting at 10:04 a.m. and requested Tim Rainey take attendance. A quorum was established.

Chairman Farooq gave instructions on how the Zoom meeting works and how to provide public comment. Public comment was opened and accepted via email at [BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov](mailto:BoardPublicComment@cwdb.ca.gov). He advised the Executive Team that anything typed in the chat would be included in the meeting summary as public record.

**Public Comments:** There is a public comment from Phillip Polly. It is quite long, so the committee decided to share the comment at the end of the meeting.

**2. ACTION ITEMS**

- a. Approve May 11, 2021 meeting summary.  
Motioned by Jamil Dada, Bob Redlo seconded, all in favor. Approved unanimously.

**3. UPDATES AND DISCUSSION**

**a. CWDB Staff Update (Item 3a)**

Joelle Hurst announced that no new staff have joined since the last Executive Committee meeting, but all of the hiring managers are prepared to fill current vacancies. As an organization, CWDB has have developed a plan to increase capacity, and by the next meeting, should have new staff members coming on board.

**b. State Labor Agency (Item 3b)**

Chairman Farooq introduced Stewart Knox as the re-appointed Undersecretary of the California Labor and Workforce Agency. Mr. Knox let everyone know that the new Secretary, Natalie Palugyai, will be joining us probably in September. She is coming from Maryland and has a lot of experience working with the Obama administration. The focus right now is unemployment insurance. The Governor has been open to giving a fairly large dollar amount to workforce development. The total overall budget for workforce development is \$960 million. Right now, staff is looking at how quickly we can get those funds out to the training side of the house, to get people into high-paying, high-quality jobs. Chairman Farooq asks if there are any questions. There are no questions for Undersecretary Knox.

**c. Washington D.C. Update (Item 3c)**

Chairman Farooq began by letting everyone know that Federal Extended Unemployment Insurance under the CARES Act is set to expire in September and is not expected to be extended. Mr. Farooq asked Jamil Dada to provide further information. Mr. Dada was on a White House call two weeks ago. The infrastructure bill was passed yesterday. It is a once-in-a-generation investment to create quality jobs and develop our nation's infrastructure. Priorities for the "Build Back Better" portion of the bill will enhance the current system and lead to in-demand jobs. Workforce Boards will all be on the frontlines of this work by an economy devastated by COVID. The "Build Back Better" plan is proposed to be a long-term \$100 billion investment. \$10 billion per year over 10 years. The plan is targeted on three funding buckets:

- Existing training
- Targeting underserved communities such as incarcerated folks, youth, and individuals with disabilities, among others.
- Strengthen the existing workforce development programs: apprenticeship programs, community colleges, etc.

The White House feels this is a good opportunity to strengthen the WIOA system, as it is up for re-authorization.

Abby Snay provided that the "Build Back Better" plan should align well with the High Road Training Partnership investments, as well as other investments.

**d. State Budget Update: SB 129 (Item 3d)**

SB129, California's Comeback Plan, includes \$100 billion for the biggest economic recovery plan in the history of California. Mr. Rainey explained that CWDB is working with LWDA and the Governor's Office to frame the budget and the timing for the issuance of funds.

The intention is to focus on these big industry sectors and move the scale around equity. The CWDB currently manages about \$100 million in grants. The 2021-2022 budget invests substantially in CWDB. Over the last five years, CWDB has invested \$73 million in H RTP and HRCC. The budget invests another \$145.5 million in H RTP and HRCC. Prison to Employment received \$20 million. WAF got another \$10.5 million. Breaking Barriers to Employment got another \$25 million. Regional Equity Partnerships with the community colleges and the work involved there was allocated \$25 million. Another \$104.5 million was provided as part of direct investments by the state legislature. Mr. Rainey shared a chart that breaks down the funds further and the current timing to release these funds.

John Brauer asked Tim and Abby in a future meeting to share how the bill would support the H RTPs and HRCCs and the other parts of the labor agency. Mr. Rainey clarified that the bill directly aligns with the HRCCs because of the growth of apprenticeships. He shared that we have a pipeline to equity and access around these jobs. Mr. Brauer added that CNA's historically tend to be really bad jobs and the entities that hire them to treat them as real estate. The turnover in those roles is nearly 100% every year. He added that one aspect that needs to be addressed is job quality. Mr. Rainey agreed that in healthcare, job quality is a big factor, and we are taking our time to address that.

Ms. Weber added that most of these funds are new funds. She asked if there will be an opportunity to leverage existing funds and to bridge these new funds. We should look at ways to integrate programs with this new funding.

Mr. Rainey responded that the intention is to build on what we currently have. Most of this funding is over a five-year period to give us time to build it out. We want to make sure we are building on each other's program work and get a bigger bang for our buck. As a part of this, we are also looking at cross-department alignment.

Bob Redlo commented that we have grown so much in the last five years, there is almost a need for an ombudsman. Someone that could connect a program with the funds that make sense for that program. He added that healthcare delivery changes in the blink of an eye. It's important to build on programs, but also important to keep up and train for what the workforce needs. He would like us to think about funds just used for new programs. It would keep us up with the employers. CNAs are really being driven by long-term care facilities. He would like us to not look to just fund CNAs, but other healthcare training too – technicians, etc. He feels there would be a better use for those dollars.

Mr. Rainey liked the idea of an ombudsmen. The team is working through a good communications plan through our field team cross departments. We have to work across our departments and make sure we aren't all tripping over each other. The bulk of the High Road and Workforce Accelerator funds will be going to new grantees.

Abby Snay added a reminder that ending working poverty is one of our big pillars. We need to address the dire and longstanding issues with the healthcare workforce.

**e. Federal Update (Item 3e)**

Director Saenz reported that since July, the EDD has been reminding claimants that federal unemployment benefits will end in September. This includes Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, and other programs the federal government was funding. These programs will all end on September 4. As a result, EDD has been working to inform claimants of other programs and benefits they may be eligible for, including CalWorks, EITC, CalJobs, as well as American Job Centers. It is going to be a big impact on quite a few people.

Joseph Williams asked about leading/lagging indicators. He wanted to know if EDD had any idea what claimants were going to do. Are people signing up for CalJobs? In the community, he sees more benefit programs than job programs. Are you surveying folks? Are they saying, "I am ready to go back to work"?

Director Saenz responded that she didn't believe they had any predictive data right now. They have been encouraging people since July 11 that they need to start looking for work and have been promoting CalJobs.

Joseph Williams asked if we can be more intrusive with these claimants. He said that case managers need to be working closely with these claimants and know what their caseload is doing. Asking more questions. He said it is difficult to see all this money being spent, and not have more analytics and predictive modeling. There just has to be more that we can do.

Director Saenz added it is tough right now as well because we have lost a lot of child care services. Plus, we still have COVID. Mr. Williams would like us to look at virtual ways to help people connect. In the future, people won't necessarily be showing up in-person to a job.

**f. Youth Policy Update (Item 3f)**

Joseph Williams reported on the work being done around a youth policy. One of the gaps that several of the board members have talked about is youth programs. There are some gaps that we can take advantage of. There is not a coordinated youth system in the state right now, and not a comprehensive way to work with youth. We have discussed bringing a youth council back to the state board. The aim is to build a youth strategy for the entire state. Tim's team has looked at several options and done some research at the local workforce boards. We provided a survey to the boards, conducted by the Department of Education, California Youth Leadership Corp., and the American Institute of Research. The board wants to open the door to other groups to be a part of this youth strategy and to make this a longstanding agenda item.

Mr. Rainey acknowledged the work and leadership of Pradeep Kotaramju and Marisa Clark in this effort. Mr. Kotaramju added that they were waiting until this meeting to send out the survey and will be sending it out shortly. He feels there is a good opportunity to capture great information here at a deliberate pace. He also asked to acknowledge the work Sheneui Weber has done on this as well. Chairman Farooq added as a parent and a school board member, the youth have been hit hard during this pandemic.

Mr. Redlo asked about the three or four boards that were not re-certified at the last meeting. What happened there? Mr. Rainey reported that they have now been re-certified.

**4. INITIATIVE UPDATES:**

**a. High Roads Field Team**

Aida Cardenas reported that they are very busy right now. The field team is working on recruiting and staffing up. There are three open positions right now. There is a lot of training happening right now and we just had our first cohort in San Bernardino. The High Roads team wants to be sure our partners deepen their work so they are ready for these funds that will be coming through. In the last month, we have had 40 convenings to bring stakeholders to the table. The High Roads team is in a place where we need to make sure we are doing the work on the front end. We are getting a better feel for what the needs are in the communities our partners are working in. The High Roads team is carrying the banner of equity and designing something that makes sense for the long run, including building on the infrastructure and looking to meet the needs and goals of our state leadership and CWDB.



**b. Program Implementation Team:**

Joelle Hurst reported that P2E and AB1111 are coming to a close and the team is looking forward to compiling the close-out data. Accelerator 8.0 was scheduled to close in September, but due to COVID, these programs won't end until March. Accelerator 9.0 is starting and being onboarded right now. H RTP and HRCC projects are all underway right now. The Program Implementation Team is helping to develop a Salesforce platform that will be used to manage grants and initiative, including the Accelerator 10 initiative this fall. The team is also working on 13 contracts right now and engaging with these entities and attaching them to our network. So they become part of our portfolio, and not just a pass-through for funding.

**c. Policy, Legislation & Research Team:**

Pradeep Kotaramju reported that almost all of the 2021 initiatives have been implemented. All 45 local workforce boards have been re-certified. We are beginning to work on the yearly WIOA report. November 30, 2021, is the deadline for this report. The legislative recess ends August 16, and Marissa Clark is actively tracking bills that may impact the CWDB. The AB1111 report has been submitted. A third-party reviewer is evaluating P2E. The AJCC evaluation continues and the quantitative data has been collected. One of the items Pradeep's team is working on right now is developing a standardized internal evaluation program. The CAAL-Skills team is developing a workforce metrics dashboard and hope to have it completed this fall. The California Policy Lab has developed an evaluation of CAAL-Skills, and we will present the results to partners. We will use the CAAL-Skills experience in gathering data to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in data collection.

John Brauer asked if we are capturing whether that program or individual was part of a union initiative as part of the calculation and part of the evaluation process. Is labor involved in that equation? He would like to see this captured as an outcome metric. He also asked what kind of marketing was being done to market H RTP investments/activities to other agencies.

Bob Redlo asked if our programs are meeting the demand for equity. Are we making progress? Do we have any data around this?

Mr. Rainey responded that in terms of the program investments, we are tracking demographics, equity, and wages. We are also doing evaluations on the WIOA-funded systems so we can compare them. What is coming out of the CAAL-Skills lab will give us a lot of data. In response, Mr. Redlo asked if there would be some data available at the next meeting to look at the equity factor. Mr. Rainey said that data should be available at the next meeting, which is in November.

Joseph Williams added that he provided some links in the chat, specifically about the state of Minnesota and regional indicators they track. He added that it would be great to have a visual to show our progress. Is there a visual dashboard we can display? Can Salesforce create something for us where we can just login and take a look at various metrics? Mr. Rainey thanked Joseph for the information and added that we are looking across state departments at a dashboard that would be meaningful as we track the California Comeback Plan.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There is a public comment from Philip Khan-Pauli from RespectAbility. **(see comment at end)**

**5. OTHER BUSINESS**

Jamil Dada informed everyone that the CWA Conference is coming up the week of Labor Day and hopes the CWDB will participate.

**6. Dates for Next Executive Committee and Board Meeting**

- a. The next CWDB Full Board Meeting is scheduled for 10 am – 1 pm on November 17, 2021.
- b. The next Executive Meeting is scheduled for 10 am – 12 pm on November 3, 2021.

**7. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Public comment is submitted by Philip Khan-Pauli from RespectAbility.

**8. ADJOURN**

Chairman Farooq closed the meeting at 11:53 a.m.

**NOTES FROM ZOOM CHAT**

09:56:33 From Pradeep Kotamraju to Everyone:  
good morning

10:16:57 From John Brauer to Everyone:  
speak

10:33:16 From John Brauer to Everyone:  
speak

10:33:31 From Bob Redlo, (he,him) to Everyone:  
Speak

11:00:38 From Joseph Williams to Everyone:  
<https://www.iftf.org/our-work/global-landscape/workable-futures/future-of-the-workforce-development-ecosystem/>

11:01:20 From Bob Redlo, (he,him) to Everyone:  
Question after youth discussion

11:14:39 From Bob Redlo, (he,him) to Everyone:  
Question at the end of reports

11:31:06 From Joseph Williams to Everyone:  
Check out these Dashboards

11:31:09 From Joseph Williams to Everyone:  
These indicators provide a more detailed look at the “Inclusive Growth” measures in the Minnesota St. Paul (MSP) Regional Indicators Dashboard,  
<https://www.centerforeconomicinclusion.org/inclusive-growth-indicators>

This Regional Indicators Dashboard is a set of shared metrics that tracks the region’s change on critical economic, environmental, and social outcomes. <https://www.greatersp.org/regional-indicators-2019/#>

11:36:32 From Bruce Stenslie, EDC to Everyone:

I'd encourage we take a look at <https://cafwd.org/california-dream-index/>. We might want some tweaks for WDB use, but this is a really important resource already available.

11:52:48 From JJacobstein to Everyone:  
no public comment on YouTube

**Public Comment from Philip Khan-Pauli of RespectAbility:**

Good afternoon, California Workforce Development Board leaders,

Attached and below are the formal comments that our organization, RespectAbility, would like to submit ahead of your meeting tomorrow. We have given our ideas serious thought and we really look forward to working with you to make California a better state for people with disabilities.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments. We look forward to working with you in the months ahead!

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To: Members and Staff, California Workforce Development Board (CWDB)

From: Staff, Board, and Fellows of RespectAbility

Re: Public Comments for August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, CWDB Executive Committee Meeting.

Dear Chair Farooq, Ph.D. and Executive Director Rainey,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to offer our comments for the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB)’s August 11<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting. With a plurality of our staff in Los Angeles, RespectAbility is a nonpartisan, nonprofit disability inclusion organization

dedicated to fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities for millions of Americans with disabilities.

One-in-five Americans have a disability according to the U.S. Census Bureau. People with disabilities are America's largest minority group and the only one that, due to accident, aging or illness, anyone can join at any time. Indeed, in California itself, [there are 4,131,700](#) residents living with some form of disability and they make up fully 10.6 percent of the state's population. In that number, it is critical to recognize the great diversity and intersectional identities of people with disabilities in California. Out of that number, there are [2,217,128](#) Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) people with disabilities. That means that 53 percent of all Californians with disabilities are also members of other marginalized communities and face barriers such as systemic racism.

These facts have wide-ranging implications for the state's overall workforce development planning and the unique challenges facing Californians with disabilities need to be recognized across the entire scope of CWDB's work.

In these comments, RespectAbility team of subject matter experts and advocates with disabilities have collected our critical ideas, policy proposals, and key data to inform your board's decision-making process. While we are a national organization, we have a significant staff presence in California, and we are eager to collaborate with you and your team.

Our ideas and recommendations are as follows:

- ***Focus on Closing the Gap in Labor Force Participation Rates between Californians with and without disabilities:*** As the Golden State grapples with new coronavirus variants and strategies to get more Californians back to work, it is worth recognizing the good and bad news facing workers with disabilities. The bad news is that even before COVID-19, working-age Californians with disabilities lagged behind their non-disabled peers in job opportunities. Prior to the pandemic, [California's employment rate](#) for working-age people with disabilities in America was 38.2 percent, compared to 76.4 percent of people without disabilities. This disparity is even more striking when broken down by race. 38 percent of working-age people with disabilities who are white have jobs compared to [only 29.8 percent](#) of those who are Black, 40.1 percent of those who are Hispanic/LatinX and 41 percent of those who are AAPI. Compounding the problem, the pandemic has ravaged the disability community and [more than 1 million](#) workers with disabilities have lost their jobs nationwide.

Far too many decision-makers only pay attention to the overall unemployment rate without looking deeper. People with disabilities want to work, can work, and are striving to work harder than ever before. As such, RespectAbility has consistently advocated that decision-makers in the workforce development system at the national, state, and

local levels use the [Labor Force Participation Rate](#) as a key metric for [measuring efforts](#) to get more people with barriers to employment into the workforce.

Looking at labor force participation rates and people with disabilities, we actually find good news. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, [before COVID-19](#), the labor force participation rate of working-age people with disabilities was only 33.8 percent, compared to 77.7 percent of those without disabilities. Now, [in the summer of 2021](#), **the labor force participation rate for working-age people with disabilities is up to 35.4 percent**, compared to 77.2 percent of people without disabilities. **This means that more people with disabilities are engaging with the workforce now, than they were before the pandemic.** As such, decision making entities like CWDB need to adopt a focused strategy for getting more people with disabilities into the workforce and the right metrics to hold themselves accountable for that success.

- ***The Entertainment Industry: A Multi-faceted Opportunity to Promote Employment of People with Disabilities:*** Studies show that stigmas dramatically limit the expectations of people with disabilities, their families, and employers alike. Showing people with disabilities for what they CAN do, instead of what they cannot do is vital. Hollywood can be a major partner on that front, as we have seen in the series *Born This Way* and the soon-to-be-released series *Born for Business* which each models successful disability employment.

Hollywood, California is the entertainment industry capital of the world and can both fight stigmas and advance disability employment in its own work. In 2018, there were 740,000 wage and salary workers in the entertainment and digital media space. The sector added 138,000 wage and salary jobs between 2013 and 2018, signifying a growing industry. Nearly half of these jobs are in film production, while emerging digital media and broadcasting account for [nearly 25 percent](#). In the economic boom before COVID-19, employment in the entertainment industry grew continuously with an average annual growth rate of 1.9 percent per year. From 2006 to 2016, total payroll employment across all industries in Los Angeles increased by 4 percent, while employment in the entertainment industry outpaced regional growth, adding more than 36,130 jobs, an increase of 19.4 percent. However, as with so many industries, Hollywood has felt the tremendous impact of the past of crisis. As a result of the pandemic, the entertainment industry shed nearly 300,000.

In looking to rebuild the industry and its workforce for a post-COVID world, there is a perfect opportunity to support jobseekers with disabilities and to fight the very stigmas that are a barrier to the aspirations of so many people. This industry is extremely important for the disability movement because it determines how PWD are portrayed on screen, which often is one of the most powerful forces in shaping public attitudes, especially in the absence of personal experience with talented PWD. When portrayals of PWD are inauthentic or condescending, it has a negative impact on the way that both PWD see themselves as well as how people without disabilities see them. This includes employers whose views are largely shaped by what they see on screen.

Even though 25 percent of adults in America have a disability, only [3.1 percent of series regular characters on television have a disability](#). In film, there has been no meaningful change in the percentage of speaking characters with disabilities, with just 2.3 percent of characters analyzed in the 100 top-grossing films of 2019 by the USC Annenberg School having a disability. While statistics for disability representation for people

working behind the camera are not available, our extensive experience working with the industry confirms the numbers are similarly disheartening.

One major cause of these statistics is stigma: PWDs have been seen for decades as “less than” – as incapable of doing the job. Stigma dampens disability employment in every employment sector. However, our previous success with placing participants in employment at major Hollywood studios (discussed below) has shown that PWD are just as capable as people without disabilities – and when it comes to advocating for accurate representation, even more so. And by showing PWD on screen as individuals who are capable in a variety of careers, we can impact employment broadly.

The best source of accurate portrayals is authentic real-world experience, so there is a virtuous circle: increasing the number of people with disabilities working in the entertainment industry leads to more diverse and authentic representation on screen, further reducing stigma and increasing employment in all sectors. As such, we hope that the California Workforce Development Board will think holistically about adopting a strategy to and invest in pathways to prepare jobseekers with disabilities for careers in these fields. RespectAbility has a Hollywood Lab program that helps train and place people with disabilities into jobs. So far, we have 90 alumni of the program, and they are both getting work and making a difference in reducing stigmas. It is time for the public sector to support apprenticeships for people with disabilities to work in media and production.

- ***Look at Strategies to Close the Gap in High School Graduation Rates:*** The link between educational attainment and ultimate employment success is clear. As such, gaps in educational attainment, especially around high school completion rates, have serious long-term impacts on the labor force, the talent pipeline, and the economic wellbeing of California. As such, it is worth paying attention to certain key, disaggregated data points that show where the gaps are in educational attainment for young Californians, especially BIPOC students with disabilities.

In California’s K-12 public schools, there are over 703,000 students with disabilities. The changing demographics of the nation are reflected in the student population, with over 78 percent of them being Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) individuals with disabilities. 11.4 percent of students with disabilities nationwide, or almost 720,000 students, identify as English-language learners. The gap in graduation rates between students with and without disabilities continues to undermine their futures. Overall, for the class of 2020, while 84.3 percent of students without disabilities graduated high school, only 68.4 percent of students with disabilities completed their high school degrees. Disaggregating data by race reveals even bigger gaps in outcomes. Only 62.1 percent of

Black students with disabilities, 68.8 percent of Hispanic/LatinX students with disabilities, 76 percent of white students with disabilities, 68.2 percent of Asian American students with disabilities, and 68 percent of Pacific Islander students with disabilities completed high school in 2020.

This means that thousands of students with disabilities are leaving California's school system with uncertain prospects for finding a place in the workforce. Numerous studies have demonstrated that college graduates will earn far more than college students who dropped out. By far, those earning the least are students without a high school diploma. A lack of a high school diploma is the negative 'gift' that keeps on hurting. As such, legislators have a moral imperative to invest in and expand services that will support the educational and employment success of more students with disabilities.

- ***Expand on the Use of Online, Cohort-Based Apprenticeships for Workers in the Knowledge Economy and the Nonprofit Sector:*** The pandemic has made remote work an accepted reality for thousands of workers. This has been a "silver lining" of expanding and normalizing a common reasonable accommodation request long championed by workers with disabilities. Microsoft has dramatically expanded their accessibility features, including built-in speech to text technology which makes it possible for people with even the most limited mobility to use computers. This has opened an unprecedented window for people with disabilities to contribute to the success of nonprofits, communities and beyond. Remote work also has great promise at expanding apprenticeship programs into more diverse sectors of the Washington state economy, especially the knowledge economy. RespectAbility has retooled our own National Leadership Program from being a cohort-based internship program located in Washington D.C., into an all-virtual, work-from-anywhere skills-based training program. Such approaches have major implications for efforts to train workers for good-paying jobs in the knowledge economy and the nonprofit sector.
- ***A 13th year to close the educational gap left by the pandemic:*** The pandemic has adversely impacted students with disabilities in the state of California. The loss of instructional time has made valuable employment transition skills nonexistent due to the pandemic and shortened school year. High school seniors, especially high school seniors with disabilities have run out of time to complete their high school diploma and take advantage of school-to-work transitional services.

Many high school senior students with disabilities have missed out on high school completion with the goal to earn a diploma and vital year to gain skills needed for integration into the workforce. There is no make-up year unless one is created. An additional year of schooling or "13th year" is crucial to allow graduating students to succeed and



enter the workforce. The pandemic should not deny transition services to this year's seniors. As education is a civil right in the United States. If students fail to earn their high school diploma, then they will be denied the opportunity to go to college. Numerous studies have demonstrated graduates of college will earn far more than college students who drop out. By far those earning the least our students without a high school diploma. Many states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Massachusetts, have introduced or passed bills that would allow students' academic extensions. It is imperative that students with disabilities in California are given a thirteenth year of schooling to close the gap the pandemic has created and allow them to take advantage of the additional time to complete their high school diploma and take advantage of transitional services to employment for their lifelong success.

- Look at Expanding Access to Entrepreneurship as a Workforce Solution:*** In the pre-pandemic era, job seekers with disabilities were already turning to self-employment in far higher numbers than their non-disabled peers. As of the [2019 American Community Survey](#), approximately 700,000 workers with disabilities were self-employed, enjoying the flexibility and opportunities that entrepreneurship provides. For many, they did so because being your own boss and owning a small business served as an end-run around the barriers to employment that hold back far too many people with disabilities. In looking at the issue of self-employment and promoting entrepreneurship among people with disabilities, special attention should be directed to the equity issues of access to capital and systemic racism. Several disability organizations have been advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities as a specific category under the rules of the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) and to advance racial diversity in the entrepreneurship space. Now is the appropriate time to begin digging deep into that work as an equitable workforce strategy. We further note that as Washington state expands this program, it should be done with careful consumer input, and use criteria to measure success and eligibility that is consistent with the real factors necessary to ensure the success of a small business.
- Focus on Encouraging Disability Owned Businesses by Utilizing Best Practices from Other States:*** There is an opportunity for a California state model which prioritizes contract and purchase services for certified disability-owned businesses as a disability employment model. To measure success, it is also important to ensure that WIOA employer engagement measures the type of employment relevant to small business activities, including disability-owned businesses, in addition to large corporate employers. These are topics that merit deeper attention as the State looks for innovative solutions to the challenge of building back better. Iowa VR has embraced entrepreneurship and self-employment as one of the key virtual services provided to the people with disabilities that they serve.

Iowa's Vocational Rehabilitation agency has embraced the current crisis by adopting a range of new virtual strategies, approaches, and procedures for providing high-quality workforce service even amid a virtual pandemic. Some of those innovative approaches

have major implications for the future of VR. Iowa quickly invested in the technological infrastructure to provide virtual services statewide, adopted a cohort-based model for fostering social connections among VR clients on Zoom and tested other emerging practices throughout 2020. Washington state could learn from the innovations and ideas tested by [Iowa and Iowans](#) with disabilities.

- ***Building the Caring Economy through Proven Models of Disability Employment:*** In looking for ways to both provide quality care to older Americans and to get more workers with disabilities into the labor force, policymakers should dramatically expand the Project SEARCH model. In the Golden State, there are [SEARCH sites](#) in Sacramento, Vallejo, Berkeley, Oakland, San Francisco, San Jose, and throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area. While this may seem numerous, each site only serves between 10 and 12 students with disabilities per year. To meet the true scope of caregiving needs, many more SEARCH sites are needed in every corner of California.

We recognize that there are many high-quality programs in California, but we know that [Project SEARCH](#) is an exemplary and transformational school-to-work transition program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that prepares them for good paying careers in hospitals, elder-care, and the caring economy. The SEARCH model is a win-win-win for the host employer, the employee with disabilities, and the many older Americans helped by Project SEARCH trained workers. The model has already been replicated in 47 states, with dozens of satisfied employers, and hundreds of workers with disabilities earning minimum wage or more. This model is perfect for expansion throughout the state and should be available to all students with disabilities. It can help fulfill the state's need for career readiness through a successful model in tandem with existing work readiness programs for adults with disabilities. The need is great, and every successful model should be grown and replicated.

***Improving Pre-ETS and continuing to offer virtual services:*** Despite the eagerness of so many to jump directly to the post-COVID world and a return to normal, providers working with youth with and without disabilities need to be prepared to continue to provide virtual services now and in the future. As such, it is worth highlighting the adaptability and innovative work done in other states around the provision of virtual pre-ETS services. We have highlighted the work of Iowa Voc Rehab previously in these comments, but it is also worth spotlighting the work done in Tennessee. Last year, [the Tennessee Department of Human Services](#) published a comprehensive guide about virtual Pre-ETS and best practices proven during the worst months of the pandemic. Youth with disabilities, especially those between the ages of 14 to 21, need to be prepared for the digital workforce and virtual training is a necessary first step. Continuing to provide virtual services presents a direct opportunity to tackle the digital divide by directly providing access to technology and assistive technology for youth with disabilities from marginalized communities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are one of the most important elements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. Representing a group of collective services designed to help youth with disabilities prepare for life after compulsory education, pre-ETS are a crucial policy innovation to connect millions of youths with disabilities to services and support while they are still in school and set them up for a lifetime of success. Part of that innovative approach is the inclusion of and collaboration with local educational agencies to order to be connect students with disabilities to skill development programs and other training needs.

The pandemic and the switch to virtual learning has significantly impacted the provision of pre-ETS services at the state and local level. An additional barrier was the serious delay in federal guidance and technical assistance to support pre-ETS work throughout 2020.

It is important to adapt Pre ETS to meet the needs of students that are virtually learning, even as people are getting vaccinated. This is done by creating clear guidelines for presenting pre-ETS in a virtual environment and planning to continue to do so in the near future. This includes scheduling time for virtual instruction, making sure that content adheres to the 5 components of pre-ETS, keeping up lines of communication and adapting documents to virtually monitor student progress, while allowing progress information to be shared among IEP teams on the educational side.

- Leveraging Federal Contractors and Section 503 to Drive Employment Opportunities for Workers with Disabilities:*** In looking at new strategies, alternative pathways, and economic sectors to support the aspirations of jobseekers with disabilities, it is worth recognizing the unique place occupied by companies doing business with the federal government. If your board members are not familiar, it is worth your attention to learn more about Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Section 503 specifically contains legislative language about affirmation action, non-discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and subsequent regulations have been used to encourage contractors to hire individuals with disabilities through affirmative action. Beginning in 2016, the [Office of Federal Contracting Compliance Program \(OFCCP\)](#) set a new utilization goal for contractors to have up to 7 percent of their workforce, in all job categories, be individuals with disabilities. The 7 percent goal was very much intended as a gauging goal and a tool to encourage great diversity efforts.

In seeking to meet the challenge of Section 503 and the 7 percent goal, contractors have adopted a wide range of strategies including encouraging disability self-disclosure among employees and staff. Contractors are prohibited from asking the nature of a disability however staff may self-disclose through demographic documents and data collection. There is comprehensive information available to support contractors through great national organizations like the [National Organization on Disability \(NOD\)](#) and [Disability: IN.](#)

There are major, multi-billion-dollar contractors doing business with the federal government across California. Examples of major federal contractors in the L.A. metropolitan area alone include Boeing, Northrup Grumman, the Aerospace Corporation, Aerojet Rocketdyne, the California Institute of Technology, Chevron, and Lockheed Martin. These companies, and other contractors in other parts of the state, are natural partners in this work. For more detailed information, please visit our website here:

<https://www.respectability.org/lajobs/federal-contractors/>

- ***Ensuring Family Engagement is an Element of Workforce Development Planning to Support Transition-Aged Youth with Disabilities:*** A critical, if often neglected, element of transition planning and workforce development is the importance of family engagement. Families are crucial stakeholders and valuable partners in the effort to get more youth with disabilities into the workforce. The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition \(NTACT\)](#) has been tracking key innovations and best practices around family engagement and transition services even before the pandemic got started. Several of NTACT's resources are directly intended to support providers as they work to successfully engage families, develop plans to inform clients about the full range of services available under the workforce development system, and strategies for success. More details are available online here: <https://transitionta.org/topics/family-engagement/>.

Likewise, given the rich cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of California's communities, resources in languages other than English are absolutely essential. Several disability organizations in communities across the country have developed Spanish language resources to support parents, family engagement and directly benefit youth with disabilities. More work needs to be done in this space, but as a starting point, we are delighted to several Spanish language documents developed by RespectAbility and our partner organizations: <https://worldenabled.org/our-projects/respect-ability-spanish-disability-guide-for-parents/>

- ***Adopting a "No-Wrong-Door" Approach to Connect Jobseekers with and Without Disabilities to Workforce Services:*** In looking for ways to transform California's workforce development system, to advance opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities, and to improve participant engagement, it is worth considering valuable lessons learned by other service systems. Specifically, it is worth looking in close detail at the successes achieved by the No Wrong Door (NWD) System initiative previously conducted by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). While ACL's work on creating a "No-Wrong-Door" system was specifically done around long-term services and support (LTSS) for older Americans and people with disabilities, this approach can significantly streamline bureaucratic processes, improve services, and support participant success. While there are barriers created by the legislative framework that funds and supports workforce services, pushing for greater collaboration at the state level and looking closely at user ex-

perience at the local level suggests that making the workforce system more person-centered and streamlined will reap critical benefits. More details and key lessons learned are well document by both Federal agencies and in other municipalities. As such, we encourage your team to learn more here:

- <https://acl.gov/programs/connecting-people-services/aging-and-disability-re-source-centers-programno-wrong-door>
  - <https://dds.dc.gov/page/full-no-wrong-door-mission-vision>
  - <https://dds.dc.gov/page/no-wrong-door>
- 
- **Implement Best Practices:** Look to the collected best practices previously documented by critical organizations such the National Governors Association (NGA) *Better Bottom Line* initiative and the Council of State Governments (CSG): *Work Matters A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities*. Likewise, look at the 2018 study completed by Accenture and the recently released report from Mercer and Global Disability Inclusion.

As an organization that advocates on behalf of job seekers with disabilities and their families, we believe that collecting the best ideas, emerging practices and innovative policies is critical to ensuring that Americans with and without disabilities have equal access to good jobs. Without such ideas communities and policymakers cannot direct appropriate resources to the places that need them most, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these matters further, our team stands ready to help, however we can. Thank you.

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**Regards,**

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