



Direct Admissions through the California State University



November 2024

Admissions Redesign
Summary and
Logic Model

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Recent shifts in the postsecondary landscape, including the impact of COVID, changes to the FAFSA, admissions testing requirements, and rulings by the Supreme Court have caused significant disruptions, as well as an opportunity to rethink college admissions. Lumina Foundation is working to support the reshaping and simplifying of the admissions process to transform how potential students apply, enroll, and access institutions through [The Great Admissions Redesign](#). In partnership with the Foundation, Research for Action (RFA) is conducting an evaluation of the three implementation grantees to foster learning and continuous improvement. As an initial step in the process, RFA conducted interviews with the California State University (CSU) system office and campus partners to gather foundational background on their Direct Admissions initiative and develop a logic model to capture the planned resources, strategies, outcomes and impact.

IMPETUS AND VISION FOR DIRECT ADMISSIONS IN THE CSU SYSTEM

The CSU system is one of three systems of higher education in California, along with the University of California (UC) system and the California Community Colleges (CCCs). Situated between these systems, the CSU system is the largest public university system in the country, comprised of 22 campuses. While the UC system has received additional funds from the state to expand enrollment, and all CCCs have received funding to offer “two-years-free,” the CSU system has reportedly not received state funds to address outreach, despite declining enrollment trends and the coming enrollment cliff. These factors, along with the presence of out-of-state recruiters and a new initiative aimed at supporting California Community College students’ enrollment in out-of-state Historically Black Colleges and Universities ([HBCUs](#)), have heightened the competition for students in California and led the CSU system to consider measures that will bolster their outreach and enrollment.

The Direct Admissions initiative in the CSU system is comprised of two complementary components: direct admissions and early high school intervention:

Direct admissions: CSU will leverage the [California College Guidance Initiative](#) (CCGI) student-facing platform ([CaliforniaColleges.edu](#)) containing data related to student course-taking and performance to identify students who meet the minimum requirements for CSU admission. Students are eligible if they have met the minimum criteria for admission to CSU (GPA greater than or equal to 2.5 and completion of prerequisite high school coursework, referred to as the A-G requirements).¹ Beginning in fall 2025, eligible 12th graders will be notified of their direct admission offer to 16 CSUs and the opportunity to apply to the five more competitive CSU campuses.

Eligible students will receive notification that they are admissible to the CSU system and *encouraged* to apply. Current 12th graders who are not eligible will be directed to the [Transfer Success Pathway](#), which facilitates enrollment in a dual admissions program that ensures admission into a CSU institution following the completion of the required coursework at a community college.

Early high school intervention: In fall 2025, CSU also plans to expand outreach to 9th through 11th graders to support their completion of A-G requirements and motivate earlier conversations with families and counselors.

In fall 2024, the system piloted this initiative in Riverside County, in partnership with the Riverside County Office of Education and ten CSU campuses. Riverside County was selected because all of their public high schools had transcript data uploaded to CCGI. Ten CSU campuses sent offers of admission to eligible 12th grade students in Riverside County with application fee waivers and the encouragement to apply.

The initiative is intended to help students, particularly low-income, Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students, see college as possible and attainable, as well as utilizing the official transcript information available in the CCGI platform to reduce burden on students and families.

CONTEXT FOR THE WORK

The CSU system perceives acute competition for enrollment from the UC and CCC systems. Further, the high in-state minimum wage makes it difficult for some students and families to understand the value of a college degree. Students and families are highly debt averse, and challenges associated with the revised FAFSA have underscored the need for clear messaging about financial aid and affordability.

While students commonly believe that beginning at a community college is a more economical approach, successful [transfer rates are low](#); in California only 10% of students transfer in two years, 19% in four years, and 23% in six years. By contrast, 56% of CSU students graduate debt free. The CSU system believes that part of the initiative is spreading the word that starting at a CSU is affordable and more efficient than starting at a community college.

In 2021, the Cradle-to-Career (C2C) [initiative](#) statutorily authorized all K12 districts to provide student-facing accounts with CCGI; the 2024 omnibus trailer budget bill requires participation in student transcript data collection across the state's K12 districts by June 2026. This transcript collection facilitates the identification of eligible students as well as potentially auto-populating admissions and financial aid applications in the future for all public high school students.

Respondents indicated that CSU campuses are experiencing initiative fatigue and frustration with what they perceive as unfunded mandates across the state. There was additional concern that the system has permitted a high level of autonomy across institutions, including supporting the creation of a multi-factor admissions (MFA) process that varies across the system. While the intention is to communicate to students a guarantee of admission, the complexity of the MFA in addition to over-enrollment at several campuses and programs means that students will not necessarily be admitted at their top-choice institution or program of study. A previous initiative designed to redirect students from their top-choice campus to other campuses within the system was reportedly ineffective because it had too many loopholes built in for institutions and/or programs to opt-out; in order for this initiative to be successful, respondents asserted that all campuses would need to participate and the system would "have to put some teeth behind it".



CSU DIRECT ADMISSIONS: A LOGIC MODEL

Figure 1 below presents the logic model for the CSU Direct Admissions program, with a discussion that follows. A logic model is a visual tool that helps clarify and communicate a program’s goals, activities, and intended results, and can be used to create a framework for an evaluation.



RESOURCES

The partnership between the **California State University (CSU)** system and **California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI)** drives the work

The partnership between **the CSU system** and **Liaison International** facilitates required IT changes for the Cal State Apply system to support direct admissions

CSU staff will provide training to campus admissions officers and school counselors in support of the initiative

Technical assistance from **Trendy Minds** and **ideas42** support communications and marketing to K12 districts and CSU campuses

Funding from **Lumina Foundation** and the **CSU Chancellor’s Office** provides financial support



STRATEGIES

CCGI’s student-facing platform **CaliforniaColleges.edu** collects student course-taking and performance data

School counselors use CCGI to **track and support A-G completion** among 9th-11th grade students and encourage rigorous course taking

CSU uses CCGI to **identify eligible 12th grade students and communicates their admissibility** in the CSU system

Ineligible 12th graders will be referred to the **Transfer Success Pathway** and encouraged to pursue dual admission at the community college and CSU

Individual campuses integrate **direct admissions and follow-up** into their CRM systems



BENEFICIARIES

All postsecondary students, especially **students of color, low-income families, first-generation college-going students**, and other underrepresented populations

CSU campuses seeking to increase enrollment rates, particularly under-enrolled campuses

High school students from underrepresented backgrounds, encouraged to take more challenging courses and complete their A-G requirements



SHORT TERM OUTCOME

Direct admissions offers are generated and sent out across the state to eligible 12th grade students

Increased applications and enrollments among students who received direct admissions offers

Increased number of networked and linked K12 districts in CCGI portal

Increased completion of A-G requirements among high school students



OVERALL IMPACT

Increase in enrollment and completion among students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students

Increase in transfer enrollments across the CSU system

Reduction in uncertainty and anxiety among students applying for college

Improved **financial aid application and packaging process** using CCGI data

Greater awareness of the value of the CSU



RESOURCES

Any initiative requires resources to support the work, including state partners. The **CSU Direct Admissions initiative** leverages the Cal State Apply platform, their online application for admission. The direct admissions and early outreach work will leverage CCGI and the 23 CSU campuses to drive the work. With funding from the **CSU Chancellor's Office** and **Lumina Foundation**, the CSU system office is working in partnership with their IT vendor, **Liaison International**, to make the required changes to the Cal State Apply system that will facilitate direct admissions.

The CSU system is working with **TrendyMinds** and **ideas42** to develop the communications and marketing tools that will support the initiative. Communications materials include the letter sent to eligible 12th grade students informing them about their admissibility, 9th through 11th grade communications, and materials for the CSU campuses and K12 school counselors to use in explaining the initiative to students and help them take the next steps in order to finalize their applications and enroll.

The initiative will require **CSU staff time** to develop trainings for K12 school counselors and admissions personnel at the CSU campuses. K12 district staff will also be expected to format student transcript data into the CCGI portal in support of this initiative.

CSU DIRECT ADMISSIONS:

Every 12th grade student who has successfully completed their A-G coursework, maintained at least a 2.5 GPA and graduates from high school is eligible for admission within the CSU system. Students will receive notification from the CSU system office that they are admissible and will be encouraged to work with their school counselors to complete the remaining steps to finalize their application and enrollment.

9th-11th grade students will be encouraged to complete their profile on the CCGI platform in order to track their completion of A-G and GPA and receive encouragement and support from their school counselors.



STRATEGIES

In accordance with the 2024 omnibus trailer budget bill, all K12 districts in California are required to provide student transcript data to the CCGI system by June 2026. This transcript data permits individual students to be assessed for their completion of A-G coursework, CSU admission eligibility, and cumulative GPA.

Through **direct admissions**, every 12th grade student in California who has completed their A-G required coursework and maintained at least a 2.5 GPA will be identified through the CCGI portal. This identification will prompt notification of these students that they are admissible in the CSU system, with a letter listing individual institutions where they are already conditionally accepted. High school seniors who do not meet the CSU minimum eligibility requirements will be routed to the Transfer Success Pathway and encouraged to dually enroll in their local community college and CSU campus.

K12 school counselors and admissions officers at the CSU institutions will be **expected to reach out to students** and support them in taking the necessary steps to finalize their application and enrollment at the CSU institution. Through the CCGI platform, school districts and counselors can monitor the 12th grade students' admission application and financial aid application status. CSU system staff will be developing and providing training to K12 and campus level staff.

K12 school counselors will also be expected to leverage CCGI data to track 9th-11th grade students' completion of A-G required coursework and encourage them to take more challenging courses. K12 schools will be encouraged to partner with local CSU campuses to provide early exposure and information, with the goal of spurring early college conversations among students and families.

Though not officially a component of the admissions initiative, financial aid applications are prepopulated with student information from the CCGI portal, simplifying the process for students and reducing application errors.

BENEFICIARIES

This initiative is focused on supporting students who may not believe that college is for them, particularly students of color, students from low-income families, and first-generation college-going students. Early intervention with high school students including 9th-11th graders is expected to increase the number of students meeting CSU eligibility requirements and ultimately increase the number of students who pursue a postsecondary education. Further, this initiative is intended to bolster enrollment across the CSU system, promoting CSU as a viable and affordable option with a higher return on investment than a community college. While several of the CSU institutions and/or programs have not been affected by declining enrollment, there are eight institutions that have experienced under-enrollment; the CSU system office is hopeful that enrollment at those institutions will increase as a result of this initiative.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

In the short term, the initiative will notify all eligible 12th graders of their admissibility in the CSU system, which is theorized to drive up applications and enrollments among the students who receive these letters. Because CSU-ineligible 12th graders will be receiving encouragement to dually enroll through the Transfer Success Pathway, enrollments in that program are also expected to increase. By June 2026, all California K12 districts are required to link their student transcript data in the CCGI portal, facilitating the identification of eligible students throughout the state. Early intervention in high school is expected to increase the number of students completing A-G coursework, and encouragement from high school counselors is expected to increase the number of students taking rigorous coursework before graduation. These efforts collectively are expected to increase the number of students who are deemed eligible for admission in the CSU system, and enrollments at CSU campuses are expected to increase.

Longer term impacts associated with this initiative include:

- **Increased enrollments and completion at CSU institutions** among students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation college students;
- **Increased successful transfers** from the community college to CSU institutions;
- **Reduction in uncertainty and anxiety** related to college admissions among high school students during the application process;
- **Improved financial aid application and packaging** process through partnership between CSU system; and
- **Greater awareness of the accessibility and value** of the CSU system.



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Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation's talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

ENDNOTES

ⁱA-G requirements refer to a set of high school courses required for admission by the UCs and CSUs: <https://cacollegeguidance.org/resourcehub/help/what-are-a-g-requirements/>

