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# **LATINOS IN CALIFORNIA'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMS: WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Latinos in California have historically experienced inequities in bachelor’s degree access and attainment compared to the state’s non-Latino population.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, California passed a law authorizing community colleges to offer bachelor’s degree programs, opening a new pathway to bachelor’s degree attainment.<sup>2</sup> Using institutional student records and survey data, this policy brief explores the academic and labor market experiences and outcomes of Latino students and graduates of community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs. Although more research is needed to examine the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of CCB programs, our findings suggest that these programs show promise for the Latino community. Among Latino students enrolled in CCB programs, 64% graduated and obtained their bachelor’s degree within two years after officially being admitted to complete their upper-division coursework. This year-two graduation rate compares favorably to the non-Latino CCB year-two graduation rate (68%) in California. Surveys sent to CCB graduates also indicate positive labor market experiences and outcomes. For example, Latino graduates of the programs reported earning \$22,600 more than they did prior to beginning their programs. Based on these findings, we make three policy recommendations: (i) ensure equitable access and opportunities for Latino students to enroll in California’s CCB programs, (ii) continue to collect and analyze data on Latinos’ academic and labor market experiences and outcomes, and (iii) continue to invest in California’s CCB programs as they seem to be a viable public pathway to bachelor’s degree attainment.

## INTRODUCTION

Research has long shown a positive relationship between bachelor’s degree attainment and socioeconomic outcomes.<sup>3</sup> However, Latinos in California face structural and systemic barriers to success in higher education. These barriers include, for example, inequities in funding across K-12 schools and districts,<sup>4</sup> fewer geographically accessible colleges and universities in areas with higher concentrations of Latinos,<sup>5</sup> and high college tuition costs.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Latino community represents 39% of California’s population but only 20% of its bachelor’s degree holders.<sup>7</sup>

Recent changes in the higher education landscape in California may have begun to address some of these barriers. In 2014, California’s state legislature passed Senate Bill 850, allowing California’s community college system to pilot new community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree programs at up to 15 colleges within the system. According to the legislation, the degree programs must be “in a subject area with unmet workforce needs in the local community or region of the district.”<sup>8</sup> Similar to community college students who transfer to a traditional four-year college or university after completing their general education courses, students can now apply for admission into a CCB program to complete more advanced, upper-division courses after they complete their lower-division requirements. In 2021, with the passage of Assembly Bill 927, California made these pilot CCB programs permanent and allowed for up to 30 new CCB programs to be approved per academic year.<sup>9</sup> Given that California’s Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960 has historically delegated the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems with the exclusive authorization to be California’s public postsecondary educational systems that confer bachelor’s degrees, this was a revolutionary policy change with implications for the structure of California’s public higher education system.<sup>10</sup>

California is one of 23 states that have authorized at least one community college to offer bachelor’s degrees.<sup>11</sup> As of September 2023, there were 31 approved CCB programs in California. This includes programs such as Cyber Defense and Analysis at San Diego City College, Ecosystem Restoration & Applied Fire Management at Feather River College, and Automotive Career Education at Ventura College. The state’s community college system serves about 1.8 million students and is one of the largest and most racially and ethnically diverse public education systems in the world.<sup>12</sup> With its financial (i.e., low tuition costs) and geographic accessibility, California’s community colleges have often been the most viable public higher education option for the Latino community. In fall 2022, about 640,000 Latino students were enrolled in California’s community colleges—more than twice the number enrolled in the CSUs and UCs combined (about 285,000 students).<sup>13</sup>

As these programs continue to expand, there is still a lot to learn about California's CCB programs and the extent to which they are a viable and equitable pathway for social and economic mobility for Latino students. The traditional four-year colleges in California<sup>14</sup> as well as those in other states such as Michigan<sup>15</sup> have pushed back against CCB programs, due to concerns about degree program duplication and potential impacts on their own enrollment. However, there is limited evidence that CCB programs divert students away from traditional four-year colleges (if anything, they are diverting students away from for-profit colleges).<sup>16</sup> This is likely because CCB programs attract a much different student population—one that is older and more likely to be invested in their local communities.<sup>17</sup>

This policy brief provides insight on what we know so far about the academic and labor market experiences and outcomes of Latino students who participated in California's first 15 CCB programs.

### **METHODOLOGY**

California's first 15 CCB programs provided data to generate insight on the academic and labor market experiences and outcomes of Latino students in the first five enrollment cohorts (2016 to 2020). We used two data sources to inform the findings in this policy brief. First, we used data from institutional student records that include all CCB students who enrolled in the first five cohorts or graduated in the first three cohorts (hereafter referred to as the CCB Institutional Records Data). Second, we used surveys administered to CCB graduates to learn more about their labor market experiences and outcomes (hereafter, the CCB Employment Outcomes Survey). The survey data covers three graduating classes (2018, 2019, and 2020). Although survey response rates varied considerably across colleges, each year's survey had a high overall response rate (96%, 94%, and 74%, respectively).

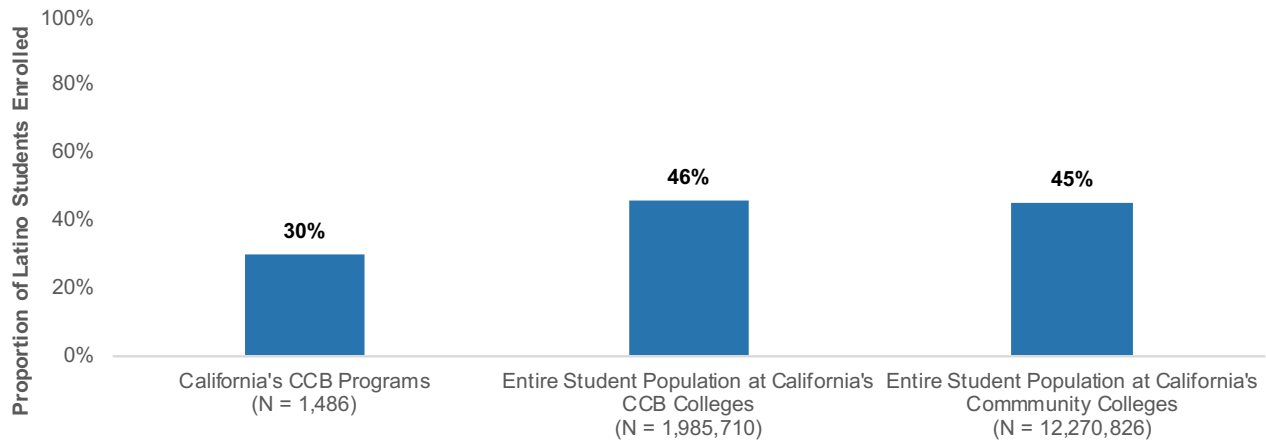
California and the colleges themselves have used these data sources to understand the outcomes of students in the CCB programs, but to our knowledge, there has been little or no research that explicitly focuses on Latino students. For this policy brief, we conduct data analysis to generate insights on Latino CCB students' academic and labor market experiences and outcomes. Where appropriate, we also contextualize and compare some of the data metrics presented and use other data sources (e.g., California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, California State University).

## FINDINGS

### Educational Access and Opportunity

The CCB enrollment data of the first five cohorts suggests some inequities and variability in Latino enrollment relative to the Latino population at the respective college or state level. For example, of the 1,486 students enrolled in the first five cohorts, 448 (about 30%) were Latino, according to the CCB Institutional Records Data. This is notably smaller than the overall Latino student share at those 15 community colleges (46%) and across all California community colleges (45%) during the same time frame.

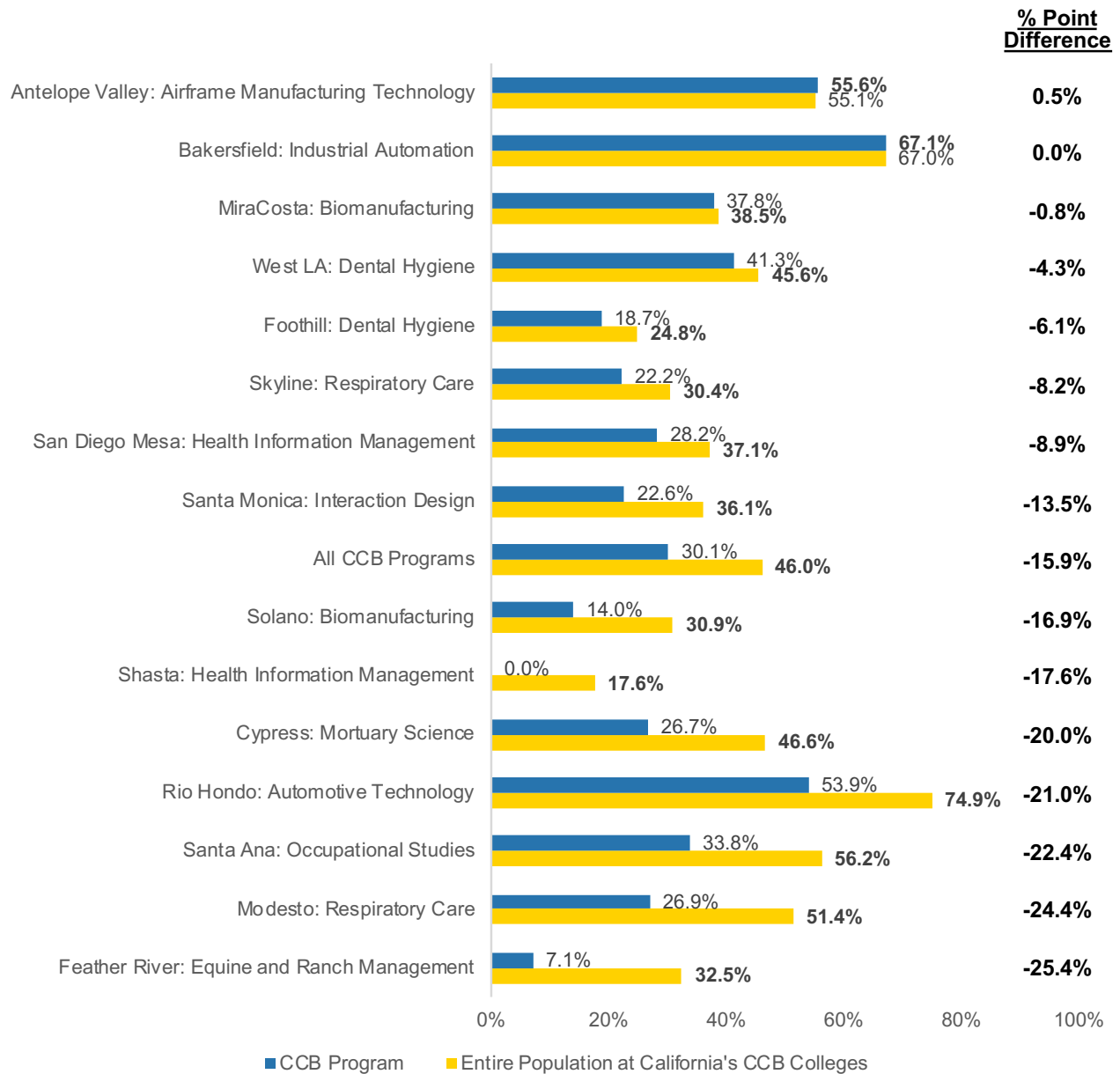
**Figure 1. Proportion of Latino Students Enrolled in California's CCB Programs, Colleges that Offer CCBs, and All California Community Colleges, 2016-2020**



Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Management Information System Data Mart; CCB Institutional Records Data

However, Latino students in two CCB programs experienced relative representation compared to the overall campus population. Antelope Valley College's Airframe Manufacturing Technology program and Bakersfield College's Industrial Automation program enrolled Latino students in proportion (56% and 67%, respectively) to their respective colleges' overall Latino population (55% and 67%, respectively).

Figure 2. Proportion of Latino Students Enrolled: Each California's CCB Program vs. Overall Collegewide, 2016-2020

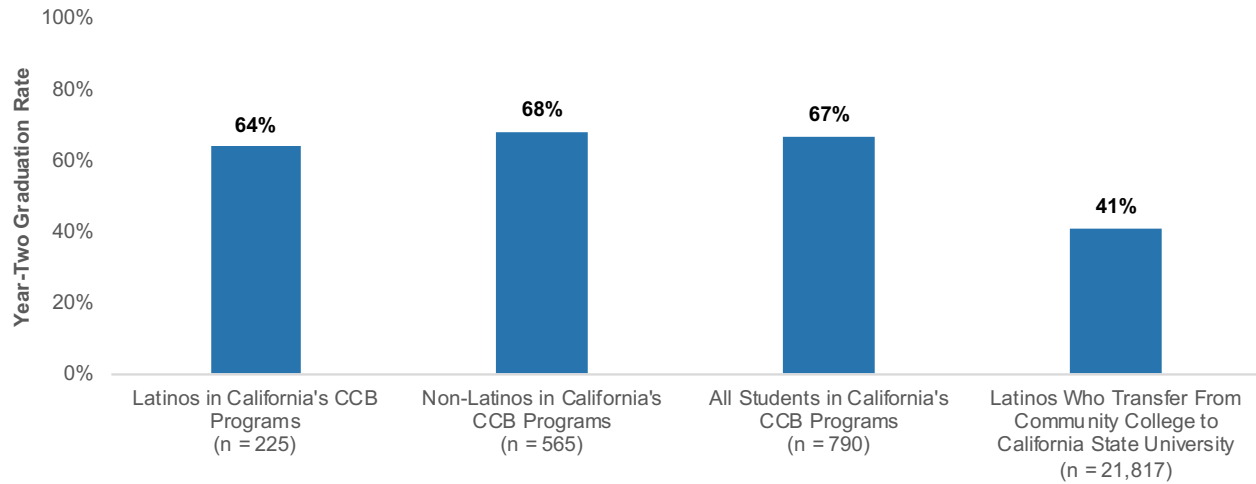


Source: CCB Institutional Records Data: Cohort and Graduation

**Academic Success**

Overall, California’s CCB programs have produced promising graduation rates . Within the first three cohorts, 527 students, 225 of whom were Latino, graduated with a bachelor’s degree within two years. As noted in the previous section, there were inequities in enrollment among Latino students in CCB programs. However, Latinos who were *actually* able to enroll in a CCB program experienced positive academic outcomes. For example, 64% of Latino CCB students graduated with their bachelor’s degree within two years of being officially admitted to take upper-division coursework (also known as the “year-two graduation rate”), according to the CCB Institutional Records Data. To contextualize this data point, the average year-two graduation rate for all non-Latino students in CCB programs was 68%, just 4 percentage points higher. Moreover, the Latino CCB year-two graduation rate was 23 percentage points higher than that of Latino community college students who transferred to a California State University school during a similar time frame (2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts)—just 41%.

**Figure 3. Year-Two Graduation Rates Among California’s CCB Latino Students, CCB Non-Latino Students, All CCB Students, and Latino Community College Students Who Transfer to a California State University, 2016-2018**



Source: California State University (2023); CCB Institutional Records Data

**Labor Market Experiences and Outcomes**

The data also suggest positive student loan borrowing patterns among Latino CCB graduates. For example, 35% of California CCB Latino graduates and 30% of California CCB non-Latino graduates reported borrowing student loans. Both rates were much lower than the overall California loan rate among both Latino and non-Latino college graduates (46%).<sup>18</sup> Since Latino students are, on average, more likely to have to take out student loans, the loan rate among Latino CCB graduates (35%) is likely lower than the loan rate among Latino college graduates across the nation<sup>19</sup> and within California.<sup>20</sup>

Latino CCB graduates also reported positive employment experiences and outcomes. For example, Latino CCB graduates who were employed reported earning \$22,600 more per year than they did prior to starting their CCB program. This figure is promising, but it should be noted that non-Latino CCB graduates reported earning approximately \$27,700 more than they did prior to starting their CCB program, suggesting an inequity in economic outcomes. However, Latino CCB graduates reported higher rates of employment (94%) and employment in California (92%) relative to non-Latino CCB graduates (93% and 88%, respectively). Rates for employment in the same field as their CCB program were comparable (about 89%) between Latino and non-Latino CCB graduates.

**Table 1. California’s CCB Employment Outcomes Survey Results, Class of 2018, 2019, and 2020**

	<b>Latino CA CCB Graduates</b>	<b>Non-Latino CA CCB Graduates</b>	<b>All CA CCB Graduates</b>
	<i>n</i> = 97	<i>n</i> = 352	<i>n</i> = 449
<b>Student Loans</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>31%</b>
	<i>n</i> = 83	<i>n</i> = 296	<i>n</i> = 379
<b>Wage Gains Among Employed</b>	<b>\$22,600</b>	<b>\$27,700</b>	<b>\$26,600</b>
	<i>n</i> = 92	<i>n</i> = 327	<i>n</i> = 419
<b>Employed</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>93%</b>
	<i>n</i> = 92	<i>n</i> = 327	<i>n</i> = 419
<b>Employed in the Same Field as their CCB Program</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>
	<i>n</i> = 91	<i>n</i> = 326	<i>n</i> = 417
<b>Employed in California</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>88%</b>

Source: CCB Employment Outcomes Survey

Note: For the purposes of this policy brief, “Employed” includes individuals who reported that they were employed in a job or self-employed / freelance. In our calculations, we omit individuals who indicated that they were not currently seeking employment for personal reasons or were working on an industry credential or obtaining a graduate degree to be in more alignment with the employment calculations (which omits individuals not in the labor force) used by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (see BLS URL: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/definitions.htm>).

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this policy brief, we report descriptive data regarding California's CCB programs for Latino students and graduates, using administrative datasets from CCB colleges' student information systems and their student alumni surveys. These data suggest that although more can be done to improve educational opportunities and access for Latino students seeking enrollment into CCB programs, those who do participate seem to experience promising academic and labor market outcomes. California's CCB programs may be an accessible and affordable public pathway to bachelor's degree attainment for Latino students. As such, we provide three recommendations to further support the Latino community:

- **Ensure equitable access and opportunities for Latino students to enroll into California's CCB programs.** The positive academic and labor market experiences of these programs for Latino students suggest that Latino students do well if and once they are *actually enrolled in* CCB programs. Community colleges and education researchers should also better understand why there are inequities in Latino enrollment across different CCB programs. Moreover, practitioners and policymakers should engage in practices and policies to identify academic programs that will be appealing to students and employers, and invest in improved outreach, recruitment, and marketing efforts to attract Latino students into these programs. Such actions can and should be taken as soon as possible.
- **Continue to collect and analyze data on Latinos' academic and labor market experiences and outcomes.** CCB programs are still relatively new and there is much more to learn about them. Future data collection could consider additional metrics to understand the mechanisms of Latino students' educational and occupational trajectories in relation to CCB programs (e.g., work experiences prior to and during CCB enrollment, internship or fieldwork experiences, job search experiences) and the extent to which inequities exist. Because the CCB Employment Outcomes Survey is administered every year, these metrics can be incorporated starting in 2024 and beyond. Further, as more data are collected and the population size grows, researchers should conduct joint data disaggregation to consider additional social experiences and characteristics (e.g., gender, age, program of study) as well as the role of geography and discrimination in students' labor market outcomes. Lastly, data on CCB students' labor market experiences is limited to CCB graduates who complete the CCB Employment Outcome Survey. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, California Employment Development Department, and the CCB colleges should work together to generate more comprehensive and accessible official labor market data about students who participate in CCB programs.

In addition to these quantitative data, researchers can also collect qualitative data to support planning, implementation, and evaluation of California's CCB programs. For example, interviews and focus groups with students can broaden stakeholders' understanding of their experiences prior to, during, and upon exiting these programs. Further, incorporating practitioner perspectives would also allow the field to better understand the contexts, possibilities, and challenges that come with implementing these programs. Such actions can and should be taken as soon as possible.

- **Invest in California's CCB programs.** The data in this policy brief suggest that Latinos' labor market experiences and outcomes are generally positive, but that inequities exist in their educational access (enrollment), success (graduation), and wage gains. Practitioners and policymakers should continue to work together to ensure that Latino students experience equity. Latinos in California have historically experienced academic, social, and economic inequities. The data generated about California's CCB programs suggest that it is a promising public pathway to promote the academic, social, and economic mobility for California's large Latino community. As such, practitioners and policymakers should continue to invest and grow in California's CCB programs as a strategy to improve structural and systemic conditions for the Latino community.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Cecilia Rios-Aguilar is Professor of Education and Department Chair at UCLA's School of Education and Information Studies (Ed&IS). Currently, she also serves as a faculty Co-Director of Policy Analysis of California Education (PACE), as a Board Member of the Spencer Foundation, and as a research affiliate of Wheelhouse: The Center for the Community College Leadership and Research at UC Davis. She is past Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

Her research is multidisciplinary and uses a variety of asset-based conceptual frameworks—funds of knowledge, community cultural wealth and the forms of capital—and of statistical approaches—econometric models, multilevel models, spatial analyses and GIS, and social network analysis—to study the educational and occupational trajectories of marginalized students. Dr. Rios-Aguilar's 2011-2014 research project, "Getting Connected: Harnessing the Power of Social Media to Enhance Community College Student Success," was funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The project explored the use of social media technology to connect and engage community college students in ways that improve success outcomes. Currently, Dr. Rios-Aguilar is examining how community college students make decisions about majors, jobs, and careers and the impact of strategic nudges to help community college students navigate the financial aid process. Her latest co-edited book, published by Routledge, *Funds of Knowledge in Higher Education: Honoring Students' Cultural Experiences and Resources as Strengths*, refines and builds on the concept of funds of knowledge in a sophisticated and multidisciplinary way to examine issues related to access and transition to college, college persistence and success, and pedagogies in higher education.

Dr. Rios-Aguilar obtained her Ph.D. in Education Theory and Policy from the University of Rochester, her M.S. in Educational Administration from the University of Rochester, and her B.A. in Economics from the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México [ITAM].



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He spent the last 10+ years in advising, teaching, and research roles across California's education system: in the non-profit sector, as well as the K-12, community college, and public/private university systems. He holds a B.A. from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and M.Ed. from the University of Southern California (USC) Rossier School of Education.

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