

CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES (Chapter 2, part 2)

The purposes of the first two chapters of this master plan are to provide background information, data, and observations that inform the implications for planning, which provided an outline for determining the District's current and anticipated challenges.

The District analyzed the data and information in these two chapters by:

- Comparing its current status to its mission (internal scans) to identify current challenges
- Studying projected demographics, legislative, and economic changes (external scans) to anticipate the challenges that the District will be called upon to address in the coming decade.

Based on this analysis and feedback gathered at the October 27, 2023, 2025-2035 District-wide Master Plan Summit, the District identified the following current and anticipated challenges. To fulfill its mission, College of the Sequoias must:

CHALLENGE #1: Provide equitable access across all District campuses to meet local community needs.

Increasing access to meet community needs is a focus of state and local attention. Specifically, the purpose of Vision 2030 Goal 2: Equity in Access is to *"Increase with equity the number of students attending a California community college, with particular emphasis on the number of underserved Californians"* (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2023). To ensure equitable access to education that meets the local community's needs, COS must focus on meeting population growth and labor market/workforce demands as well as identifying underserved groups in the local community.

Population Growth

Over the next ten years, enrollment at COS is projected to increase by 1% each year (Data Set 10c). This projection is based on an analysis of the previous 10 years in which an average 0.98% increase in FTES per year was observed as well as demographic projections for Tulare and Kings Counties.

The District's service area is encompassed in Tulare and Kings Counties, both of which are projected to experience population growth from 2020 to 2035 (Data Set 1). Tulare County is projected to increase from 480,788 in 2020 to 535,463 in 2035 (+11.1%). Kings County is projected to increase from 154,745 in 2020 to 171,517 in 2035 (+10.8%). Additionally, the volume of college-aged individuals (18-24 years old) in both Tulare (+11.4%) and Kings (+23.5%) Counties is projected to increase, while the proportion of college-aged individuals remains similar in both counties (Data Set 2). Due to this and the fact that a majority (72.5%) of COS students are 24 years old or younger (Data Set 16), student demand throughout the District is projected to increase. However, the decrease in 5-17-year old age group in both counties may impact future demand from K-12 students (Data Set 2).

Hispanic students accounted for 71.0% of the Fall 2020 COS student population, but only accounted for 63.5% of Tulare County and 53.2% of Kings County residents in 2020 (Data Sets 3 & 18). Additionally, from 2020 to 2030, the Hispanic population is projected to increase by 10% in Tulare County and 9% in Kings County (Data Set 3). The projected increase in the Hispanic population in the area may increase student demand for COS, as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

From 2020 to 2040, college-aged individuals are projected to increase in both Kings County and Tulare County, with Kings County projected to have a substantial increase (+16.7%) among 18 -24-year old age

group (Data Set 2). Hanford, the county seat and largest city in Kings County, ranks 3rd in student headcount based on city of residence (Data Set 13). Given the projected increase in college-aged individuals, and that individuals living in Hanford account for approximately 8% of the COS student population, student demand for courses at the Hanford campus may also increase.

COS Growth

Over the past five years (2018 – 2022), the District's total headcount grew by 3.7% while California Community Colleges as a whole experienced a 19% decrease (Data Set 10a). While the number of students enrolled in credit courses (-2%) and FTES (-6%) declined from 2018-2022, both increased over the past year (Data set 10b & Data Set 12). As headcounts and FTES have trended upward over the past year, student demand is projected to increase.

In Fall 2022, residents of the COS School Facility Improvement District #2 (Visalia, Cutler-Orosi, Farmersville, Exeter, and Woodlake Unified School Districts) passed Measure C, which will allow the District to facilitate the offering of bachelor's and master's degrees through partnerships with four-year universities (Chapter 1). Additionally, a poll conducted by FM3 Research, showed that residents had knowledge of COS and more favorable opinions of COS when compared to local 4-year universities (Data Sets 28 & 29). Residents also believed that better 4-year degree options were needed for the area and improving 4-year degree options in the area would help the local economy and property values (Data Set 30). Since the community has expressed favorable opinions of COS and a desire for better 4-year degree options in the area and COS is expanding 4-year degree options via partnerships, student demand is projected to increase.

Labor Market/Workforce Demands

In addition to population growth, labor market/workforce demands will influence the local community educational needs. Less than half of Kings County and Tulare County residents over the age of 25 have at least some college education, and many of the largest and/or fastest growing occupations in the area (Heavy and tractor trailer truck drivers, teachers, teaching assistants, accountants, Licensed Vocation Nurse, Registered Nurse, Nursing Assistants, etc.) requires at least some post-secondary education (Data Sets 5a, 7 & 8). To meet the labor market/workforce demands of the local community, increased enrollment, specifically in programs related to the largest/fastest growing employment opportunities, is needed.

COS has added/in the process of adding new CTE programs to the Hanford and Tulare campuses (Chapter 1). One such program, beginning in Summer 2024 at the Hanford Campus, is the paramedic program, which assists in meeting labor market demands as paramedic is one of the fastest growing occupations in Tulare County (Data Set 7). The addition and expansion of COS programs is needed to meet the labor market/workforce demands of the local community.

In addition, Vision 2030 specifically mentions expanding access to health care pathway programs such as nursing and mental and behavioral health, which are listed in the fastest and/or largest growing occupations for both Tulare and Kings Counties (Data Sets 7 & 8).

Underserved Populations within the Local Community

To align with Vision 2030, COS must increase educational access to underserved populations within the local community. Vision 2030 specifically discusses increasing educational access for low-income learners. Tulare and Kings Counties have higher rates of families below the poverty line and a smaller proportion of adult residents with postsecondary education when compared to California as a whole (Data Set 5a & 6a). Additionally, weekly median income is shown to increase with educational attainment. Therefore, expanding educational access to low-income individuals is important to meet local community needs (Data Set 9).

CHALLENGE #2: Improve student success for our diverse student population

Improving student success outcomes for our diverse student population is a focus of state and local attention. Specifically, the purpose of Vision 2030 Goal 1: Equity in Success is to “*Ensure the academic and career success of all Californians who are current and prospective California community college students*” (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2023). To ensure academic and career success for students, COS must focus on improving various student success outcomes across the diverse student population.

Course Success Rates

From 2018/2019 through 2020/2021, course success rates for COS students were the same or higher than course success rates for all California Community College students. However, 2021/2022 course success rates for COS students were slightly below the course success rates for all California Community College students (Data Set 21).

From Fall 2018 to Fall 2022, course success rates decreased for all race/ethnic groups except students who identified as multi-ethnic and students whose race/ethnicity was not provided (unknown). Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, and White students consistently had course success rates higher than the District average, and African American, Native American, and Hispanic students as well as students whose race/ethnicity was not provided (unknown) consistently had course success rates lower than the District average (Data Set 24).

From Fall 2018 to Fall 2022, course success rates decreased for all age groups. During the same period, students younger than 20, 30-49 years old, and 50 or older consistently had course success rates higher than the District average. In addition, students 20-29 years old consistently had course success rates lower than the District average (Data Set 25).

From Fall 2018 to Fall 2022, the proportion of part-time students increased. In Fall 2022, 60% of COS students took fewer than 12 units per semester, and part-time students consistently had lower course success rates than full-time students. (Data Sets 14 & 26)

With overall course success rates declining, and course success rates for specific populations consistently falling below the District average, improving course success rates among COS’s diverse student population is essential to achieve overall academic success.

Transfer Level Math & English

With the implementation of new placement policies in Fall 2019 resulting from AB 705 legislation, all COS students are given the opportunity to enroll in transfer-level math and English courses. Since the implementation of these placement policies, "77% - 86% of each of the past five first-time student cohorts have placed into English 001 without support, and as of Fall 2021, 100% of COS students are eligible to take at-least one transfer-level math course without support (Data Set 20). Additionally, the rates of students completing transfer-level math and English within their first year doubled from 7% in 2017-2018 to 14% in 2021-2022 (Data Set 21). While increases in transfer-level math and English completion rates are promising, continued improvement in transfer-level math and English is important to promote overall academic success among COS students.

Degree/Certificate Completion

Kings (47.4%) and Tulare (46.1%) Counties have lower rates of residents with at least some college education when compared to California as a whole (63.8%). These rates fall below the California Governor's goal in which 70% of residents obtain a postsecondary degree and/or certification by 2030 (Data Set 5a, Vision 2030 & Chapter 1). These education attainment rates also fall below the projected educational attainment levels needed to sustain workforce/labor market needs. Between 2021 and 2031, 2,169,000 jobs are projected to open annually in California due to the creation of new positions and replacement openings. Of the new and replacement positions an estimated 67% will require postsecondary credentials, and in 2031 it is projected that 67% of all jobs in California will require some postsecondary training beyond high school, with 30% requiring some college or an associate degree. (Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2023).

From 2018/2019 through 2021/2022, COS had a higher rate of students who attained the vision goal definition of completion when compared to all students enrolled at California Community Colleges. However, the rate of COS students achieving this outcome is still low (8% - 12%) (Data Set 21). Additionally, the number of degrees issued by COS slightly declined from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023 (-0.2%), but the number of students receiving a degree increased by 9.5% over the same period (Data Sets 27a & 27b). In addition, the number of certificates issued (-34.2%) and certificate recipients (-31.1%) decreased from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023 (Data Sets 27a & 27c). While the increases in degree recipients and proportion of students achieving the vision goal definition of completion is notable, the completion rate is unlikely to meet projected workforce/labor market needs. To meet the Vision 2030 benchmark, which calls for a 30% increase in students completing a certificate, associate degree or baccalaureate degree, completion rates must improve.

Transfer to a Four-Year Institution

Only 15.2% of Tulare County residents and 14.3% of Kings County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. The low proportion of residents with a bachelor's degree poses an issue because by 2031, it is projected that 37% of all jobs in California will require a bachelor's degree or higher (Data Sets 5a & Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, 2023).

While COS students transfer at similar rates to all California Community College students, less than 10% of COS students enrolled in a given academic year transfer to a four-year institution, and only 20-22% of COS students transfer to a four-year institution within three years of beginning at COS (Data Set 21 & COS Research Office, 2022). This transfer rate is unlikely to meet projected workforce/labor market

needs and will need to increase to meet the Vision 2030 benchmark, which calls for a 20% increase in the number of students who transfer to a California State University or University of California.

CHALLENGE #3: Align academic offerings and provide equitable student support services to respond to the needs of our diverse student population.

Aligning academic programs, educational resources, and student support services to meet the needs of diverse student populations is a focus of state and local attention. Specifically, the purpose of Vision 2030 Goal 3: Equity in Support is to *“Partner with other systems, agencies, institutions and community-based organizations to provide students the academic, financial and social supports necessary to thrive by taking education opportunities and the accompanying support to Californians”* (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2023). To ensure our academic programs and student support services meet the needs of our students, COS must identify student needs and barriers to academic success and align programs and services accordingly.

Academic Offerings

Demand for online and hybrid courses has remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, and it will likely be sustained or increase (Data Sets 23 & 15). Specifically, student headcounts, FTES, and credit enrollments for online courses have substantially increased from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022, and student headcounts for hybrid courses have increased over the same period (Data Sets 10a, 10b, 12 & 15).

In Fall 2020, 60% of COS students were enrolled part-time (Data Set 15). The need to work may contribute to the high portion of COS students who enroll part-time, especially considering that balancing work with school was endorsed by students in both 2021 and 2023 as the most challenging educational obstacle/issue. This is a concern for student success in two ways: (1) fewer units per semester are linked to lower likelihood of completing degrees, certificates, and transfer requirements, and (2) part-time students have lower course success rates when compared to full-time students (Data Set 26). Vision 2030 suggests increasing flexibility in term structure and scheduling as ways to promote increased “full-time course intensity” among working students (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2023).

Ensuring access to rigorous and quality academic programs that offer flexibility in modality and scheduling is important to meeting the educational needs of the diverse student population COS serves.

Academic Resources

Although course success rates for online courses have remained the same from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022 and course success rates for hybrid courses has slightly increased over the same period, these instruction modalities have lower course success rates when compared to face-to-face instruction. To assist students in succeeding, COS students need access to equitable academic resources regardless of instruction modality.

From 2017/2018 through 2021/2022, the proportions of Kings County (33% to 42%) and Tulare County (32% to 37%) 12th grade graduates who completed all courses required for UC and/or CSU entrance have consistently been below the state rates, which ranged from 40% to 52%. Therefore, to assist

students in succeeding, many students coming from high schools in the COS service area will need academic resources to meet them where they are.

Ensuring students have equitable access to academic resources, regardless of modality, which meet them where they are is important to meeting the educational needs of the diverse student population COS serves.

Student Support Services

To provide equitable support that responds to the needs of our diverse student population, the District must align its student support services. Multiple demographic variables, which intersect to inform our students' identities are summarized below.

Income and Poverty Rates

The income for many residents within the District's geographic boundaries is noticeably below poverty level. The statewide family income is significantly higher than the median and mean family income levels for residents in Tulare and Kings Counties. In addition, Tulare and Kings Counties both exhibit poverty levels above California. For example, Tulare County's poverty rate (16.4%) is nearly double the statewide poverty level (9%). In both Kings and Tulare Counties, families with female householders with no spouse present have a poverty level above 30% compared to the statewide average of 21% (Data Sets 6a & 6b).

Linguistic Diversity

The percentage of language other than English spoken at home in Tulare County (51%) is higher than the rates of Kings County (42%) and California (44%). Of the languages other than English spoken at home, Spanish is the most prevalent (Data Set 4).

First-Generation College Status

While the proportion of first-generation college students (parents with high school education or below) enrolled at COS has declined since Fall 2018, first-generation students still account for nearly half (43%) of the COS student population in Fall 2022 (Data Set 19). Additionally, in Fall 2022, COS had a higher proportion of first-generation students when compared to all California Community Colleges combined (31%).

Barriers to Students' Educational Pursuits

To align student support services to meet the needs of our diverse student population, the District must also understand students' barriers to educational success. Below is an overview of obstacles students reported as being "very challenging" to their educational pursuits.

In both the Spring 2021 and Spring 2023 administrations of the Student Support Services Survey, the top four obstacles/issues to students' educational pursuits were 1) balancing work and school, 2) financial/money issues, 3) balancing family and school, and 4) medical/mental health issues. However, the percentage of students reporting these issues as "Very challenging" decreased from 2021 to 2023 (Data Sets 31a, 31b & 32). In 2023, 21% of respondents reported balancing work with school and financial issues as very challenging, while 14% reported balancing work with family as very challenging. Medical/mental health issues were reported as very challenging by 9% of the respondents. The other

obstacles reported as very challenging to students' educational pursuits were transportation issues (6%), childcare issues (6%), food insecurity (5%), computer/internet issues (3%), and housing instability (3%).

The demographic characteristics of COS students intersect to display a multifaceted student profile in which nearly half of COS students have parents/guardians with no postsecondary experience and many are living in households with poverty. When parents/guardians possess little/no postsecondary education, they often cannot provide effective guidance to their children's academic and educational success. Additionally, living in low-income and low-resources households may require our students to dedicate resources, including time and energy, to their families through part-time employment and/or increased household responsibilities. This notion was supported by balancing school with work and family as well as financial issues being top challenges our students face. The demographic characteristics highlighted above intersect and contribute to the educational obstacles/challenges faced by our students, and in turn limit students' abilities to overcome the burdening realities of under-education and poverty. (Data Sets 4, 6a, 6b, 19,31a, 31b, 32)

CHALLENGE #4: Continuously improve our policies, practices, and systems to provide a quality affordable education and support the community we serve.

Based on discussions, comments, and feedback gathered at the October 27, 2023, 2025-2035 District-wide Master Plan Summit, which was attended by more than 100 participants/contributors representing the COS faculty, staff, students and Board, an additional challenge was identified. To continue providing a quality affordable education and support our diverse community, COS must engage in continuous improvement efforts district-wide in developing and implementing policies, business practices and maintaining operational systems. The continuous improvement efforts discussed were 1) Navigating the impact of legislation such as AB 705, AB 1705, and CalGETC of students' educational experiences, 2) Engaging in professional development opportunities to promote best practices in higher education, 3) Reviewing the scope of research to better identify data needs in support of the District's mission, and 4) Navigate the state/local economy by examining and incorporating economic forecasts into the District's plans.

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Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. (2023). *After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031*. https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections_2031-State-Report.pdf