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## **Public Higher Education Finance Reform Will Be Challenging but Necessary Says Range of Experts, Voters in New Study**

*Project from David Binder Research Shows Bipartisan Support*

SAN FRANCISCO — California is in the grip of a paradox – a college education has never been more important to have, but has never felt harder to get. With more qualified students than ever seeking a constrained number of seats, many students and their families worry that the promise of higher education will elude them. For the public university systems in the state – the University of California and the California State University – ensuring that all qualified California students can achieve their educational goals is an enduring challenge.

With an understanding that guaranteeing these systems' future effectiveness—and student access to those systems—is a complex undertaking, the College Futures Foundation commissioned David Binder Research to reach beyond simple solutions by engaging a wide range of people with a deep stake in the success of California's higher education system.

This qualitative research was funded by College Futures Foundation as part of its commitment to building a shared understanding between public policy makers and higher education leaders of the finance system challenges facing California public universities, as well as practical ways to solve them.

David Binder and his team conducted one-on-one interviews with business leaders, state finance officials, and Sacramento insiders. He also led group conversations with teachers and university employees, and focus groups with voters representing a diversity of political views and with students planning to enter college. His report paints a nuanced picture of California's higher education system as it reveals a combined commitment from inside and outside the systems to provide California's students with the education they will need to succeed in the new economy.

"We were struck by the clarity and thoughtfulness of the participants across the board," said David Binder. "Policymakers, university staff, students, and voters across the political spectrum agreed that California's public universities must be able to effectively serve the state's students in the new economy, but they were careful to acknowledge that that success won't be easy," he said. "In particular, the notion of 'free college tuition' was frequently dismissed as unrealistic and even ill-advised."

“In contrast to a number of other issues dominating the public debate today, Republicans and Democrats generally don’t see higher education finance reform in partisan terms,” said Russell Gould, Chairman of the Board of the College Futures Foundation. “We see this as a real opportunity to advance a conversation in a collaborative and constructive way.”

“More of our students than ever are ready to succeed in higher education and we owe it to them and to the state’s economic future to make room for them in our colleges and universities,” continued Gould. “College Futures is eager to work with David Binder’s group to further explore some of the topics from this study and other fundamental issues related to college access and student success.”

The research showed a general understanding among respondents that the systems would have to be more efficient, despite agreement that they are still underfunded, and there was strong support for a set of potential fiscal reforms that could stabilize spending and revenues over time.

“Ensuring adequate funding for public higher education will require addressing some challenging but solvable problems: stabilizing and increasing revenues, improving efficiency; and greater transparency and accountability,” said Jane Wellman, who authored College Futures Foundation’s recent report *Securing the Public Trust*. “The good news is that these solutions are seen as necessary and achievable, which is an essential first step.”

A few key points from the research bear noting:

**The system is seen as relatively accessible to all.**

- The most commonly cited positive feature was the ability for a diverse student body to access California’s public higher education system.
- Many also cite the system’s relative affordability, the tiered structure allowing for greater opportunities for all types of students, and the strength of the research conducted throughout the system.

**Insiders and outsiders alike agree that the public higher education system needs to become more efficient and less wasteful.**

- However, while people inside the system agree that efficiencies can and should be sought, they feel that the overall system will be unstable without additional reforms and funding.

**Interviewees agreed on the need for a few major areas for reform: revenue stability and predictability, more revenues (apart from predictability), and improved accountability and transparency.**

- Nevertheless, there was disagreement among the groups about the level of urgency with which these reforms are required. People inside the system believe reform is essential to prevent a significant decline in California’s higher educational system.
- In contrast, voters do not express the same sense of urgency about higher education finance reform as people more familiar with the system do.

Read more about the study here:

[www.higheredfinance.org/report/perceptions-higher-ed-finance](http://www.higheredfinance.org/report/perceptions-higher-ed-finance)

Download the report directly from here: [http://bit.ly/Perceptions\\_HigherEdFinance](http://bit.ly/Perceptions_HigherEdFinance)

Find more information on higher education finance reform for California here:  
[www.higheredfinance.org](http://www.higheredfinance.org)

Access a previous qualitative public opinion study by David Binder Research on the topic of higher education and higher education finance here: <http://bit.ly/2klrNsk>

### **About College Futures Foundation**

*College Futures Foundation operates on the beliefs that a vibrant future for California's economy and communities requires more bachelor's degrees, and that every student in California should have the chance to succeed in college. College Futures aims to increase opportunities for low-income and underrepresented students by removing barriers to college degrees. Established in 2005, the foundation awards nearly \$20 million in grants annually. Together with its grantees and partners, College Futures works towards more graduates for a thriving California. Visit [www.collegefutures.org](http://www.collegefutures.org).*

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