

# California EDGE Coalition's 2025-26 Policy Agenda



## Advancing Education, Diversity, & Growth in the Economy

The California EDGE Coalition (EDGE) is a non-partisan organization that brings together employers, labor, social justice, education, and workforce organizations with a shared goal of fostering widespread prosperity. We are united in our commitment to ensuring that post-secondary education and training serve as critical pathways to economic mobility for individuals and communities. Our coalition believes that equipping people with the skills and abilities needed in today's job market will enable California to thrive, leveraging the diversity, talent, and strengths of its people.

In the 2025-2026 legislative session, EDGE will focus on key priorities that align with our mission: to shape state policies and investments that create and maintain pathways to quality jobs for all Californians, particularly for those facing barriers to economic and social mobility, including adult learners, opportunity youth, dislocated workers, immigrants, people with mental health challenges, and justice-involved individuals, while also addressing the workforce needs of employers.

## Supporting Opportunity Youth

EDGE is committed to removing barriers for Opportunity Youth (OY) to succeed in career readiness and employment.

OY are young people aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor employed, often facing challenges related to the foster care system, juvenile justice, or homelessness. These individuals encounter barriers to education, training, and employment that are typically designed for adults, making it difficult for many—especially youth of color—to connect with educational and economic opportunities.

In 2023, California passed ACR 16 (authored by Assemblymember Mike Fong), urging the state to create pathways to success for OY by developing a statewide plan focused on reducing economic disparities. This plan emphasizes prioritizing investments and strategies in:

- education and workforce training programs
- expanding innovative “earn and learn” opportunities like apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and work-based learning
- enhancing flexible learning approaches like dual enrollment
- ensuring OY are included in the Cradle-to-Career Data System
- removing barriers to student financial aid access
- safeguarding social safety nets that support basic needs

To further these efforts, EDGE is committed to the implementation of ACR 16 and ensuring OY have the support they need to succeed.

## Increase access to, and completion of, education and skills training opportunities

- ***Support investments for flexible learning approaches like adult dual enrollment, credit for prior learning, and competency-based education opportunities.*** Flexible learning approaches are tailored to individual learning needs and prior experiences, accessible anytime, delivered through nontraditional methods, formally recognizing both traditional and nontraditional learning, and adaptable to economic shifts.
- ***Expand access to support services for underserved Californians.*** Students face significant challenges in focusing on their education and career aspirations when dealing with issues like child care, transportation, housing, and food insecurity. Many adult learners, workers, and opportunity youth miss opportunities to earn income while participating in education and training programs due to reduced work hours. Additionally, California must continue working to expand health care coverage for everyone, no matter their immigration status. Immigrants are twice as likely to launch small businesses, playing a vital role in supporting and growing our state's economy. Ensuring Californians have the resources to meet their basic needs, including expanded access to student financial aid, enables them to fully participate and complete programs that equip them with the skills needed for today's labor market.
- ***Expand and enhance career technical education (CTE) and apprenticeship programs to provide practical, skills-based learning.*** Strengthening these programs through policy reforms, investments, and online access is key to offering diverse career pathways across the range of workforce sectors. Increasing career exploration strategies for all Californians, while also incorporating labor-management partnerships, will further enrich workforce development. It is essential to develop high-quality career pathways that lead to in-demand jobs with family-sustaining wages. Strengthening CTE and apprenticeship pathways for adult learners and opportunity youth will help create more high-quality training options leading to industry-recognized credentials and certifications. Expanding stackable credentials is a key part of this effort, as these credentials offer students flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities for career advancement.
- ***Protect and support AB 1705/AB 705 implementation.*** These essential laws are designed to prevent students at community colleges from being placed in remedial courses that can delay or hinder their educational progress and entry into the workforce. As California continues to implement these laws, it is critical to ensure that community colleges receive adequate support, that student services are accessible, and that racial equity remains a priority throughout the process.
- ***Advance the Master Plan for Career Education.*** EDGE is committed to continuing efforts to inform the development and refinement of the Governor's Master Plan for Career Education to ensure that it moves the state toward more integrated, streamlined, and equitable education and workforce development systems.

## Advance digital equity strategies that support economic mobility

Investing in quality broadband and reliable high-speed internet, particularly in underserved communities, along with providing access to essential technological tools like computers and smartphones, is crucial for achieving digital equity. Coupled with digital literacy training, this ensures that more individuals can engage in online learning, earn certificates or credentials, and access public benefits. These efforts play a key role in education and workforce development, opening up greater opportunities for economic participation and advancement.

## Strengthen and expand the use of data to inform policy and investment decisions

Continued investment and implementation of California's Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Data System will advance statewide data integration in education, workforce, and human services, providing decision-makers and the public with a comprehensive view of the factors that influence career readiness and economic mobility. It will also help identify gaps and disparities, offering insight into what leads—or fails to lead—Californians to quality jobs.

