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COLLEGE ACCESS & SUCCESS IN THE SOUTHEAST | POLICY FRAMEWORK

In Southeast Los Angeles (SELA), the number of Latino students graduating from high school and accessing post-secondary pathways have risen over the last few years. In the 2009-10 academic year, the graduation rate in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) was 62.4% and in the 2018-19 academic year, the graduation rate rose to 78.1% which is reflective of the overall growth in the state of California¹. However, there are still large and persistent gaps for SELA students that include college preparation, access, and completion. To meet the rising economic demand for degree holders and to close poverty gaps, decision makers will need to make meaningful strides toward meeting the educational needs of the SELA community.

This policy framework builds on the voices and perspectives of SELA parents, students, faculty, and community leaders focused on creating a strong higher education pipeline for the SELA community. We highlight six policy values that are centered on the success of SELA students and offer policy recommendations to advance each policy value. These values were selected based on a qualitative analysis of listening sessions with diverse stakeholders in SELA.

While the content of this framework was created before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we uphold these policy values with even more urgency in order to ensure this crisis does not derail the progress of our students. The policy values, recommended priorities, and policy recommendations were finalized with considerations of how higher education initiatives and institutions could play a role in the economic and academic recovery of students.

¹https://laist.com/2019/08/15/lausd_graduation_rates_hit_all-time_high_state_of_schools.php

POLICY FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

An overview of the 2020-2022 Higher Education Policy Framework can be found in the following summary table which includes the policy values, priorities, and recommendations at the local and state level. Each component of this overview is a result of the community conversations that were held with diverse stakeholders in Southeast Los Angeles:

POLICY VALUE	RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>1 MAINTAIN AND ENSURE COLLEGE IS FINANCIALLY ACCESSIBLE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare students and families for the financial aid application process to ensure that they are no longer intimidated or confused by the process. • Increase and improve the college counselor-to-student ratio for high schools in Southeast Los Angeles to support and assist students in accessing financial aid information. • Increase awareness of the importance of public investments, such as local and state resources. • Ensure state and local higher education systems partner with K-12 entities and families to design a more student-centered approach to financial aid opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form is a requirement for graduating seniors. • Increasing access to the general funds and requiring less documentation for specialized* populations while completing financial aid forms. <i>* State and federal issue</i> • Increase training opportunities for counselors, teachers, or staff that know how to adequately complete the application. This could include but would not be limited to increased partnerships with college readiness nonprofits and/or financial aid/outreach to people on higher ed campuses. • Increasing the presence of the California Student Opportunity and Access Program (Cal-SOAP) in Southeast Los Angeles schools. • Support advocacy for state financial aid reform of the Cal Grant system & regional efforts to strengthen and expand Promise Program Partnerships.



POLICY VALUE	RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>2 PRIORITY PREPAREDNESS FOR FIRST- GENERATION STUDENTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase parent and family involvement in the college application process to help them understand the importance of college. • Ensure high school students have the option to meet the admissions requirements for California’s public colleges and universities. • Improve and develop partnerships between K-12 school districts and local colleges/universities to promote access to higher education pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of college counselors in Southeast Los Angeles to improve the counselor-to-student ratio. • Advocate for the implementation of the Realizing the Promise for All: Close the Gap by 2023 resolution in LAUSD to improve key outcomes for high needs youth across the educational pipeline. • Make the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) exams more accessible for all high school students by offering these tests for free and during the school day. <i>*The University of California and California State University suspended the SAT/ACT requirements for 2021 applicants.</i> • Expand the partnerships between K-12 schools and the local community colleges to increase the number of dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment programs.
<p>3 INCREASE COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS SUPPORT OPTIONS IN HIGH SCHOOL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment. • Increase access to public and non-profit college and career readiness in Southeast Los Angeles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase financial aid workshops in high schools. • Increase the number of higher education partners in Southeast Los Angeles such as the Neighborhood Academic Initiative offered by the University of Southern California (USC).

POLICY VALUE	RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES	STRATEGIES & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>4 STRENGTHEN POST-SECONDARY SUPPORT OPTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure students have access to programs that aim to improve their executive-functioning skills; these programs should prepare students for the compounding and unique workloads of Latino students in a college environment. • Provide students effective, evidence-based programs that aim to improve the socio-emotional and social well-being of students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish first-year experiences and cohort-based programming for first-generation students that provide opportunities for students and their families to familiarize themselves with the college campus.
<p>5 CREATE A SELA COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase college awareness programming (i.e., FACTOR) in K-6 that includes parents' understanding of the higher systems, financial aid, and admissions. • Engage families early in their children's academic careers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop partnerships between K-8 and higher ed institutions located near SELA.
<p>6 PRIORITIZE CAREER READINESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of career options and requirements to enter various fields through career technical education. • Develop partnerships to further workforce development opportunities in SELA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding of majoring career goals. • Increased understanding of job sector projections and average salaries. • Develop stronger partnerships between SELA high schools and ELAC or community colleges.

DATA OVERVIEW: SOUTHEAST LOS ANGELES

In Southeast Los Angeles, only 6.51% of residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher². However, the number of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in schools in 2018 was 40.32% which is an increase of over 10 percent from 2010³. This demonstrates that there is an increased college enrollment of young adults in Southeast Los Angeles over the past decade. The percentage of SELA residents completing high school has remained consistent over the last decade, going from 23.14% of SELA residents 25 years and over to 23.5% securing a high school degree⁴. However, educational disparities continue to exist in the region. Just over 82% and 78% of California and L.A. County residents, respectively, have attained a high school degree or higher, compared to a little over 50% of SELA residents. The disparity is even wider when it comes to higher education: nearly 7% of SELA residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31.2% and 32.6% of L.A. County and California residents, respectively. In addition, students in K-12 public schools in SELA are not meeting standards on statewide proficiency exams in English and Math, with 70% of Asian students and 60% of White students performing on grade level in English language arts and mathematics, respectively, and for Latina/o students, only 40% and 30%, respectively.



POLICY VALUE #1

MAINTAIN AND ENSURE COLLEGE IS FINANCIALLY ACCESSIBLE

Maintaining and ensuring college affordability for students in Southeast Los Angeles provides a clear and comprehensive option for more access to post secondary pathways. Through the community conversations that were held with diverse stakeholders, it is clear that students are not prepared nor well informed for college and the financial aid application process. The participants of the listening sessions identified the financial aid application process for colleges to be long, intimidating, and confusing for both students and parents.

Furthermore, some of the common challenges identified in accessing and understanding the financial aid process include: mistrust from parents to provide sensitive information (tax returns and Social Security Numbers), language barriers, and the digital divide. First-generation families who have never experienced the financial aid process may view sharing sensitive information as untrustworthy. Unfortunately, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), California DREAM Act, scholarships, and other financial aid opportunities requires access to a computer and the Internet and that is not feasible for many SELA residents. The USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) found that 36% of Latinos who attend K-12 schools lack a computer and high-speed Internet in LA County⁵.

The last main takeaway from our listening session found that the counselor-to-student ratio is disproportionate in high schools, which leads to the lack of support and assistance for students to access critical information such as the financial aid process and scholarship opportunities. In the 2018-19 academic year, there were estimates that high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District ranged from one counselor to 690-890 students. Although there are efforts by the school district to increase the number of high school counselors for the next three academic years, the current climate indicates that students are not receiving adequate support.

² The USC Price Center for Social Innovation - Neighborhood Data for Social Change. Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (Table 1)

³ The USC Price Center for Social Innovation - Neighborhood Data for Social Change. Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (Table 2)

⁴ http://selacollab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SELA_Collab_Policy_Agenda_Final-pages.pdf

⁵ https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/COVID_04.pdf



POLICY VALUE #2

PRIORITIZE PREPAREDNESS FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Prioritizing student preparedness efforts for first-generation students in Southeast Los Angeles is necessary to ensure a higher number of students attend and graduate from college. Students who have more access to Advanced Placement courses and college preparatory courses are more likely to be prepared for the rigors of a college environment. Fortunately, all 21 SELA high schools are preparing more students to apply to four-year state colleges and universities compared to other high schools in California. Through the community conversations that were held with diverse stakeholders, it is clear that understanding the importance of college is essential for students' success and college preparedness.

The participants of the listening sessions also identified the importance of including parents and family members in the conversations between students and counselors in order to access post secondary opportunities. Engaging in an inclusive approach to college preparedness efforts will provide more familial and community ownership of ensuring students access post secondary opportunities. Furthermore, the participants shared that increasing and improving communication between the counselor and students will better clarify the difference between selecting a major and a career to help students with proper higher education pathways.

The last main takeaway from our listening session found that not enough high school senior students are meeting the college admissions requirements necessary to be eligible for the California State University or University of California schools. In the 2018-19 academic year, one-third of Southeast Los Angeles' Latino students were not meeting the eligibility requirements for California's public colleges and universities. Furthermore, participants shared that the K-12 institutions need to improve and develop partnerships with colleges/universities and other community-based organizations to promote access to higher education and have students college and career ready. An example of this type of partnership exists with GO East Los Angeles, which is a partnership between the Los Angeles Unified School District, East Los Angeles College, and Cal State L.A.



POLICY VALUE #3

INCREASE COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS SUPPORT OPTIONS IN HIGH SCHOOL

Increasing college preparedness support options for students in high school means that students have the option to access high-quality dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment programs that aim to supplement their learning experience with college credit courses. Research shows that high school students that complete at least one college class could significantly increase their chances of attending college and eventually graduating. Research also shows that low-income students are more likely to benefit from participating in dual enrollment programs by increasing their college degree attainment rates.

Through the community conversations that were held with diverse stakeholders, it is clear that there needs to be more access to dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment programs that provide college credit courses to students in Southeast Los Angeles. One of the concrete ways that high schools in SELA can provide these programs is to develop partnerships with higher educational institutions located near their community. The Los Angeles Unified School District should play a key role in cultivating these partnerships with existing relationships with community colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District.



POLICY VALUE #4

STRENGTHEN POST-SECONDARY SUPPORT OPTIONS

Strengthening post-secondary programs and resources for first-generation students provides critical supplemental supports that aim to improve students' academic success and achieve college graduation. In 2018, there are 40.32% of young adults in Southeast Los Angeles between the ages of 18 and 24 enrolled in schools; however, less than 7% of current residents over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree. There is a growing momentum of students who are on the upward trajectory of redefining college success for residents in SELA.

The participants of the listening sessions identified the following barriers that prevent college students from matriculating through college: financial concerns, family commitments, personal guilt of attending college, lack of social support on campus, lack of family programs, and fear of punishment for self-advocacy. The college journey for first-generation students encompasses many compounding challenges and barriers that prevent them from succeeding in a typical academic environment. Many students work part-time jobs and have family commitments that prevent them from focusing their entire energy on engaging academic courses.

The last main takeaway from our listening session found that students face a mixture of socio-emotional and social challenges that college campuses may not address for all students. For example, one of the college student participants shared that they were very intimidated by asking for academic help because they lacked mentors, lacked access to a familiar network, and feared that they would be judged. Furthermore, the student participants shared that they are expected to speak up and build relationships with peers and professors in college; however, they felt that they were reprimanded or punished in high school for speaking up. The students shared that they need a social skills training that prepares them for the essential non-academic factors of a college environment that are necessary to graduate from school. This has also raised the need to increase the hiring of faculty and administrators of color into higher education institutions.



POLICY VALUE #5

CREATE A SELA COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

Creating a college-going culture for communities in Southeast Los Angeles is necessary to increase college awareness for more families and students. Developing and implementing college awareness programming in elementary schools will provide an opportunity for families and students to be exposed to information that is needed to explore and navigate college pathways. Schools that implement a college-going culture in early education provides students and families the proper tools to access post-secondary opportunities. Research shows that students of color in low-socioeconomic backgrounds may benefit from a schoolwide culture of engaged learning that is rigorous, meaningful, and infused throughout school.

Through the community conversations that were held with diverse stakeholders, it is clear that there needs to be access to more programs that promote a college-going culture and provide students proper guidance. One of the concrete ways that schools in Southeast Los Angeles can develop a college-going culture for students is to develop partnerships between K-8 and higher educational institutions located near their community. Creating enrichment programs that expose elementary and middle school students to college environments can build connections for students and provide them opportunities to familiarize themselves with college processes.



POLICY VALUE #6

PRIORITIZE CAREER READINESS

Prioritizing career readiness programs and initiatives in Southeast Los Angeles is necessary to increase the awareness of career options and requirements for students. Providing career and technical education (CTE) programs to high school students will expand workforce development opportunities by offering career-specific skills in a variety of occupations. A report from The Manufacturing Institute finds that, “63 percent of students enrolled in CTE courses view their own interests and experiences as a major influence in their career pathway.” Based on the community discussions we had with our stakeholders, high schools need to develop strong partnerships with local community colleges to help guide students identify careers that reflect their own interests and experiences.

TABLE 1 | COLLEGE GRADUATION RATE

THE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION AGES 25 AND OLDER WHO HAVE A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION

The percentage of the population ages 25 and older who have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education

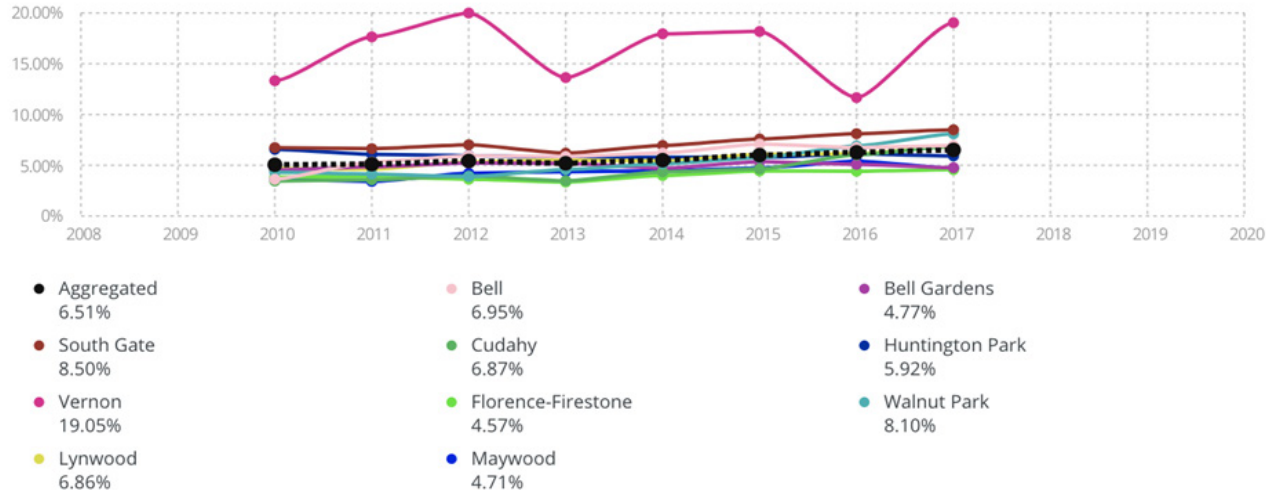
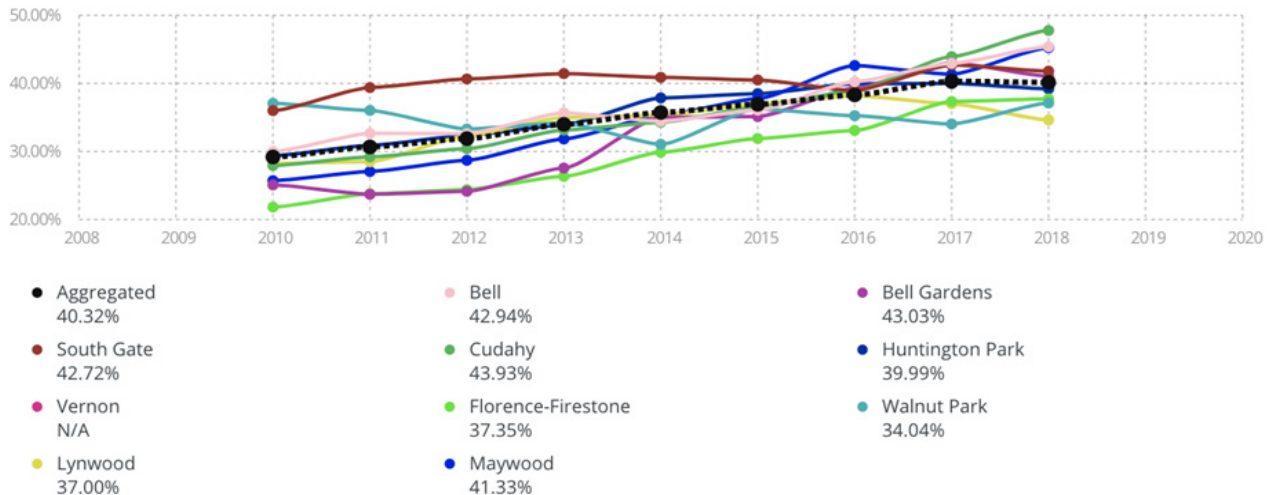


TABLE 2 | YOUNG ADULTS ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

THE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 24 ENROLLED IN PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SCHOOL

Individuals enrolled in vocational and trade schools are not included in this percentage.





Alliance for a Better Community is advancing social, economic, racial equity and justice for the Latino community and the Los Angeles region through power building and policy advocacy.

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