

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COUNTIES

CAREER EDUCATION

Impact Report | 2025



TRANSFORMING CALIFORNIA'S WORKFORCE WITH INVESTMENTS IN CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Impacts of the Strong Workforce Program
in San Diego & Imperial Counties

**Empowering Students.
Strengthening Communities.
Driving Economic Growth.**

sdiregionalconsortium.org



“After witnessing an accident as a child, I knew I wanted to make a difference between someone’s life and death. The San Diego Miramar College Fire Academy has a great fire science program, and I was eager to be part of the next generation of firefighters. One thing that surprised me was the financial aid support—it made school possible for me. The staff and administration kept me motivated, and I love knowing I’m getting the same quality education as any other college.”

*Carlos Andres Barajas, Student
Public Safety & Government*

“After high school, I was unsure of my path and took a job in fast food. As I moved up in management, I realized it wasn’t what I wanted long-term. It wasn’t until I started working with children that I found my passion. Going back to school felt daunting, but community college welcomed me from day one. Taking that first step was the hardest part, but it changed everything.”

*Vianey Vilchis Sanchez, Student
Education & Human Development*

REGIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS: BY THE NUMBERS

Since the inception of the Strong Workforce Program (SWP)—a California initiative that invests annually in Career Technical Education (CTE) throughout the state—the San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium has strategically leveraged SWP funds to expand and improve CTE in California’s southern border region. Focusing on data-driven outcomes, the Regional Consortium collaborates with educators, industry partners, economic/workforce developers, and community organizations to respond to employers’ workforce needs and enhance student access, support, and success.

\$80M+

invested in CTE-related initiatives
and programs

551

CTE programs developed in response to
industry feedback and labor market data

4,937

employers served

315+

entrepreneurs developed

23,000+

work-based learning
opportunities created annually

95,212

CTE students
served annually

649

faculty trained in data-driven,
inclusive teaching and counseling

200+

courses approved for
Credit-for-Prior Learning

INVESTING IN CTE IS INVESTING IN CALIFORNIA'S EMPLOYERS



The Regional Consortium and San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges have fostered meaningful connections between employers and students through Career Technical Education (CTE) investments such as the Strong Workforce Program (SWP).

At San Diego Mesa College and MiraCosta College alone, over 23,000 students participate annually in work-based learning (WBL) activities, ranging from internships and job shadowing to mock interviews and classroom projects with industry professionals.

San Diego College of Continuing Education, Cuyamaca College, Grossmont College, and San Diego City College embedded WBL into curriculum design by integrating career services into courses. Similar efforts at Southwestern College **doubled job applications submitted by students, increasing from 6,000 to 12,000 in a single year.**

Imperial Valley College and Palomar College co-located

career services and WBL teams

within a centralized career center, offering students seamless access to career counseling, internships, and work experiences.

San Diego Community College District (SDCCD) also developed the first SG21 Reporting Framework in the state, enabling colleges to track students' WBL activities and evaluate their impact: **WBL eliminates equity gaps, with students from all demographics who have WBL experiences achieving similar success rates.**

“The colleges have been able to track students’ work-based learning opportunities and evaluate that WBL eliminates equity gaps: All students who have WBL experiences achieve similar success rates as their peers.”

Tina Ngo Bartel, Executive Director, San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence

Offering work-based learning to students would not have been possible without **partnerships with nearly 5,000 employers.** To name a few:

AALL CARE In-Home Services
 Able-Disabled Advocacy
 Aerotek
 Alpine Special Treatment Center, Inc.
 American Lithium Energy
 Aquillius
 Aveanna Healthcare
 Biocom California Institute
 Brain Balance
 BrightStar Care
 Burnham Center for Community Advancement
 California State University San Marcos
 Care Choice Health Systems, Inc.
 Chicano Federation of San Diego County
 City of San Diego
 CMTC Manufacturing Resource Network
 Coastal Farms
 County of San Diego
 Darlington Marketing
 Dr. Bronner’s Soap
 East County EDC
 Encinitas Chamber of Commerce
 EnergySource Minerals
 Foot Solutions Encinitas
 Franklin Energy
 Gafcon
 Genentech

General Dynamics NASSCO
 Grossmont Union High School District
 Hidalgo Consulting
 Hudson Ranch Power
 Hyatt Hotels Corporation
 Imperial County Office of Education
 Imperial County Workforce Development Board
 Imperial Regional Alliance
 Imperial Valley EDC
 Intesa Communications Group
 MAAC
 Maxim Healthcare Services
 MilliporeSigma
 Mor Furniture for Less, Inc.
 National University
 North County EDC
 North San Diego Business Chamber
 Northrop Grumman
 Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems
 Ormat Nevada, Inc.
 PKL Services, Inc.
 Port of San Diego
 Positive Behavior Supports Corp.
 Proficio
 ResMed
 RICK Engineering Company
 Sage Business & Education, LLC

San Diego County Office of Education
 San Diego Equality Business Association
 San Diego Gas & Electric
 SD Regional East County Chamber of Commerce
 San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation
 San Diego State University
 San Diego Workforce Partnership
 Scripps Research Translational Institute
 Silverado Hospice San Diego
 Smith Group
 Society of Women Engineers, San Diego
 Solar Turbines, A Caterpillar Company
 South County EDC
 Subaru
 Sun Valley Research Center, Inc.
 SWF Partners, LLC
 Taylor Guitars
 The Westin, San Diego Bayview
 ThermoFisher
 Toyota
 Turner Construction Company
 USS Midway Museum
 Viejas Casino & Resort
 WorkforceConnect



PILOT INNOVATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The San Diego & Imperial region has developed 551 CTE programs since the Strong Workforce Program's inception, creating talent pipelines for high-demand industries.

In manufacturing, MiraCosta College used SWP funds to help launch the nation's first community college biomanufacturing bachelor's degree program. **The program graduates 20 students annually, with nearly 100 alumni placed at 60 biotechnology companies.** These achievements attracted additional investments,

doubling program capacity and enabling the construction of a state-of-the-art biotech facility with chemistry and biochemistry labs. Similarly,

Imperial Valley College (IVC) leveraged SWP funds to support its Lithium Industry Force Training (LIFT) program with advanced manufacturing equipment.

These investments secured partnerships with major companies such as Berkshire Hathaway Energy Renewables, positioning IVC as the primary training hub for Lithium Valley.¹

Additionally, the Regional Consortium helped San Diego College of Continuing Education secure a \$1.175 million U.S. Navy grant to expand its welding program, further supporting workforce development efforts.

In transportation, Cuyamaca College and San Diego Miramar College modernized their automotive programs by acquiring electric vehicles (EVs) and upgrading equipment such as EV-compatible lifts. These enhancements attracted partnerships with dealerships eager to hire skilled EV technicians, including General Motors, Honda, Subaru, and Volvo. Updating equipment to industry standards also revitalized San Diego City College's HVAC² and electricity programs, **boosting enrollment from 15 to 75 students per semester.** Similarly, Southwestern College's revamped logistics program saw a **72% increase in completions** after transitioning to stackable certificates in supply chain management.

These innovations have enabled colleges to secure additional resources, such as \$3.1 million in California Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI) grants, ensuring sustainability and growth.

¹ lithiumvalley.imperialcounty.org

² Heating, ventilation and air conditioning



DEVELOP ENTREPRENEURS FROM DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

SWP empowered the regional colleges to support aspiring entrepreneurs by establishing entrepreneurship centers and startup incubators. At San Diego Miramar College, the **Regional Entrepreneurship Center (REC) Innovation Lab** has become a hub for entrepreneurial development, especially for underserved communities. REC participants receive one-on-one mentoring, seed funding, and access to pro bono legal, technical, and marketing support from employers who donate their time, equipment, and expertise. Similarly, the **Small Business Virtual Incubator (SBVI)** at San Diego Mesa College enables students to pursue their entrepreneurial goals from anywhere, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. **Together, these two programs supported more than 315 students in launching ventures across diverse industries, from agriculture to high-tech startups.** Participants also have the opportunity to showcase their ideas in a pitch competition judged by industry leaders and investors.

"I followed the presentation directions quite literally and created a pitch deck with an investment ask at the end. I made a joke ... and said, 'If anyone has some money burning a hole in their pocket, come see me.' ...However, after the presentation, I had 2 people approach me asking if I was serious about looking for investors, as they are interested in investing in Foot Kinetics."

Sammie Bradley, Foot Kinetics



DISMANTLE SILOS AND SCALE DATA-DRIVEN, INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

649 instructors and counselors collaborated with researchers and learned how to close equity gaps by examining student outcomes data.

The Regional Consortium partnered with all 10 San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges to recruit 649 instructors and counselors for SWP-funded professional development programs such as the Strong Workforce Faculty Institute and Counselor Institute. These programs empower instructors, counselors, and researchers to collaborate and use data to close equity gaps and improve student outcomes. CTE research experts create dashboards, help faculty interpret data, and guide them in identifying disproportionate outcomes in courses and support services. For the first time, counselors examined how student support services impact enrollment, retention, and completion. MiraCosta College and Palomar College amplified the Institutes' impact by empowering program completers to serve as data coaches. These coaches play a key role in campus-wide initiatives such as Guided Pathways, embedding data-driven, inclusive practices through a sustainable train-the-trainer model.

“Regional Strong Workforce funds helped break down silos at our local institutions. The natural state of affairs lends itself to working in silos (academic affairs, student services) and these investments required us to do things differently. Innovative change cannot occur in isolation. We started thinking differently...about who we should have at the table to make things better for all our students. The Regional Consortium has been instrumental over the past few years in driving collaboration across our campuses.”

*Jennifer Lewis, Dean, School of Applied Technology, Hospitality Management & Workforce Development
Southwestern College*

RECOGNIZE PRIOR LEARNING TO REDUCE COSTS AND COMPLETION TIME

SWP funds established Palomar College as the state leader in Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), with over 200 courses eligible for CPL.

By enabling students to earn academic credit for prior professional, military, or life experiences, Credit for Prior Learning reduces both the time and cost of degree completion. Palomar College also developed CPL training resources, now hosted in the Chancellor's Office Vision Resource Center for statewide implementation.

MiraCosta College, Southwestern College, and Grossmont College used SWP funds to build CPL infrastructure, raise awareness, and provide professional development for faculty and staff. At San Diego City College, CPL usage has grown exponentially, particularly among veterans and adult learners. These regional efforts validate students' existing skills, remove barriers to completion, and create affordable, equitable pathways for nontraditional learners to achieve their educational and career goals.

“We couldn't have done this without regional SWP investments in CTE.”

Representatives from each of the 10 San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges

OPTIMIZE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The region launched careered.org, a program finder featuring 1,494 CTE programs across K12, adult education, and community colleges.

San Diego College of Continuing Education, San Diego City College, and San Diego Mesa College complemented this initiative with culturally relevant videos, brochures, and targeted marketing campaigns aimed at communities previously unaware of CTE programs aligned with labor market demand. Imperial Valley College experienced **double-digit enrollment growth** as a result of these efforts.

At MiraCosta College, the concierge model revolutionized the matriculation process, **connecting over 1,000 prospective students to pathway programs**. Integrated with a customer relationship management (CRM) system, the concierge service simplifies complex processes such as registration and onboarding, ensuring students receive timely support to overcome challenges. To support students in balancing work, life, and school, Cuyamaca College conducted student surveys and **adjusted course offerings to better align with students' schedules**.

A CALL TO ACTION: WHY CONTINUED FUNDING MATTERS

“As stewards of the Strong Workforce Program on behalf of the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, we are aligned with the Vision 2030 roadmap to prioritize data-driven practices that advance equity in access, support, and success for every learner. By removing barriers, tailoring support to students’ needs, and strengthening academic and career pathways, we help learners achieve meaningful workforce outcomes while fostering social and economic mobility. SWP funding and CTE programs play pivotal roles in preparing students for successful careers and lifetime socio-economic success. CTE programs address critical labor market needs, create pathways to prosperity, and drive economic growth across California. By bridging education and industry, SWP and CTE initiatives are vital to building a more equitable future for all. Sustained SWP funding empowers students, strengthens the regional workforce, and fuels community economic progress. Together, we can create a stronger, more inclusive California.”

*Danene Brown, Regional Chair
San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium*

“Life was hectic—I was raising five kids alone while working as a McDonald’s manager. I wanted a better future for my family, so I went back to school. Miramar College offered night classes, allowing me to care for my kids during the day. The biotech program was intense, but earning my certification wasn’t just about a piece of paper—it gave me the opportunity to pursue my passion. After graduation, I landed a job in biotech based on my program experience. Now, my kids proudly tell their teachers, ‘My mom’s a scientist.’ Providing for them is the most rewarding part.”

Tracy Naputi, Student, Life Sciences & Biotechnology

“I love that college offers industry-standard equipment and hands-on learning. It makes all the difference. Some people go to school just to get a job, but for me, college is a place to explore my creativity. The possibilities feel endless.”

*Javi Moreno, Student
Information & Communication Technologies (ICT)
& Digital Media*



ABOUT THE SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES REGIONAL CONSORTIUM

With our equity-centered mission, the San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium is committed to advancing the social and economic mobility of individuals and their families. By supporting innovative, high-quality career education or career technical education (CE/CTE) programs, we empower adults to access “more and better” economic opportunities in our region. These efforts are driven by strong partnerships within a robust workforce ecosystem, including educators, workforce development agencies, industry leaders, and community-based organizations. Together, we prepare, sustain, and strengthen a highly skilled workforce while building the capacity of the region’s community colleges to meet the evolving demands of our local economy.

The San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium represents 10 community colleges serving California’s southern border region: Cuyamaca College, Grossmont College, Imperial Valley College, MiraCosta College, Palomar College, San Diego City College, San Diego College of Continuing Education, San Diego Mesa College, San Diego Miramar College, and Southwestern College. Our collective efforts reflect the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Vision 2030 roadmap to advance equity via success, access, and support for every learner. Our goals include building college capacity to create systemic change and close equity gaps; unifying the workforce ecosystem; and advocating for equitable changes to policy, processes, and practices.

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