
The Inland Empire's Neglected Majority

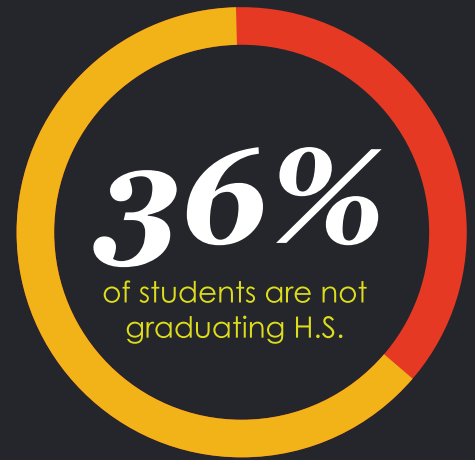
By The Numbers

This article quantifies the educational attainment and gainful employment for residents of the Inland Empire, the 12th most populous metropolitan area in the United States.

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But, let's examine the local reality with facts about our educational system to determine:

1. How many of our students are actually enrolling directly into college
2. How many complete a baccalaureate education
3. How many receive commensurate employment after graduation.



Between 2000 – 2008 in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, 64% of all high school students who began as freshman graduated within four years.¹ So right off the bat, we can assume that 36% of our region's students are not graduating from high school and are not enrolling directly into the university. They are either incarcerated, remain unemployed, or immediately join the local workforce.

From the 64% of students mentioned above that graduated from high school in the Inland Empire in 2008, 40% directly enrolled in a public or private college or university in California.² The remaining high school graduates (60% of the graduating class) did not continue on to higher education. Presumably, they either moved out of state or sought employment with whatever career-readiness skills they garnered in high school.

Now, if we calculate the college-going rate based on the total number of ninth graders that started high school in the Inland Empire, it ends up being 26%. So, we know that, on average, only 26% of the youth in Inland Empire will directly enroll in college after high school. Stated another way, 74% of ninth graders are not college bound – at least not right away. This might be a little shocking considering all the attention given to enrolling in universities, but this is fairly normal compared to other regions in the state. This 74%, the “neglected majority,” needs alternatives to the “college prep” curriculum, A-G requirements, and “one way to win” mentality.³

1. California Postsecondary Education Commission, Public High School Graduation Rates, Inland Empire Region

2. California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2007 College-Going Rates, Inland Empire; and Custom Data Report: 2008 Enrollment – Private & Public Institution Freshmen College going Counts, from Inland Empire High Schools.

3. Parnell, D. (1985). *The Neglected Majority*. Washington D.C: The Community College Press.



Yet, just applying and getting into college isn't the end goal (at least it shouldn't be).

Research shows that many teens are simply not ready for college right after high school. For many students, college may be the right answer, but right after high school may not be the right time. Many are not adequately prepared, emotionally or intellectually equipped, or occupationally focused to succeed. Many students stop attending classes for personal, family, medical or other reasons.

Throughout California, we know that 62% of full-time college freshmen complete a bachelor's degree within six years.⁴ This means that among the 26% of ninth graders in the Inland Empire, only 16% will complete their bachelor's degree. Thus, the reality of our regional educational attainment is that only a small portion (16%) of the ninth graders in Inland Empire high schools will graduate from high school, enroll in college, and graduate with a bachelor's degree within 6 years. Only after these few graduate do many of them start exploring careers. It is here that many discover that their degree may not have prepared them for the world of work. You may be well educated, but not every degree is direct preparation for employment.

There's one more nuance we have to consider. The federal departments of education and labor report that there are 57 predicted jobs requiring a 4-year degree for every 100 people who earn one.⁵ This misalignment between degrees and job skills causes 43% of university graduates to be under-employed in "gray-collar jobs" taking positions that do not require the education they have received, earning less than expected, while trying to pay down their student loan debt. Conventional wisdom suggests that a university degree guarantees a higher salary. But with rising education costs, a shrinking job market, and the oversaturation of some academic majors in the workforce, this old advice is now a myth for a majority of students.

So, if we return to our ninth graders in the Inland Empire, for every 100 in our high schools, 16 will graduate with a bachelor's degree, and of those, 7 will be underemployed, and only 9 will secure commensurate employment after graduating from college.⁶ Yes, only 9% of our local ninth graders will win the "one way to win" game that our culture perpetuates. Yet there are high paying, technical jobs going unfilled which require a 1-year certificate or 2-year degree.⁷

4. Shulock, N. (February, 2009). The Grades Are in 2008: Is California Higher Education Measuring Up?, Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy.

5. Federal Departments of Education and Labor, as cited in Gray, K., & Herr, E. (2006). Other Ways to Win: Creating Alternatives for High School Graduates. Corwin Press.

6. Interestingly, this is on par with the national figure of 10%.

7. USA Today. (August 8, 2012). No college degree required for these \$100,000 jobs. www.CNBC.com

Our world has changed, and in this new economy, the university degree is no longer the guaranteed path towards financial success as it was for previous generations. And even if you do earn one, that education alone may not be enough. In today's highly-technical knowledge economy, having hands-on skills and perfecting what you are good at can be more valuable than getting a degree in 'something' simply to get one. Employers want to know what you can do, and what you can do well; not just what degree hangs on your wall.

There is no silver bullet or magic solution to address the neglected majority in the Inland Empire. What these numbers do illustrate, however, is:

- We should always promote open access and provide the opportunity for students to fulfill their highest potential, but to delude ourselves into believing that everyone has the ability and desire to be successful in the university right after high school (at the expense of those that do not enroll) is simply not logical.
- Let's shift our paradigm about preparing all children for the university. Most high school counselors, administrators and school boards assert that all students will go to the university and they promote a "one size fits all" approach to college-prep high school curriculum. But, all this achieves is setting up 74% of ninth graders for failure while starving them of the tools they need to be successful in the workforce.
- "College-prep" and Career & Technical Education are in fact complementary, not competing, goals. The Tech Prep approach (also called a 2+2 pathway) is one state-led structure that provides both the academic rigor and technical preparation required for our students to be successful in the 21st century workplace. Both community colleges and high schools should embrace both the "college-ready" and "career-ready" approach by investing in strong career & technical education programs articulated with local colleges.
- We do not adequately prepare the 74% of ninth graders that will directly enter the workforce with work-readiness skills. We have stripped most schools of vocational programs - and where they are present, these career and technical education courses are chronically underfunded.
- We need to educate counselors, parents and students about the realities of a 4-year degree. Just getting in is not the goal; as only 62% of those enrolled will complete their degree. Just graduating with a bachelor's degree is also not the end goal; as 43% of college graduates are underemployed. Rather, we should be focused on ensuring that those who enroll in college both graduate and find commensurate employment. This requires directing students into fields that not only have projected openings and require highly technical skills; but they must also be aligned with the individual student's abilities and interests.
- Community colleges are in the ideal position to provide over 70% of tomorrow's workforce with an education combined with applied technical skills, industry driven credentials, and specific preparation for employment.

We should not simply direct our youth to get a 4-year degree in “something” with false pretenses and unrealistic expectations that it will lead to success. The obtainment of a 4-year degree is no longer the golden ticket to financial success that it once was. Associate Degrees with skills and industry certifications are the new currency.

THE FATE OF 100 9TH GRADERS IN THE INLAND EMPIRE



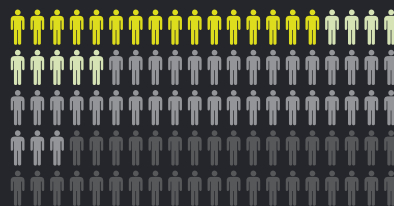
36 DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL



38 GRADUATE AND GO STRAIGHT TO WORK



16 GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE



7 GRADUATE BUT ARE UNDEREMPLOYED



9 WIN THE “ONE WAY TO WIN” GAME AND SECURE COMMENSURATE EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATING FROM COLLEGE.

91 DON'T

