




FOR LABOR MARKET RESEARCH
SOUTH CENTRAL COAST

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An aerial photograph showing a vast landscape with rolling hills, a major highway with multiple lanes, and a large campus with several buildings and sports fields. The sky is blue with wispy clouds.

Strategies to Close Equity Gaps

in the South Central Coast Region

POWERED BY



California
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• Executive Summary

The South Central Coast Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research (SCC COE) prepared this report to expand on previous research that identified top jobs and equity gaps related to those jobs throughout the South Central Coast Region. The SCC COE's *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment* identified three significant equity gaps:

- Hispanic or Latino workers are underrepresented in high-paying jobs.
- Women are underrepresented in skilled trades occupations and programs.
- Men are underrepresented in health occupations and programs.

These gaps were selected for additional analysis due to the high number of Top Jobs in which each group was underrepresented as well as considerations for the percentage of the labor force and student population each group accounts for, substantial gaps related to earnings outcomes, and sector concentration.

To understand the barriers to closing these gaps, and potential strategies to close them, the SCC COE conducted an extensive literature review that culminated in four broad strategies that can address common barriers to success for these underrepresented groups. Exhibit 1 shows these strategies, which barriers they can address, and which groups would be best served by these strategies (as denoted with a check mark).

Exhibit 1: Strategies to Close Equity Gaps in the South Central Coast Region

Strategies to Close the Gap	Barriers to Closing the Gap	Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs	Female Underrepresentation in Skilled Trades	Male Underrepresentation in Health
Alleviate Caregiving Responsibilities and Create Family-Friendly and Inclusive Environments	Caregiving Responsibilities and Familial Obligations	✓	✓	
	Health and Safety		✓	
	Hostile Environments		✓	
	On-the-Job Challenges			✓
Improve Persistence and Retention	Education and Training	✓	✓	
	Recruitment/Retention	✓		✓
Promote Programs and Recruit Underrepresented Groups	Bias, Stereotypes, and Representation	✓	✓	✓
	Recruitment/Retention	✓		
Provide Mentorship and Support	Lack of Role Models		✓	✓
	Recruitment/Retention		✓	✓

“Though this report focuses on closing equity gaps for three underrepresented groups in specific types of jobs and programs, the identified barriers are common challenges for other underrepresented groups... Similarly, the strategies identified can support students and workers from a variety of backgrounds.”



Executive Summary, Continued

Notably, some strategies can be used to address multiple barriers and equity gaps, demonstrating how these strategies can impact multiple underrepresented groups. It is also important to note that a check mark in Exhibit 1 indicates the most ***prominent*** barriers as identified in existing literature and research. These underrepresented groups or individuals that identify with that group may face additional barriers not discussed in this report. Conversely, the absence of a check mark in Exhibit 1 does not mean an underrepresented group would not benefit from the strategy. For example, alleviating childcare responsibilities for all parents, not only women, could benefit single dads. Likewise, mentorship and role models could provide additional support for Hispanic or Latino students and workers.

Though this report focuses on closing equity gaps for three underrepresented groups in specific types of jobs and programs, the identified barriers are common challenges for other underrepresented groups, including Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Native American students and workers. Similarly, the strategies identified can support students and workers from a variety of backgrounds. Regional stakeholders, including community colleges and other educational institutions, can consider using these strategies, as well as the case studies included throughout this report, to address regional equity gaps, leading to improved outcomes and employment for underrepresented individuals in good-paying, high demand jobs throughout the region.

• Introduction

In March 2025, the SCC COE published the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment*, which identified Top Jobs throughout the SCC Region and examined the demographic disparities among workers in these jobs, as well as students in vocational programs designed to prepare them for these roles.¹ To further expand on this research, the goal of this report is to explore potential strategies regional community colleges and other workforce development stakeholders can use to address the equity gaps identified in the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment*.

To identify barriers to closing these gaps and potential strategies to close them, the SCC COE conducted a thorough review of national trends and evidence-based solutions related to underrepresentation in these jobs and educational programs. Regional community colleges and other workforce development stakeholders can use the information in this report to help develop their own local strategies for addressing equity gaps. These strategies can also help address occupational segregation, which can lead to pay inequities, fewer benefits, and higher unemployment rates for underrepresented groups.²

Three major gaps were previously identified:



Hispanic or Latinos workers are significantly underrepresented in **24 Top Jobs** and tend to be underrepresented in **higher-paying Top Jobs**



Women are significantly underrepresented in **23 of the 37 Top Jobs** but only **15 of the 44 Top Job** vocational programs. These jobs and programs are concentrated in traditional trades such as construction, manufacturing, public safety, and transportation.



Male workers are underrepresented in **11 of the 37 Top Jobs** but **17 of the 44 Top Job** vocational programs. These jobs and programs are concentrated in the Health sector.





• Occupational Segregation

Before examining strategies to address equity gaps, it is important to understand the adverse impact underrepresentation in good-paying, in-demand jobs can have on individual workers, the overall labor force, and society as a whole. The concept of occupational segregation, which commonly refers to overrepresentation or underrepresentation of a demographic group in an occupation, originated in the late 1960s, when researcher Edward Gross conducted research that focused on the unequal distribution between men and women in occupations.^{3, 4} Gross found that “there is as much sexual segregation now as there was some sixty years ago...this phenomenon is very persistent, being unaffected by the vast changes (war, depressions) that have affected labor market behavior in so many other ways.”^{4, 5} Though Gross labeled this phenomenon sexual segregation, the idea evolved into occupational segregation, or “the systematic concentration of groups of workers (e.g. women, people of color) in particular jobs.”⁶

While the foundation of occupational segregation is based on sex segregation, it is integral to note that occupational segregation is also related to race and intersects with sex and gender. One study found that from 2017 to 2021, women, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latino workers were more likely to work in lower-wage, occupationally segregated jobs compared to White men.⁷ These trends continue to persist; in 2022, 20% of Black, 19% of Hispanic or Latino, 18% of female workers were paid less than \$15 per hour.⁸

Occupational Segregation, Continued

Impacts of Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation has major impacts on wage gaps and inequality, worker safety, and overall job quality.



Wage Gaps and Inequality

While rates of occupational segregation are at the lowest since the 1950s, **women earned 83% of what their male counterparts earned** in 2023.⁹ Additionally, women who hold a bachelor's degree earn similar wages compared to men who holds associate degree.¹⁰ Furthermore, the well-documented **glass ceiling effect** prevents women and other historically underrepresented groups from advancing to leadership roles that are often higher paying, have decision-making power, and greater autonomy.¹¹

Occupational segregation also contributes to **inequality**, as demographic groups such as women and people of color are continually grouped into **low-paying jobs with lower levels of job security**. For example, jobs with a high concentration of women, such as those in **childcare, education, and health care**, are crucial to society but often have **lower wages**.¹² Low wages for these jobs demonstrate how “women’s work” has been devalued, creating conditions where “women have had more incentive than men to move into gender-nontraditional activities and positions.”¹³ One estimate shows that if **gendered occupational segregation** continues at post-2000s rates, it would take **320 years** to fully integrate and end gender segregation in all occupations.¹⁴



Worker Safety

Though women are employed in male-dominated fields at higher rates than before, **women face unsafe conditions** in fields that are traditionally male-dominated. For example, personal protective equipment (PPE) is often designed for men, resulting in ill-fitting equipment for women and increasing their risk for workplace injuries and musculoskeletal disorders.^{15, 16, 17} Similarly, **overrepresentation of Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American workers** in jobs such as construction laborers, truck drivers, and freight movers, results in those groups having the **highest rate of occupational fatalities** in the country.¹⁸



Job Quality

Job quality refers to characteristics of a job such as **wages, benefits, hours, paid leave, stability, predictable schedules**, and more. **Higher quality jobs** have a high concentration of white men, whereas women, Hispanic or Latino, and Black or African American workers are concentrated in **lower quality jobs**.¹⁹ **Lack of access to employer-sponsored healthcare** and **erratic scheduling** practices can have negative effects on health and wellbeing.²⁰ Additionally, adults with job flexibility and higher job security are less likely to experience anxiety and other psychological distress.²¹

The findings from the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment* are consistent with the trends in occupational segregation discussed in this section. The following sections further explore underrepresentation of specific groups as identified in the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment* and strategies to address these equity gaps.

• Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs

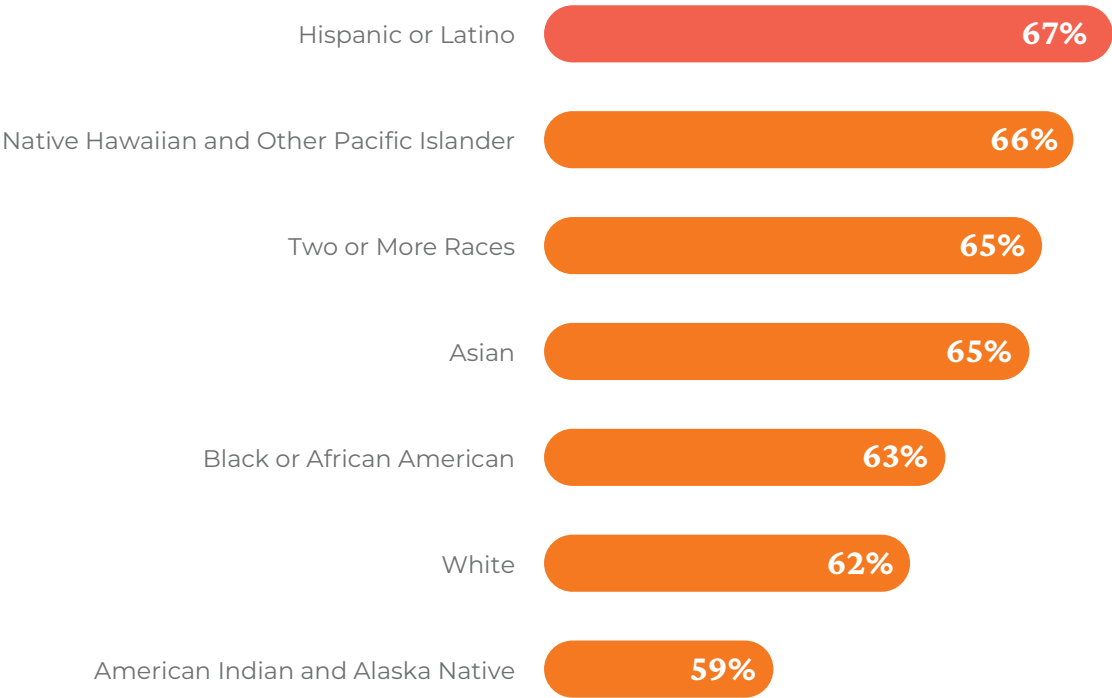
Barriers

Nationally, Hispanics or Latinos comprised nearly 19% of the workforce in 2023, which is aligned with their proportion of the overall population. Hispanic or Latinos also have the highest labor force participation rate (67%) of all race and ethnicity groups in 2023, as shown in Exhibit 2.²²

However, Hispanic or Latino workers are underrepresented in high paying jobs such as management and professional occupations and overrepresented in low paying service occupations.²³ Additionally, Hispanic or Latinos “accounted for only 4 percent of large U.S. companies’ most senior executives in 2021.”²⁴ Similarly, data from the United States Equal Opportunity Commission shows that “10% of managers and just 5% of executive and senior officials in the US workforce identify as Hispanic or Latino.”²⁵

As discussed in the previous section, occupational segregation can sort demographic groups into lower quality jobs, including those with low pay, hazardous working conditions, and poor scheduling practices. For Hispanic or Latino individuals, high representation in low paying jobs leads to unpredictable work schedules, the highest rate of occupational fatality in the country, and greater representation in industries with high rates of minimum wage violations.²⁶

Exhibit 2: National Labor Force Participation Rate by Race and Ethnicity, 2023



Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs, Continued

There are several barriers for Hispanic or Latino employment in higher-paying occupations; these barriers can be grouped into three broad categories:

Bias, Stereotypes, and Representation

- Non-Latinos estimate 33% of Latinos are undocumented, significantly higher than the actual 13% of undocumented Latinos. This perception could pigeonhole Hispanic or Latino individuals into low-level, low-wage positions.²⁷
- Nearly one-quarter of Hispanic employees report discrimination at work; young Hispanic employees reported higher levels of discrimination.²⁸

Caregiving Responsibilities and Familial Obligations

- Hispanic or Latino students are the most likely to report that childcare or other caregiving responsibilities are a major reason they consider dropping out of higher education.²⁹
- As of 2022, there were 1.4 million Latinas that were not working due to family care responsibilities.³⁰

Education and Training

- Though Hispanic or Latino enrollment at postsecondary institutions has doubled in the past 20 years, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino individuals with a bachelor's degree (20%) still lags behind the overall U.S. population (38%).³¹ Higher rates of educational attainment are correlated with lower unemployment rates and higher lifetime earnings.³²
- Hispanic or Latino students are underrepresented in educational programs that lead to employment in high wage jobs, such as those in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).³³
- In 2023, over half of Hispanic college students considered stopping coursework for at least one term.³⁴

The remainder of this section discusses strategies that regional community colleges and other educational institutions can use to address underrepresentation of Hispanic or Latino workers in high-paying jobs.



Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs, Continued



CASE STUDY

College of the Desert EDGE Program

The Engage. Develop. Grow. Empower (EDGE) program consists of a summer bridge component designed to prepare students for college and college-level coursework in math and English, as well as first and second-year comprehensive wrap-around support services to increase success, persistence, and financial support to eliminate barriers.”

As of 2020, the EDGE program has increased the number of first-time college students taking 12 or more units by 61% and students in the program have a “15% higher fall to spring persistence rate” compared to students who are not in the program.

For more information, see: [Engage. Develop. Grow. Empower. \(EDGE\)/pLEDGE Program](#)

Strategies to Close the Gap

Improve Persistence and Retention

Though Hispanic or Latino student enrollment has increased over the last 20 years, particularly at community colleges, persistence, graduation, and transfer rates have remained low.³⁵

Additionally, Hispanic or Latino adults are “less likely to earn degrees in STEM than other degree fields, and they continue to make up a lower share of STEM graduates relative to their share of the adult population.”³⁶

In a qualitative study of 40 Latino students at a college in the Southwest U.S., researchers found that challenges for persistence and retention were related to the high school-to-college transition, financial constraints (even with financial aid), and balancing school and home responsibilities.³⁷

Regional community colleges could consider implementing these strategies, as well as examples from the case studies included throughout this section, to improve Hispanic or Latino student retention, persistence, and completion, particularly in programs that lead to high wage jobs.



Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs, Continued



Exelencia in Education, an organization committed to Latino student success in higher education, has identified evidence-based programs that improve educational achievement for Latinos.

Exelencia in Education identified five ways to support Latino student success³⁸:

1. **Involve Families:** many Latino students are first-generation college students and familial support can increase student success.
2. **Create co-curricular spaces:** workshops or events for Latino students can “promote belonging and connections among learners.”
3. **Make resources bilingual:** resources for families and courses for bilingual students can bridge gaps.
4. **Provide mentorship:** mentors or other peer leaders can help guide students through the complex college process.
5. **Connect to community:** programs that support students’ passions through community engagement “see high levels of success.”

The City Colleges of Chicago School of Engineering
WILBUR WRIGHT COLLEGE
 CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO

CASE STUDY

Engineering Program at Wright College

The Engineering Program at Wright College (EPW) in Chicago aims to expand diversity in engineering by “increasing enrollment, transfer, bachelor’s degree completion, and job placement of underrepresented students, especially Latinos.”

The EPW developed a bridge program to increase competency in math and chemistry and increased partnerships with industry for internships. In the last three years, the EPW has led to Fall-to-Fall retention rates ranging from 93%-96% and the transfer rate for students in the program is 75% within two years.

For more information, see: [Engineering Program at Wright College \(EPW\)](#)



Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in High-Paying Jobs, Continued

Alleviate Caregiving Responsibilities and Create Family-Friendly and Inclusive Environments

As noted above, Hispanic or Latino students are the most likely to report that childcare or other caregiving responsibilities are a major reason they consider dropping out of higher education. According to one study, “student parents spend about 30 hours a week to take care of their dependent children.”³⁹ Other studies have found that on-campus childcare can improve persistence and completion, and yet another study found that student parents that used on-campus childcare centers were more likely to stay in school and had higher graduation and transfer rates than student parents who did not.⁴⁰

Though it is common for higher education institutions to have on-campus childcare centers, “95% of centers at 2- and 4-year colleges across the United States have a waiting list averaging out to 82 children.”⁴¹ Results from a survey of over 600 student parents at a California State University campus showed that 75% of student parents did not feel like they were informed enough about the on-campus childcare program and 66% were hindered by the cost of the program. Approximately 53% said they would appreciate a childcare program with extended hours (7:00 am to 7:00 pm).

The authors of this study recommended establishing a parent resource center to support student parent success, offering more family-friendly events and spaces such as playgroups for children and more lactation rooms, and workshops to support parent student well-being. Regional community colleges could consider these strategies, which would benefit not only Hispanic or Latino students – who are disproportionately impacted by childcare and other caregiving responsibilities – but all student parents on campus. These efforts could also increase access for low-income adults, one of the goals of Vision 2030.⁴²

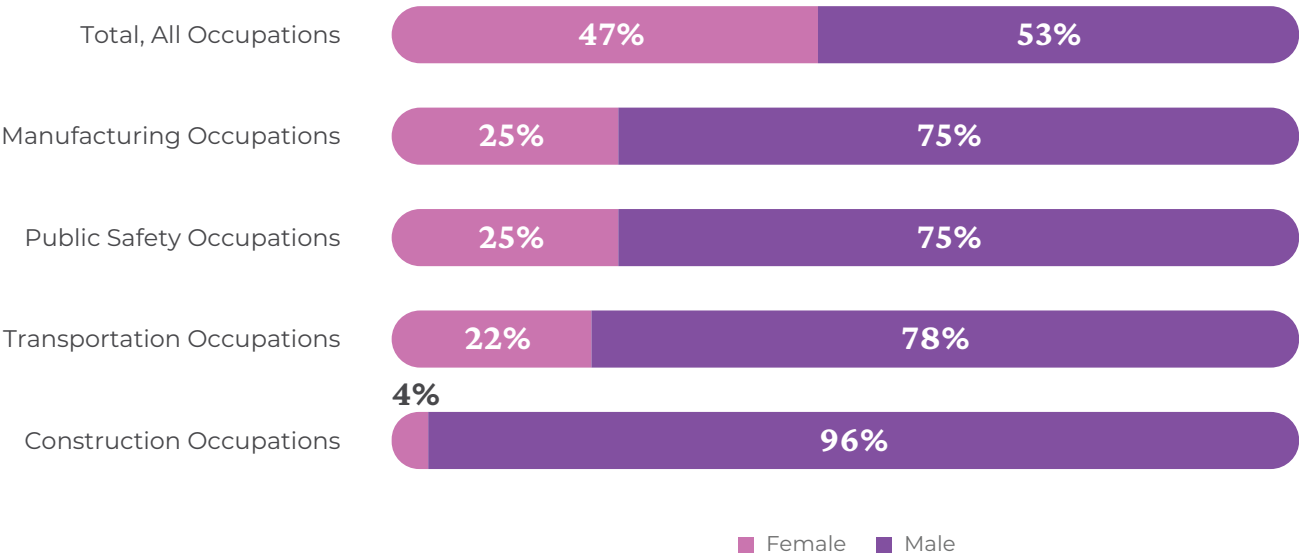


• Female Underrepresentation in Skilled Trades

Barriers

As indicated in the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment*, women are underrepresented in occupations related to construction, manufacturing, public safety, and transportation. Despite women now accounting for 47% of the labor force, women are consistently underrepresented in these four occupational areas, as shown in Exhibit 3.⁴³ Nationally, approximately 47% of employed persons are women. However, women account for only 4% of construction, 25% of manufacturing, 22% of transportation, and 25% of public safety occupations.⁴⁴ Exhibit 3 shows the percentage of women and men in each occupational area throughout the country.

Exhibit 3: National Major Occupational Group Employment by Sex, 2024



Female Underrepresentation in Skilled Trades, Continued

Though women began integrating into these types of jobs during and after World War II, they remain underrepresented and continue to face barriers to entering these occupations, including:

Bias, Stereotypes, and Representation

- Women are often perceived as not strong or capable enough to perform physical work.⁴⁵
- Within policing specifically, women are underrepresented due to historical exclusion and the perception that policing is a hypermasculine job.^{46, 47}

Hostile Environments

- Compared to men, women are more likely to report sexual harassment in industries such as construction (27 times more likely), transportation and warehousing (10 times more likely), and manufacturing (eight times more likely).⁴⁸
- Female firefighters face sexism and higher levels of coworker conflict than their male counterparts.⁴⁹

Health and Safety

- Results from a 2021 survey of female, non-binary, and transgender tradespeople show that less than 20% of respondents were always provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) that fit them.⁵⁰ Without properly fitting PPE, women face on-the-job hazards.⁵¹
- Specifically, within firefighting, “ill-fitting gear is a barrier for women to be successful” and the lack of proper PPE such as ill-fitting boots and self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) masks can also lead to “injuries and an increased exposure to harmful chemicals”.⁵² This is a common challenge and over 65% of women in the firefighting service face this issue of ill-fitting gear.⁵³

Recruitment and Retention

- Results from a survey of women in manufacturing show that harassment and disrespect are the most common reason women want to leave their position.⁵⁴
- Within policing and firefighting, women have limited access to high profile assignments, leading to retention issues.⁵⁵
- Nearly 70% of women with children under 18 who considered leaving their construction job cited childcare as a factor and 63% noted the lack of pregnancy accommodations as a reason for leaving.⁵⁶

Education and Training

- Societal stereotypes that girls are less interested than boys in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects creates disparities from a young age.⁵⁷ In 2018 female US high school students represented only 13% of AP computer science and 29% of AP physics students.⁵⁸
- Within manufacturing, “fewer than one in ten respondents learned about manufacturing opportunities from high school counselors (2.1%)”.⁵⁹
- Women are often unaware of the opportunities that exist in nontraditional programs at community colleges due to a lack of guidance and understanding if they show interest in the programs, leaving them lost on how they can be most successful in the programs.⁶⁰

The remainder of this section discusses strategies that regional community colleges and other educational institutions can use to address underrepresentation of women in construction, manufacturing, public safety, and transportation jobs by focusing on barriers for this population.

Female Underrepresentation in Skilled Trades, Continued

Strategies to Close The Gap

To best target the underrepresentation of women in construction, manufacturing, transportation, and public safety, research focused on emphasizing strategies such as outreach and recruitment, alleviating caregiving responsibilities and creating inclusive environments, and mentorship programs.

Promote Programs and Recruit Girls and Women to Skilled Trades

As noted above, gender stereotypes related to jobs are formed early among girls and boys, creating disparities from a young age and further contributing to occupational segregation. Targeted outreach and engagement could break down these barriers and demonstrate to girls and women that skilled trades are a viable career path, especially considering the demand and good wages for these occupations.

Construction + Community, a non-profit organization based in Berkeley, runs a school-year program for girls grades 9-12 where they learn about construction skills, including working with power tools. This program is free and helps young girls gain hands-on experience in construction and building.⁶¹

Similarly, both Cal Fire and the Ventura County Fire Department run camps targeted to high school-aged girls to show them opportunities in firefighting.^{62, 63} Regional community colleges could consider partnering with these organizations to recruit more young women into existing fire technology programs.



CASE STUDY

Ventura County Fire Department Girls' Fire Camp and CAL Fire Camp Cinder

The Ventura County Fire Department hosts an annual Girls' Fire Camp. The camp is free and includes hands-on activities like hydrant and nozzle checks, hose deployment, rope operations, and more. The camp accepts 30 girls from ages 14-18 and activities are led by professional female firefighters, further demonstrating to girls that they can go into this traditionally male field and inspiring the next generation of female firefighters.

[For more information, see: Ventura County Fire Department Girls' Fire Camp](#)

CAL FIRE runs similar programs throughout the state, including in San Luis Obispo County, for girls age 15-17. According to CAL FIRE, "the mission of Camp Cinder is to provide young women a safe, dynamic, interactive and challenging environment to gain strength, knowledge, and confidence in their ability to excel in the profession of firefighting and beyond."

[For more information, see: Camp Cinder](#)



Female Underrepresentation in Skilled Trades, Continued



CASE STUDY

Cerritos College Ironworkers Program

Cerritos College in Los Angeles County received \$600,000 in ERiCA grant funding for childcare, and another \$300,000 for outreach. Both efforts aim to increase the number of women in building trades. The first round of ERiCA funding was for 2023-2035, but early data suggests this funding is having an impact, with Cerritos College reporting a 40% increase of women enrolled in their ironworkers program since the funding became available.

For more information, see: [To expand appeal, California apprenticeships in construction trades offer child care support](#)



CASE STUDY

Women MAKE America Mentorship Program

The Manufacturing Institute's Women MAKE America mentorship program has a goal to train more than 1,000 female mentors by 2030 and connecting them with young women in the manufacturing industry, as well as students in middle-school, high school and college. According to one mentee, the program "filled a gap in my support system" and contributed to their professional development by teaching them how to get buy-in on new projects.

For more information, see: [Why Female Mentorship Matters in Manufacturing](#)

Alleviate Caregiving Responsibilities and Create Family-Friendly and Inclusive Environments

Women bear the brunt of responsibility for childcare, which is often a barrier for entering and staying in the workforce. The issue of childcare is particularly challenging in skilled trades and public safety, which often have irregular hours, volatile scheduling practices, and may require being on-call. In acknowledgment of this issue, the Equal Representation in Construction Apprenticeship (ERiCA) grant, distributed by the Division of Apprenticeship Standards, aims to support women and other underrepresented groups by providing funding to cover childcare for pre-apprentices and apprentices.⁶⁴

Provide Mentorship and Support

Mentorship can be a powerful for attracting and retaining women in traditional skilled trades. Mentorship programs can either be between peers, such as older students mentoring younger students, or through faculty mentorship. One study suggested that utilizing a feminist mentoring model that encourages active participation can help recruit women to industries where they are underrepresented, such as construction.⁶⁵ Additionally, female construction faculty can serve as both formal mentors and also serve as a role model by changing perceptions of who can work in construction; female faculty can also aid with recruitment.⁶⁶





• Male Underrepresentation in Health

Barriers

Men are underrepresented in allied health roles such as *Registered Nurses (29-1141)*, *Dental Hygienists (29-1292)*, and *Psychiatric Technicians (29-2053)*. As discussed throughout this report, there have been ongoing efforts to increase female participation in fields that are traditionally male dominated. However, there have not been similar efforts to increase male participation in traditional female-dominated fields like nursing, which continues to face a critical workforce shortage.⁶⁷ As of 2024, only 13% of *Registered Nurses (29-1141)* nationwide are men.⁶⁸ Similarly, the percentage of men in psychology-related occupations has dropped 10% in the last 10 years.⁶⁹

Historically, allied health professions – in particular, nursing – have been some of the most sex-segregated occupations, with women dominating the field. However, employment for traditionally male-dominated fields, such as manufacturing, has declined over the last 40 years; conversely, employment in health care and social assistance has boomed. This employment shift has “largely left men behind” and “many men are simply deciding not to work at all.”⁷⁰

Expanding the number of men in allied health professions such as nursing can benefit both male job seekers and health care organizations “by welcoming more men into a college education path that leads to a high-growth employment sector.”⁷¹ However, there are several barriers to expanding male representation in health. Most notably, different research studies have focused on negative stereotypes and long-term societal conception of nursing being aligned with “women’s work” or seen as “unmasculine.”



Male Underrepresentation in Health, Continued

A large scale systematic review of factors that influence men as they navigate the nursing profession identified multiple barriers, including:

Bias, Stereotypes, and Representation

- Nursing can be perceived as an “inferior” choice relative to other health care professionals, such as doctors.
- There is a “perceived incongruence between masculinity and the nursing profession, which was a source of tension and difficulty for male nurses to navigate.”
- Perception that nursing curriculum is less conducive for some men, leading to retention and completion challenges.

On-the-Job Challenges

- Men were 2.5 times more likely to leave the nursing profession due to financial reasons.
- Male nurses tend to be perceived as less caring than female nurses, and “therefore not well suited to the profession.”

Lack of Role Models

- Due to the low number of men in nursing, there is a lack of role models.
- However, “males indicated their understanding and desire to enter the profession by way of other male role models who are present in the profession.”
- Additionally, “familiarity with nurses and what they do is also shown to be an important factor in mitigating the impact of negative stereotypes toward nursing as a profession for men.”

Understanding these barriers can help drive specific strategies to combat stereotypes, increase male participation and retention in nursing and other allied health programs, and address the critical health workforce shortage.

Male Underrepresentation in Health, Continued

Strategies to Close the Gap**Promote Programs and Recruit Men to Allied Health and Nursing**

Like women in skilled trades, gender stereotypes are a major barrier to boys and men in allied health and nursing. One study found that challenging stereotypes and how nursing is perceived by the public, as well as recruitment efforts targeted at high school age boys, could boost male interest in nursing.⁷² Another factor is that boys are typically not exposed to allied health and nursing as a career option when meeting with high school counselors. However, promoting nursing's job security and opportunity for advancement has a positive effect on recruiting men to nursing.⁷³ Community colleges and K12 schools should consider promoting the long-term stability, good wages, and opportunity for advancement when counseling boys and men on program and career opportunities.

**NURSING**

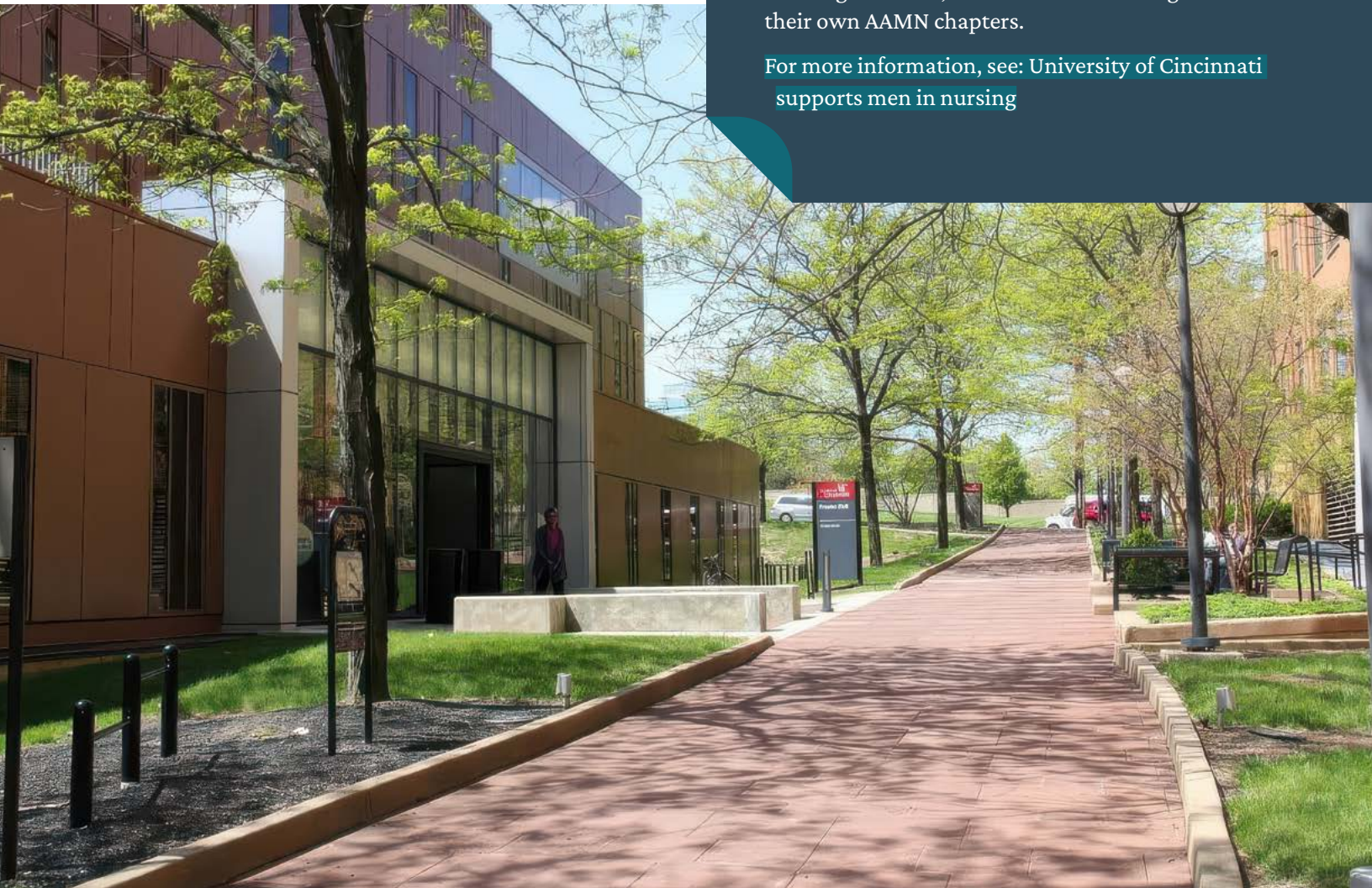
CASE STUDY

University of Cincinnati College of Nursing

In 2013, the University of Cincinnati (UC) launched a mentorship program that “connects registered male nurses with UC male nursing student and is designed to advance the view and quality of male nursing.” Though it is unclear if this specific mentorship program still exists, UC has been recognized as a leader in recruiting and retaining men in nursing programs.

Additionally, male and female students participate in the UC AAMN chapter, which coordinates career panel discussions, discusses obstacles that impact men in nursing, coordinates bonding and team building activities, and assists other colleges establish their own AAMN chapters.

For more information, see: [University of Cincinnati supports men in nursing](#)



Male Underrepresentation in Health, Continued

Provide Mentorship and Support

One of the other major barriers for men in nursing and other healthcare roles is the lack of role models and mentors. One qualitative study of male nursing students at two Midwest colleges found that male nursing students desired “more male role model representation within nursing programs... there is a collaborative feeling of familiarity and understanding between male faculty and male nursing students.”⁷⁴ Additionally, these students appreciated the establishment of an American Association for Men in Nursing (AAMN) chapter that served as a support network and created a sense of belonging for men in nursing.

As noted previously, only 13% of **Registered Nurses (29-1141)** nationwide are men, so the pool of male nurses to recruit for teaching positions is limited. However, mentoring can also be used as a tool for recruiting and retaining male nursing faculty. A qualitative study of male nurses that transitioned to academia found that early support for their career decisions and mentoring to learn pedagogy and navigating higher education contributed greatly to their success.⁷⁵ These forms of support also encouraged them to “pay it forward” and seek out opportunities to become mentors in the future.

Regional community colleges could consider developing local informal or formal (such as those through the American Association for Men in Nursing) support networks and mentorship programs for male students and faculty in nursing programs to attract and retain male nursing students. These efforts could lead to better male representation in these professions and help address the critical health workforce shortage.



• Conclusion

The *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment* identified Top Jobs and equity gaps between the Top Jobs workforce, Top Job vocational programs, and the SCC labor force to provide a base understanding of equity gaps within the SCC region. This report expanded on that research by identifying barriers and potential strategies to close the most significant gaps, including Hispanic or Latino Underrepresentation in high-paying jobs, female underrepresentation in skilled trades, and male underrepresentation in health. Across all gaps, there were common themes, such as barriers to education and training, bias and stereotypes, on-the-job challenges such as harassment and perceptions of who belongs in certain types of jobs, and more. Due to these overlapping themes, strategies can be used to address all three equity gaps identified in the *South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment*.

Regional community colleges could consider these strategies and take inspiration from the case studies discussed throughout this report, to close regional equity gaps and get more underrepresented individuals employed in good-paying, high demand jobs throughout the region.

These strategies include:



Promote programs and recruit groups to programs and occupations where they are traditionally underrepresented, including women in skilled trades and men in allied health.



Improve persistence and retention by providing targeted academic and career support, addressing workplace culture, and creating clear pathways for advancement.



Alleviate caregiving responsibilities and create family-friendly and inclusive environments to ensure student and worker safety, further support persistence and retention, and accommodate student parents.



Provide mentorship and support to create a sense of belonging and community for underrepresented groups.



• Appendix A: End Notes

- 1 "South Central Coast Top Jobs and Equity Assessment," Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, last modified March 25, 2025, <https://coeccc.net/south-central-coast/2025/03/south-central-coast-top-jobs-and-equity-assessment/>
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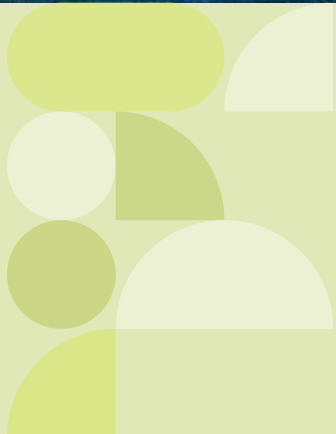
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Prepared by the South Central Coast Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research:

Jacob Poore, Director

Ashley Kernan, Research Manager

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