

# College Promise Program Shows A Decade Of Growth, Looks To Expand Influence

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**A**fter the Long Beach College Promise, an initiative to increase the accessibility of higher education, reached its 10-year anniversary in March, leaders of the four participating institutions reflected on its progress and looked toward expanding it in the future.

Through a partnership between the city's three public educational institutions: California State University, Long Beach (CSULB); Long Beach City College (LBCC) and the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) the Promise program guarantees a tuition-free year at LBCC and a path to admission at CSULB for LBUSD students who graduate and meet certain requirements. When Mayor Robert Garcia took office in 2014, he entered the City of Long Beach into the initiative as another partner, expanding the number of internship opportunities and early childhood education programs.

Reflecting on the program's first decade, Garcia described it as a "complete success," adding that it is one of the best education partnerships in the country. Since its inception in 2008, the direct enrollment of students from Long Beach Unified to CSULB has increased by 71%, according to the program's 10-year anniversary report. And the number of students transferring from Long Beach City College to CSULB has increased by 55%.

Reagan Romali, the superintendent and president of LBCC, described the results as "truly tremendous and groundbreaking." She added that, "Degree obtainment, whether it's an associate or bachelor's degree, leads to increased social mobility, increased economic prosperity and a decrease in the city's poverty rate."

The anniversary report also revealed a 22% growth in the number of LBUSD students who are college-ready upon entering CSULB. The number has increased from 43% in 2008 to 65% in 2017. The growth is due in part to a change in the LBUSD curriculum to require four years of math instead of two, according to the educational leaders. "As partners, we all talk about the problems we see," California State University, Long Beach President Jane Close Conoley said. "Long Beach Unified was quick to adopt a four-year math requirement when we saw that students weren't ready in that subject. This illustrates that, when the CEOs of each group commit to student progress across the systems, good things can happen."

LBUSD is implementing other developments that encourage college attendance and intellectual exploration. "We're launching a pre-college summer program this year with

CSULB," Chris Steinhauser, the superintendent of schools for the Long Beach Unified School District, explained. "We're offering classes in public speaking, the arts and other programs so kids can take courses at the university." The district also plans to add more class times to its ethnic studies program, another partnership with CSULB that gives high school students the opportunity to earn college credit.

"The partnership is never ending," Steinhauser said. "It's like a living organism; it's ever-changing and getting better. My ultimate goal is that every community has what we have in Long Beach. There are many similar programs up and down the state, but the one in Long Beach is by far the most advanced."

Steinhauser said a unique factor of the Long Beach program is having the city as a partner. With the added resources of Mayor Garcia's office, college awareness now starts among younger students. A new Educare Los Angeles center opened last year in Long Beach to serve 200 low-income infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children.

Every year, all LBUSD fourth and fifth graders tour LBCC and CSULB. According to the 10-year report, more than 50,000 elementary students have experienced a college campus. Middle school students and parents also sign an online pledge to commit to college readiness and attendance. According to Close Conoley, these measures are designed to target potential first-generation university attendees.

"More than 40% of our students are first-generation," Close Conoley said. "Parents may have good intentions and want the best for their kids, but they don't have the experience to facilitate it. We also have partnerships with communities of faith. We go into African-American and Cambodian churches and tell them we have workshops to help them fill out the Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)."

Garcia has also increased the city's involvement in the Promise through the Long Beach Internship Challenge, an initiative through his office. According to the mayor, the number of internships offered for middle school to college-aged students have increased from about 1,500 to 3,000 since 2014. "These are great numbers and we want to continue with that," Garcia said.

Close Conoley expressed agreement, stating, "We've increased our internship placement quite dramatically. We started a special effort in the liberal arts college, since that's historically been the spot where students didn't have immediate access to internships." She added that internships in the business sector have also increased by about 60% among CSULB students.

To turn these internships and educational experience into job opportunities, the schools have partnered with the Long Beach Community Foundation and Pacific Gateway Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Network. Through a grant from the Knight Foundation, these organizations are working with employers to create a pipeline for recent graduates to jobs in Long Beach.

"The challenge we have, and that many other cities have, is retaining our talent within the

city," Long Beach Community Foundation President and CEO Marcelle Epley said. The Community Foundation is managing the grant from the Knight Foundation. "We spend a lot of resources training, mentoring and providing scholarship opportunities, but then students leave Long Beach. In fact, we have many local employers who need that talent."

Epley said the goal is to have the parameters for the program in place this year and launch it in the spring of 2019. Her vision is to provide graduating students with fellowships under a particular employer, similar to apprenticeships, for a finite period of time. According to Epley, a barometer for future success is to increase the 20% of people who both live and work in Long Beach.

"The importance of having people live and work in the same city is extremely beneficial, not only for improving the local economic environment, but also to encourage people to be engaged and involved with the city," she said. "We're going to start with a small group of employers and students and grow it over the course of months and years so it is sustainable and long-lasting." ■



The leaders of the educational partners of the Long Beach College Promise celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the initiative, which aims to increase the accessibility of higher education. The program guarantees a tuition-free year at Long Beach City College (LBCC) and a path to admission at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) for Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) students who meet certain requirements. Pictured from left are: Reagan Romali, LBCC superintendent and president; Jane Close Conoley, CSULB president; Mayor Robert Garcia; Diana Morales, field representative from California State Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon's office; and Chris Steinhauser, superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District. (Photograph courtesy of CSULB)