

PARTICIPANTS

Kevin Cook is a research associate at the PPIC Higher Education Center. His research interests include education finance and policy for both K–12 and higher education, and his current work focuses on performance-based funding, online learning, and public pensions. Before joining PPIC, he worked as a research assistant in the investments division of the California State Teachers' Retirement System, where he conducted sustainability risk analysis. He holds an MPPA from Sacramento State University and a BA in history from Occidental College.

Benjamin Duran is executive director of the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, an organization that brings together executives from 26 community colleges, independent colleges, and public universities to collaborate on higher education issues in California's Central Valley. A longtime higher education leader, he retired as superintendent and president of the Merced Community College District in 2012 after serving the district for 22 years, with 14 years as CEO. He chaired the Commission on the Future for the Community College League of California and was appointed by Chancellor Jack Scott to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Student Success Task Force. He also served for 12 years on the Chancellor's Office Economic and Workforce Development Advisory Committee. He is a faculty member in the EdD program at California State University, Stanislaus.

Deborah Gonzalez is director of government affairs at PPIC. She and her staff work to connect PPIC research with policymakers and community leaders. A longtime Capitol staffer, she served as policy and fiscal director for six legislative leaders and worked on a wide variety of issues—including the state budget, education reform, infrastructure funding, and public safety. She holds a law degree from the McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific, and a BA from Claremont McKenna College, where she majored in international relations.

Hans Johnson is director of the PPIC Higher Education Center and a senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California. As center director, he works with a team of researchers to identify policies that can make higher education policy more successful and sustainable. His own research focuses on improving college access and completion. He frequently presents his work to policymakers and higher education officials, and he serves as a technical advisor to many organizations seeking to improve college graduation rates, address workforce needs, and engage in long-term capacity planning. Previously, he served as research director at PPIC. Before joining PPIC, he worked as a demographer at the California Research Bureau and at the California Department of Finance. He holds a PhD in demography and a master's degree in biostatistics from the University of California, Berkeley.

Ken O'Donnell is associate vice president of Student Success Program Integration and Assessment at California State University, Dominguez Hills. About three-quarters of the campus's 13,000 students are eligible for federal financial aid, from historically underserved minority populations, or both. Reporting to the university president, he is responsible for connecting student success efforts and high-impact educational practices across the divisions of academic affairs, information technology, business and finance, and student affairs. Previously, he was senior director of student engagement at the CSU Office of the Chancellor, leading systemwide offices and projects to strengthen STEM education, community engagement, transfer and articulation, and general education. He has addressed numerous conferences and workshops around the country on the intersections between deep learning and student success, the benefits of locating college learning in real-world contexts, and the role of public state systems in educational reform. Before coming to CSU, he was a member of the screenwriting faculty and an assistant dean at the film school at Chapman University.

Alma Salazar is senior vice president of the Center for Education Excellence and Talent Development at the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. She oversees the chamber's education and workforce development initiatives and also directs the chamber's higher education and workforce development policies. In 2012, she was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown to serve on the California Workforce Development Board. Since 2000, she has worked to build business and education partnerships to improve academic achievement and life-long learning for California's students. Serving as an intermediary, she looks to create and support effective collaboration among education, business, civic, and workforce development leaders to influence policies and practices that attempt to close the skills gap and improve the economic mobility of the region's neediest populations. She was awarded the prestigious American Memorial Fellowship by the German Marshall Fund of the United States in 2012. She graduated from California State University, Long Beach, with a bachelor's degree in speech communication, a master's degree in public policy and administration, and a doctoral degree in educational leadership.