

PARTICIPANTS

Niu Gao is a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, specializing in K–12 education. Her areas of interest include math and science education, digital learning in K–12 schools, and teacher workforce. Prior to joining PPIC, she worked as a quantitative policy analyst at Stanford. She holds a PhD in educational policy and an MS in economics from Florida State University.

Deborah Gonzalez is vice president of government affairs and chief data officer 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.

Yvette Gullatt serves as vice provost of diversity and engagement and interim vice president for student affairs for the University of California system. In these roles, she provides strategic leadership and advice for translating UC's vision of inclusive excellence into sustainable policies, practices, and programs. Her responsibilities include undergraduate admissions, undergraduate and graduate campus life, and student financial support. She also oversees UC programs and services that enhance the accessibility of college degrees, including pre-college academic preparation and teacher professional development programs. She holds BA, MA, and PhD degrees in English from University of California, Berkeley. She is a graduate of the management development program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and of the UC-Coro Systemwide Leadership Collaborative.

Julien Lafortune is a research fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, where he specializes in K–12 education. His primary areas of focus include education finance, school capital funding policy, and educational tracking and stratification. He has published research on the impacts of school finance reforms on student achievement in the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of California, Berkeley.

Varsha Sarveshwar is president of the University of California Student Association, the official voice of more than 275,000 UC students. As president, she represents UC students before UC leaders, elected officials and state agencies, media outlets, and nonprofits. She is passionate about affordability, accessibility, and equity in higher education, and she works to strengthen the institutional power of students in decision-making spaces. She is a senior at University of California, Berkeley, majoring in political science and minoring in history and public policy.

Blain Watson is principal of Manuel Dominguez High School in the Compton Unified School District. He previously served in leadership capacities in several urban schools across Los Angeles, most recently as coordinator of child welfare and attendance for the Centinela Valley Union High School District. He holds BAs in communication studies and in Spanish language and literature from the University of San Diego. He has an MA in educational administration and policy studies from California State University, Northridge. He is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern California, pursuing an EdD in educational leadership. His dissertation research is focused on effective strategies implemented by school district leaders to close the A–G course requirement gap for black males across California.