2024
Milestone Report

California Education Code § 75009 (2018)

calbright.edu

California Community Colleges

Submitted by

Ajita Talwalker Menon
President & CEO
Calbright College

and

Amy M. Costa
President of the Board of Trustees
Calbright College

July 31, 2024

Table of Contents

President's Message

Calbright College's mission is to serve adult learners across California – those who have fallen through the cracks of the economy and traditional education systems, who seek to upskill to remain competitive in their industry, or reskill into a new career. These learners have historically struggled in traditional higher education—here in California and across the nation—and are rarely the beneficiaries of data-driven solutions to nurture their success. Calbright's unique competency-based model of education offers online, flexible, skills-based, and workforce-focused programs that meet students where they are and leads the way in solving for the complex equation of how best to support this community of learners.

This Milestone Report illustrates the hard work and dedication of our faculty, students, and staff, and tells a story of strong progress throughout the 2023-2024 fiscal year. In the past year, Calbright received accreditation, launched three new programs, and continued strong cross-sector partnerships to drive student success and create clear pipelines to good jobs for our students.

Our work delivers on the promise and potential of our mission and advances the efforts of the system as a whole as we collectively innovate toward fulfilling the priorities outlined by California Community Colleges Chancellor Sonya Christian. Calbright sits in service of the system's Vision 2030 Roadmap goal: upskilling adult learners in an equitable manner. It's critical we build systems

and institutions, like Calbright, that recognize their unique experiences and are designed around their needs and goals. As a driver of this goal, Calbright's actions are guided by the learners we serve, nearly 70 percent of whom are Black, indigenous, and other people of color. One third of Calbright students are parents or caregivers, and 42% are unemployed. Despite the barriers facing adult learners, from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024, Calbright's student body grew to more than 4,500 learners. During this period, the College also awarded 411 certificates to graduates – the highest annual number in our short history. And, per our 2024 Student Experience Survey, more than half of Calbright graduates reported experiencing a positive labor market outcome within one year of completing their program.

Our achievements are directly aligned with our student-centered design; nearly nine in ten of our students cite our model as the reason they enrolled at Calbright. As a statewide workforce development catalyst, we leverage the knowledge that learners already bring to the table and help expand their skills as they move diligently through the curriculum, while taking the time they need to learn and master new material.

Supporting the success of California's adult learners requires smart, collaborative work beyond higher education. This year, Calbright has deepened its reach across the state by connecting with workforce, economic development, business, and community organizations to work towards the shared goal of providing more opportunities for more Californians. We're engaging partners from the Bay Area Council, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the Inland Empire Economic Partnership, Shasta College – and others in between – to better inform our regional engagement. And, as a newly minted state pre-apprenticeship provider by the Division of Apprenticeship Standards and eligible training provider, Calbright is also connecting the dots between students and employers, including working with the City and County of San Francisco to offer paid tech apprenticeships.

Conversations continue to shift from "What is Calbright and why is it different from any other community college?" to "How can we work together to connect more Californians to education opportunities?" Building a new college from the ground up takes time and focused attention. We are grateful for continued support from Governor Newsom, the California Legislature, and stakeholders across the state as we work together to build a more equitable, inclusive, and accessible community college system.

Sincerely,

Ajita Talwalker Menon
President & CEO of Calbright College

Executive Summary

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Calbright College experienced sustained growth and development. In July 2023, the College was granted initial accreditation from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), more than a year ahead of the April 1, 2025 deadline outlined in the College's founding legislation. Enrollment increased by nearly 60%, certificates conferred grew by 144%, and Calbright has met or exceeded every legislative requirement outlined in its founding legislation.

Calbright continues to build on its already-achieved legislative milestones by driving enrollment, designing and launching new skills-based programs, and collaborating across sectors to boost adult learner outcomes. As noted above and discussed in more detail throughout this report, this past fiscal year, enrollment grew substantially and student success metrics, like program satisfaction, persistence, and positive labor market outcomes saw notable upward trends. Calbright remains focused on learning from its students to optimize operations and support endeavors.

Overview / Mission

What is Calbright?

Calbright College is a new kind of community college designed to support the needs and goals of adult learners. Established in 2018, Calbright is a statewide, online, and flexible California Community College that offers accessible and career-focused programs—based on in-demand skills from IT Support to CRM Platform Administration to Data Analysis. Calbright's free and flexibly paced model, which utilizes competency-based education, works within the schedules of California's working-age adults to provide the rigor of higher education without the logistical hurdles of a traditional institution.

The College is committed to increasing economic mobility and closing equity gaps for Californians who lack easy access to traditional forms of higher education and workforce training.

On the heels of a global pandemic, the nation is in a new era of economic uncertainty that is underscored by deepening inequalities throughout California and beyond. There are roughly 6.8 million Californians ages 25 to 54 who have a high school diploma but no college degree. Building a statewide public, online, skills-based college designed around the unique needs of working adults is critical to the state's long-term prosperity. Calbright is advancing new solutions responsive to the realities facing its community of learners and is meeting the challenge of helping students navigate a rapidly evolving economy.

Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education (CBE) is a flexible approach to teaching and learning based on knowledge and skills that are transparent and measurable. Progress is based on demostrated mastery of what students are expected to know (knowledge) and be able to do (skills), rather than hours spent in class.

Meeting Statutory Milestones

Calbright's founding legislation outlines milestones the College must achieve throughout its seven-year start-up period, which concludes in early 2026. While there are no milestones mandated for completion during the 2023-2024 fiscal year, this Report describes the College's continued fulfillment of its already-achieved legislative requirements. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Calbright received accreditation and launched new programs from its host of previously designed and validated programs. Additionally, the College has and will continue to achieve its requirements due in July 2025 to "enroll students into the college's program pathways" and "incorporate student feedback to improve the college's instruction, technology, and student support services."

Accreditation

The California Community Colleges Act of 2018 states that Calbright must provide "evidence of having obtained full accreditation from an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education on or before April 1, 2025." In July 2023, more than a year before the deadline, Calbright College was granted accreditation from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission[1] (DEAC). In addition to recognizing and validating the College's mission, academic offerings, and operations, this pivotal accomplishment acknowledges institutional accountability and consumer protection for students and the public by ensuring integrity, quality, and effectiveness. As is standard, the accreditation period is three years, through June 2026. Calbright will renew its accreditation before the end of this period.

> *"Accreditation by DEAC is a reliable indicator of the value and quality of the distance education that an institution offers," said Dr. Leah Matthews, executive director of DEAC. "In receiving this initial grant of accreditation, Calbright College has demonstrated its commitment to educational standards and ethical business practices that assure quality, accountability, and improvement in higher education."*

---

1   DEAC is the preeminent accrediting organization for distance education delivered worldwide that sets high standards for academic quality inspiring excellence in teaching, learning, and student outcomes through voluntary assessment and peer review. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and provides a single source of nationally recognized accreditation from the primary school level through professional doctoral degree-granting institutions. Accreditation by DEAC covers all distance education activities within an institution. DEAC's focus and leadership within the distance education sector, and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion were leading reasons Calbright chose it as a possible accreditor when commencing the application process in 2021.

Accreditation provides students, particularly adult learners, with greater opportunities to have their validated learning connect to other postsecondary institutions. It provides an entry point for the College to begin the process of accepting credit students earn from other institutions and offering credit courses – both of which will take time for Calbright to operationalize and will likely be feasible toward the end of the College's start-up period, which concludes in early 2026. It also opens the door for students to access state and federal resources to support their education and training. However, like offering credit courses, access to these resources will take time for the College to implement.

The DEAC decision allows Calbright the full rights and privileges of an accredited institution. In addition to serving as a hallmark of credibility, this includes access to grants and categorical funding to support students' needs, enhanced employment opportunities for graduates, and the ability for students to carry their academic achievements beyond Calbright. Given accreditation, Calbright shifted its website suffix from .org to .edu.

Designing and Validating Programs

Calbright's founding legislation requires the College to design and validate at least 10 additional program pathways, for a total of 16. For every 10 new programs, at least one must be developed in collaboration with a traditional community college.
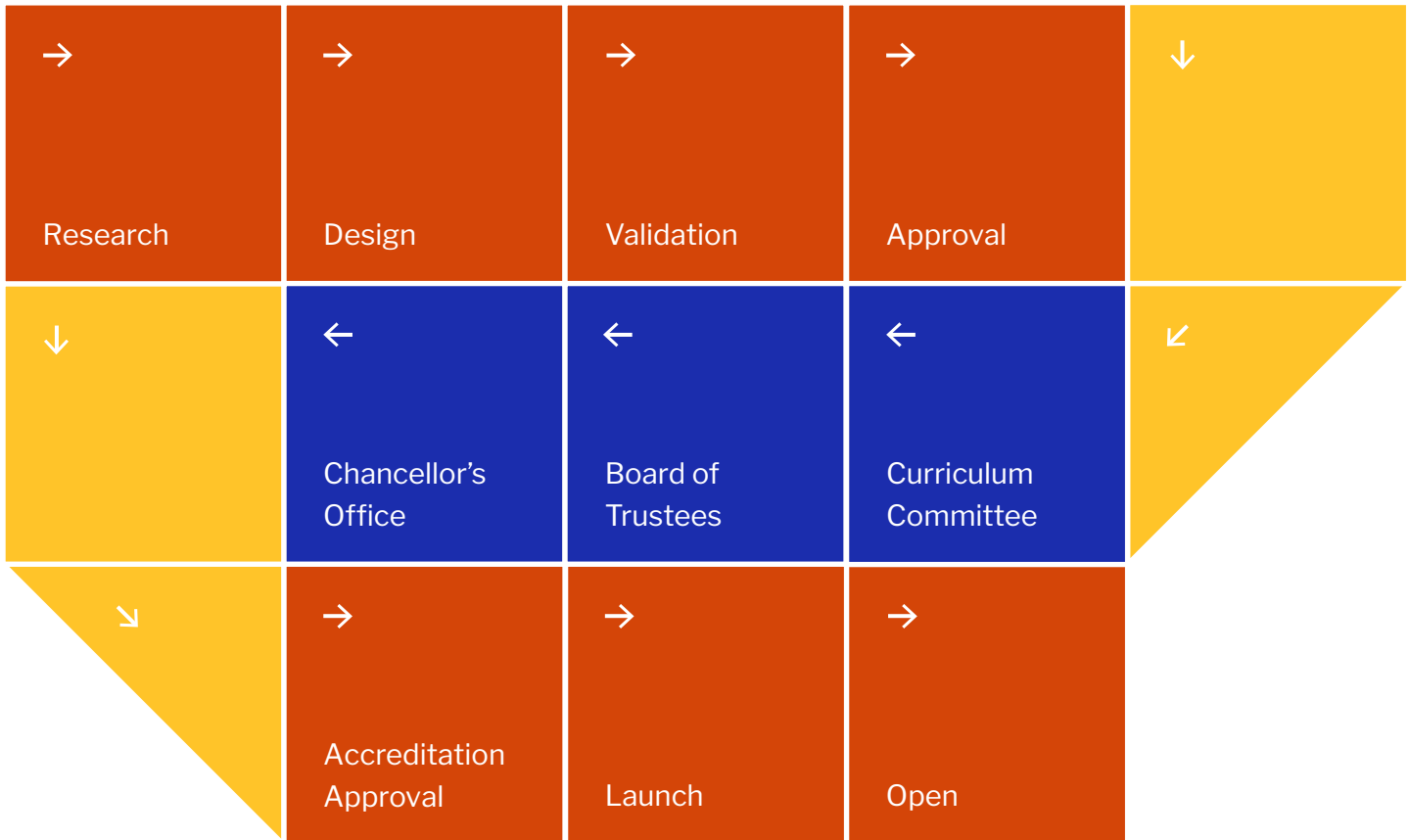
Calbright has exceeded this requirement and designed and validated 17 programs as part of its growth and development. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Calbright launched three programs: Data Analysis, Network Technology, and Project Management.

As of June 30, 2024, Calbright students are enrolled in the following programs:
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Platform Administration
- Cybersecurity
- Data Analysis
- Introduction to Information Technology (IT) Support
- Medical Coding
- Network Technology (pilot phase)
- Project Management (pilot phase)

In addition to the programs listed above, the College has designed, validated, and received Board of Trustees approval for the following programs: Community Health Worker, Entrepreneurship; Full-Stack Software Developer; Human Resources: Learning and Development; Human Resources: Talent Acquisition; Licensed Vocational Nurse; Medical Billing; Upskilling for Equitable Health Impacts: Interpersonal Skills for Healthcare Workers; User Experience/User Interface; and 3D Animation and Game Design.

New Program Development

→	→	→	→	↓
Research	**Design**	**Validation**	**Approval**	
↓	←	←	←	↙
	Chancellor's Office	**Board of Trustees**	**Curriculum Committee**	
↘	→	→	→	
	Accreditation Approval	**Launch**	**Open**	

Calbright utilizes an equity-centered design approach to ensure adult learners' unique circumstances, needs, and lived experiences directly influence program selection. The College's decision making leverages labor market insights to assess traditional supply and demand metrics as well as in-demand occupational skills, including workforce analysis to gauge hiring probability of its target population.

Calbright employs data sources such as Lightcast, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and California's Labor Market Information Division (LMID) to inform this research, including information on total job postings in California for roles related to specific programs; regional and statewide demand for these roles; expected job growth within California over the next decade; and whether the median and range of salaries for those positions will foster economic mobility. In addition, Calbright maintains an Advisory Council for each discipline area composed of external leaders in a discipline's area of focus. The members provide expert feedback and collaborate to help identify in-demand jobs and the technical and durable skills they require. They participate in discussions that help guide future program strategies, competency development, and the currency of both technical and essential workforce related skills. Additionally, the Councils make recommendations and provide feedback and perspectives on curriculum, assessments, and learning opportunities. Research on job postings' educational attainment requirements—as well as race equity within the incumbent workforce by occupation—further validates that the College's programs enhance both job prospects and economic mobility of its target population while creating a more diverse talent pipeline.

Incorporating Student Feedback

Each year, Calbright College invites its students to participate in the Annual Student Experience Survey to facilitate feedback and enhance the student experience at the College. Results from the College's 2024 Student Experience Survey are still being analyzed; though, preliminary data suggests that more than 70% of respondents feel that Calbright has helped them progress in their educational and career goals.

The 2023 Student Experience Survey, distributed in the fall of 2023, illustrated that 91% of respondents would recommend Calbright to a friend, citing the College's supportive staff and community as well as the free, flexible education as critical components. As a student-centered institution, Calbright is committed to providing a space for learners to communicate their needs and offer feedback, contributing to continued innovation and evolution of the College's operation and student journey.

> *"Student feedback provides insight for scaffolding a personal student journey that empowers every learner, especially as we expand our programs and deepen support services. The overwhelmingly positive response on the Student Experience Survey lets us know we're on the right track, and helps us identify areas we can improve to ensure we are helping students achieve their goals," said Don Orth, vice president for student services and success at Calbright College.*

The 2023 Student Experience Survey reflected high student satisfaction with Calbright's programs and the overall experience:

- 76% indicate that they are satisfied with their experience at Calbright and with what they have learned so far in their programs;
- Nearly 85% agree or strongly agree that engaging with Success Counselors supports their academic journey, and nearly 60% agree or strongly agree that engaging with instructors contributes to their success; and
- Students' satisfaction with progress made toward personal educational and professional goals increased from 50% in 2022 to 61% in 2023.

What students are saying:

> *"There is a true sense of community at Calbright and it is an extremely supportive program."*

> *"As this is self paced, it's been a perfect program for me to transition to IT even though I have experience already before, everything is kind of new to [me] since it's been more than a decade already since I've applied what I've learned from my school before."*

Calbright continuously works to ensure a positive, online education journey for students that leads to certificate completion.

Student feedback suggested that the College's flexibly paced education model, which is the reason many students are able to enroll, can sometimes act as a double-edged sword. In collaboration with UC Irvine's School of Education and ideas42, Calbright developed a pilot model of program timelines—specifically for Customer Relationship Management Platform Administration students—that helps create a customized structure for students. More information on this partnership can be found in the Driving Student Success section of the Milestone Report.

The survey highlights positive student experiences across the board, though students suggest that the top two areas for improvement are Calbright's "Connections to Employers" and "Preparation for Job Search." Calbright continues to drive workforce opportunities for its learners both during their programs and beyond the virtual classroom by engaging with employment-related partners and expanding its holistic career services support. Through these partnerships, the College identifies skills gaps, open job positions, and in-demand training that is either not currently offered or not available statewide. For example, after identifying a high demand for data analysis skills in California—there are currently over 10,000 job openings statewide requiring them—Calbright partnered with Bakersfield College to co-develop an academic program that also serves as a pre-apprenticeship conduit. Additionally, Calbright recently partnered with Lightcast, a labor market analysis company, to explore and identify misaligned skills and degree requirements in the public sector that produce unintended barriers to economic mobility for Calbright learners.

The College uses surveys, interviews, focus groups, and more as sources of student feedback, collecting data throughout the year to gauge student and alumni satisfaction and to learn from their experiences with Calbright's programs, systems, and services. In addition to the Annual Student Experience Survey, day-to-day work of success counselors, instructors, and other support teams who engage with students directly, the College distributes two other surveys at key moments throughout a student's Calbright journey: the End-of-Term Survey and the Alumni Survey. Information from these surveys is used to help different teams design new solutions or improve systems and practices.

Californians We Serve

Calbright is working to solve the complex equation of how to best nurture the success of non-traditional students, and share what it learns with the rest of the California Community Colleges system. Higher education, as a sector, is slow to adapt or change how it operates, and seldom do institutions challenge their own operations in order to test, iterate, improve, and implement new behavior in response to students' need and input.

As an open access institution, Calbright welcomes and accepts all qualified applicants— California residents over the age of 18 with a high school diploma or GED equivalent—who apply, though outreach endeavors focus on students who are at least 25 years old. Calbright also recognizes that many populations face structural barriers to education and today's workforce. Calbright's equity focus includes (but is not limited to) narrowing gaps in enrollment and outcomes by race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as lowering barriers based on gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, national origin, veteran status, justice involvement, and rural residency.
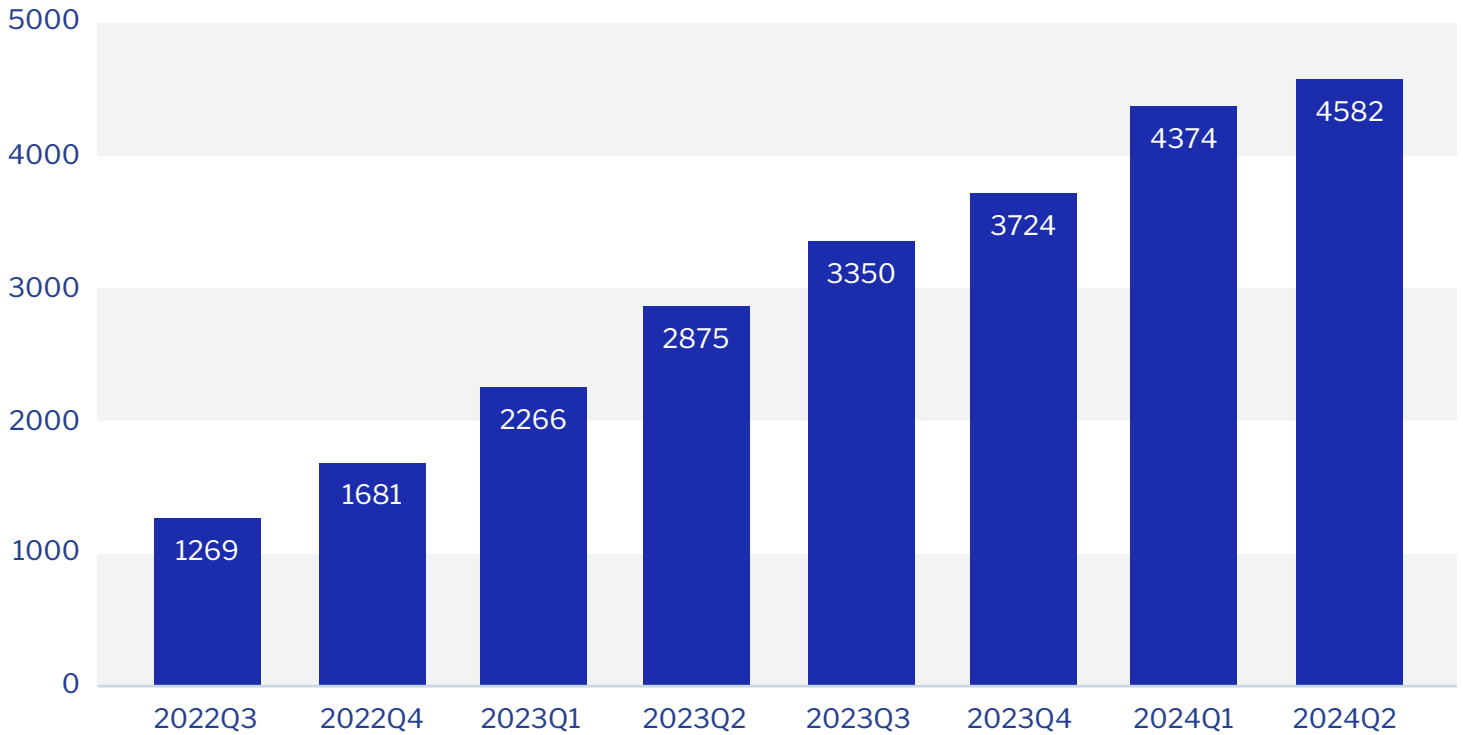
Student Data

Calbright's enrollment growth over the last fiscal year is a testament to the need for affordable and flexible education models. At the close of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Calbright's enrollment was 4,582 students. This student body reflects the College's mission of enrolling underserved adult learners from the across the state:
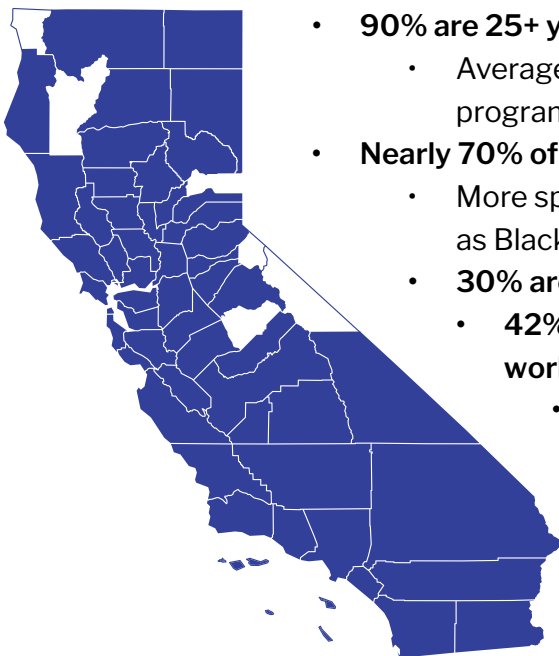
- **90% are 25+ years old (45% across the CCC system); median age is late 30s**
  - Average age of a Calbright graduate at the time they completed their program is 40 years old
- **Nearly 70% of students identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color.**
  - More specifically[2], 31% of students identify as Hispanic, 22% identify as Black (more than triple the CCC rate), and 19% identify as Asian.
  - **30% are parents or caregivers (~10% across the CCC system)**
    - **42% of students are unemployed, 53% work one job, and 6% work two or more jobs.**
      - **52 of California's 58 counties* are represented by the student body, including 34 of the state's 40 rural counties.**

  *As of June 30, 2024

---

2   Since students may choose as many race groups that apply, students may be counted in more than one race group percentage..

Calbright Student Body by Calendar Quarter

The largest share of Calbright's student body is enrolled in the College's Introduction to IT Support program, followed by the Customer Relationships Management (CRM) Platform Administration program. The breakdown of program enrollment as of June 30, 2024 is below:

IT Support	2401
Data Analysis	1102
Transition to Technology: CRM Platform Administration	664
Cybersecurity	262
Project Management	96
Transition to Technology: Introduction to Networks	46
Medical Coding	11

As of June 30, 2024, Calbright had issued 697 certificates since its inception, an increase of 144% from June 30, 2023. The majority of the certificates Calbright has issued are in its IT Support program and Customer Relationship Management Platform Administration program.

Program	Completions
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Platform Administration	220
Cybersecurity	103
Data Analysis	89
Information Technology Support	265
Medical Coding	15
Other (Network Technology (pilot), Project Management (pilot), and Upskilling for Equitable Health Impacts: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (no longer offered)	5

Nearly 40% of Calbright's student body is at least 40 years old, which is indicative of adult learners returning to education after time away – to upskill, reskill, or transition their career.

Take Maurice Thomas, of Fremont, for example. When his wife became pregnant with their first child, "the fire got put in me to make a change," he said. *"I realized: If I'm going to do something different, it's going to be now. I'm not going to put the family through a career change while my kid is growing up. I want to have started in the tech industry, even if I'm not yet where I want to be, so I don't have to take as much time and attention away from my family."* He enrolled in Calbright's IT Support program, took advantage of the College's career services resources, and is now a Desk Support Technician at a hospital.

And there's also Christine (Khris) Pool, from San Diego, who has worked in cosmetology since she was in high school. She was a stylist and then taught cosmetology for 20 years. But she wanted a career change.

"I like technology, and I thought: all of these jobs are asking for CRM, and Salesforce seems to be the biggest one out there. So I can use those skills in my own business, and get a job doing it for a company, because it seems like every job I want is looking for people who can do CRM."

Now a Calbright CRM Platform Administration graduate, Khris is working with Calbright's Career Services to find the right job.

Innovation for Adult Learners

Calbright is driving innovative solutions to meet adult learners where they are, offering crucial support services and partnering with mission-aligned organizations and employers to solve this challenge and create more opportunities for Calbright students.

Program Pace and Progress

Keeping students engaged in an online, asynchronous learning environment is a shared challenge across higher education and one that Calbright is actively working to address.

As noted in Calbright's 2023 Student Experience Survey results, while students enroll at the College mainly due to its flexibly paced education model, it may also serve as a double-edged sword. Programs without a set schedule for coursework or firm deadlines for assignments offer adult learners much-needed flexibility in terms of how they get their work done, but they also call for significantly more self-discipline to remain on track.

This feedback led Calbright and its research partners at the University of California Irvine School of Education (UCI) and behavioral design firm ideas42 to develop "Pace and Progress Timelines." The Timelines, which are meant to create a customized structure for students, are sets of suggested target dates for assignments and ultimately program completion. The timelines range from a few months to a year. Calbright administers a survey during enrollment that takes into consideration their outside responsibilities and technical aptitude to determine the best timeline for each student, upon which a student may change if needed.

After a successful pilot of the Pace and Progress Timelines in 2023, Calbright has since launched them across all programs. Looking at programs that have data from before the timelines were introduced, students who have chosen to align their coursework to a timeline are now completing substantially more assignments than those who did not use the timeline structure. For example, currently students in the IT Support, Cybersecurity, and CRM Platform Administration programs who use timelines complete an average of 38% more assignments during their first 90 days.

The timelines have illustrated that pairing student feedback with data and behavioral science strategies can improve student outcomes.

Additionally, after identifying potential barriers to engagement with Calbright support resources, Calbright developed short TikTok-style videos to foster engagement with faculty and counselors as well as to streamline the online learning experience. Specifically, one video focused on the enrollment process, another provided a personal introduction to a student's success counselor, and a third offered a brief overview of the different career services resources available to students. The video nudges worked: the data suggest that students who received videos were more likely to engage with Calbright's resources and people.

Equitable Technology Innovations for Student Success

Calbright's founding legislation calls for the College to serve as a research and development engine to expand options for adult learners across the California Community Colleges system and help solve the complex equation of how to best nurture adult learner success. This success begins with innovative solutions to drive students' program progress and help ensure stronger career outcomes. Now, with around 4,500 students, the rapidly growing College continues to invest in the development, evaluation, and continuous improvement of its programs and operations to best support its students and align with the California Community Colleges Vision 2030 to break down barriers for adult learners.

In the fall of 2023, Calbright College partnered with Axim Collaborative to sponsor and design a track in the 2023-2024 Learning Engineering Tools Competition focused on making college more equitable, accessible, and effective for adult students. The annual Tools Competition launched in 2020 to bring together the best minds to accelerate learning outcomes for all students and boost collaboration between technologists, researchers, and educators. It is hosted by Georgia State University and The Learning Agency, with participation from leading philanthropic entities including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and Schmidt Futures.

The Engaging Adult Learners in Higher Education Track received 340 applications, 81% of which were first-time applicants to the competition. Entrants were assessed during three rounds of review, and expert reviewers chose sixteen finalists. Each finalist pitched their proposals to a panel of judges made up of higher education leaders, and six winners were selected. Two winners were selected for the Implementation and Impact Prize and will implement their tools in Calbright's student-centered and equity-focused environment.

Winners in the Engaging Adult Learners in Higher Education Track presented proposals that leverage technology and learning engineering to improve equity and access to higher education, particularly for adult learners from high-need demographics historically underserved by current education and workforce systems. The submitted proposals included tools for:
- Supporting self-directed learning and providing personalized learning supports.
- Enhancing community and belonging in online learning environments.
- Personalized guidance and career navigation.

The competition offered three award levels based on the development phase of the tools:
- Catalyst Phase Awards: For early-stage ideas or products.
- Growth Phase Awards: For tools with some users and scalability.
- Transform Phase Awards: For established platforms with 10,000 or more users.
- Growth and Transform level competitors could qualify for the Implementation and Impact Prize, to partner with Calbright for piloting, testing, and validating their tool at the college.

Winners of the Tools Competition's Engaging Adult Learners in Higher Education Track:

- Personalized, Timely, Proactive Faculty Support of Online Students | Western Governors University
  - Catalyst Level
  - Western Governors University designed three machine learning models to provide faculty with individualized, proactive, and timely feedback on their students' academic progress within each course.
- The AI Guide | CampusEvolve
  - Growth Level
  - The AI Guide maps the entire array of a school's supports to each student, at every stage of their learning journey.
- OATutor-GenAI | University of California, Berkeley
  - Growth Level
  - Implementation and Impact Prize Winner
  - OATutor-GenAI is an open-source, adaptive tutoring tool—driven by generative AI research—capable of covering all lower-division college STEM subjects.
- Unlocking Opportunity: Tools for Incarcerated Learners | Unlocked Labs
  - Growth Level
  - Unlocked Labs' tool leverages AI to provide competency-based education for incarcerated learners—offering real-time data insights for administrators and researchers to enhance program effectiveness.
- Experience Translator | Wingspans
  - Growth Level
  - Implementation and Impact Prize Winner
  - Wingspans is an inclusive career navigation platform that forges brighter futures through storytelling—empowering individuals to succeed in work that is better paid and more highly valued.
- Career Coach | Mainstay
  - Transform Level
  - Career Coach is a human-centered, AI-enhanced guide empowering adult learners to achieve their career goals through personalized support.

Calbright will begin implementing some of these tools and sharing insights across the California Community Colleges system and beyond in the coming months.

Boosting Career Opportunities

California currently leads the nation with the highest unemployment rate, while 42% of Calbright students are unemployed. As a leader in skills-based online education, Calbright recognizes that a strong pathway to a good job is more than just offering students a flexible, accessible education. It's about higher education, industries, employers, nonprofits, and philanthropy working together collaboratively to advance skills-based hiring, apprenticeship opportunities, and career readiness resources so we can increase equity across California's workforce.

Labor Market Research

As noted in the Designing and Validating Programs section, Calbright partners with Lightcast, a labor market analytics company, to inform its program pipeline and ensure current programs are updated based on today's in-demand skills[3]. This partnership also equips Calbright with the right data to understand how learners can be better positioned to succeed in the workforce.

In May 2024, Calbright College collaborated with Lightcast to release a report titled: The Road to Optimizing California's Public Sector Labor Market. The report highlights how California's public sector plays a crucial role in the state's economy, yet employers often encounter difficulties securing the critical talent. To announce the report and discuss statewide, collaborative solutions, the College convened experts for a webinar, including Ajita Talwalker Menon, president and CEO of Calbright College, Arnie Sowell, NextGen Policy's executive director, Abby Snay, deputy secretary for workforce strategy at the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, and Adele Burnes, deputy chief of the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards.

With Governor Newsom's executive order to prepare the workforce of tomorrow through skills-based hiring, California plays a unique leadership role in reducing barriers to employment. However, California's public sector is experiencing labor shortages, struggling to return to pre-pandemic employment levels and to fill in-demand openings across the state. With in-depth analysis, the report identifies the key challenges that must be addressed in order for the state to remain resilient and competitive, while also offering opportunities to create more equitable access to these jobs.

---

3   Calbright gathers an in-depth understanding of industry needs, not only for today, but for 10 years from now, including in-demand skills, current job openings, and more.

Through an in-depth analysis of California's public sector, The Road to Optimizing California's Public Sector Labor Market pinpointed key challenges that must be addressed in order to stay resilient and competitive:

- **Need for a Future-Ready Workforce** – Talent shortages are prevalent in almost every industry and region. Stakeholders in the public sector, including employers and educators, must gain a clear understanding of the evolving trends in the industry.
- **Talent Supply Gaps** – California's public sector suffers from severe supply stress; 31% of occupations have fewer than one local person available to fill a job for these roles.
- **Hiring Processes and Inefficiencies** – A common theme of interviews conducted for the report with public sector employers were concerns with the hurdles that exist for workers at each step of the hiring process.
- **Underutilization** – California has the highest labor underutilization rate in the United States, and people of color are underutilized at a higher rate than the state average. While there are many reasons why individuals may be underutilized, education is often a key factor.

The report also includes recommendations for policymakers, higher education leaders and public sector employers for improving access to public sector jobs. These include:
- Right-sizing requirements for public sector job sand shifting to skills-based hiring,
- Developing workforce management models to improve collaboration between educators and communities, and
- Inclusive state workforce policies like Executive Order N-11-23, which directs the California Human Resources Department to evaluate whether a college degree is needed for a position whenever its classification is reviewed.

Apprenticeships

Calbright is bridging the gap between employers and potential employees – it's part of our DNA. As a newly approved state pre-apprenticeship provider by the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS), the College will continue to partner with organizations across the state to offer adult learners a better chance at success in today's labor market, while providing California employers with highly-skilled and qualified employees. This DAS approval status, a first in Calbright's history, applies to the College's IT Support, Cybersecurity, and Data Analysis certificate programs. Not only does this approval validate the programs' alignment with industry standards, it will help Calbright prepare a pipeline of talent ready to thrive in high demand apprenticeship roles.

In September 2023, Calbright publicly launched its Data Analysis program, designed in partnership with fellow California Community College Bakersfield College (BC). With this program, Calbright is now the pre-apprenticeship provider for BC's data analysis apprenticeship program with OpenClassrooms, another online training provider. The partnership recently expanded to include Calbright's IT Support program as well. Calbright continues to work closely with both Bakersfield and OpenClassrooms as part of ongoing employer-student convenings to secure positions for Calbright students. Upon confirmation of an employer placement, students will become eligible to enter the apprenticeship pathway with BC.

CareerConnect

Over 80% of Calbright students want to build skills for career advancement or transition. While the College's programs are designed to teach labor market-based skills, Calbright recognized the critical need for a central place for current students and alumni to prepare for their career journey, so we created CareerConnect.

CareerConnect is a customizable, online career services portal for students to:
- Align their job searches with their current skills and programs
- Connect with Calbright career services team members
- Create and maintain their resume and portfolio materials
- Practice interviewing through a mock interview tool
- Keep track of their job applications

In turn, CareerConnect will enable Calbright to track student career journeys and engage with alumni.

Labor Agreements

Faculty, staff, and students all have a voice in shaping how Calbright fulfills its shared commitment to success. Calbright's operational structure reflects its unique model, builds on the strong tradition of participatory governance in the CCC system, and honors the leadership, contributions, and perspectives of faculty and staff across the institution.

At present, the College is in contract with all chapters of its labor partners. In the spring of 2023, Calbright officially ratified its first contract with the California School Employees Association (CSEA) Chapter 53, creating an organized labor union agreement for classified employees. This agreement, reached through an extensive and cooperative negotiation process, is the College's inaugural contract with CSEA.

In May of 2022, the Calbright College Board of Trustees unanimously approved the College's collective bargaining agreement with the Calbright Faculty Association (CFA), which is the institution's local chapter (1485) of the California Teachers Association, and the first labor agreement in Calbright's history. The CSEA and CFA contracts are yet another example of Calbright's institutional development and commitment to organized labor, nurturing a supportive workplace culture, and fair representation.

> *"From the very beginning, our goal was to ensure that classified employees would have a meaningful voice at Calbright, helping to contribute to the fulfillment of the College's mission, and vision. Together, we created a contract that establishes baseline working conditions by providing classified employees with the critical protections, tools, and wage increases that support the passion they bring to our urgent work on a daily basis."*

Anya Elder
CSEA Chapter 53 President and
Strategic Initiatives Specialist,
Calbright College

Progress Following California State Auditor Report

In the spring of 2021, the California State Auditor published a report on decision making mistakes made by the College's inaugural president and leadership team. The Report also noted early institutional improvements made by President Ajita Talwalker Menon, who began as interim President and CEO in early 2020, and found Calbright College to be non-duplicative within the California Community Colleges system and complementary to the system as a whole.

Calbright College accepted each of the auditor's 10 recommendations, is delivering on those that are not yet fully met, and remains committed to the transparency standards required of public institutions. As of the 2022-2023 Milestone Report, and per the auditor's fall 2023 response[4], eight of the 10 auditor recommendations are complete. The remaining two recommendations include:

- Pending implementation: "Calbright should immediately establish an efficient process to recognize previous training and experience and allow students to bypass areas of curriculum in which they have demonstrated competence."
    - Now that Calbright has received accreditation, it is moving quickly to complete this recommendation in its entirety. Meanwhile, Calbright has established policies and processes to recognize a student's prior learning.
        - Notably, the College implemented a challenge procedure for students who wish to enroll in Calbright's Cybersecurity program and skip the prerequisite of holding a CompTIA A+ certification or completing the College's Introduction to IT Support program. Additionally, a competency-based model for education naturally recognizes prior experience, as learners are able to move quickly through material they already know while taking the time they need for new areas of knowledge.

---

4   To view the full State Auditor Report you can visit: https://information.auditor.ca.gov/reports/recommendations/2020-104

- Partially implemented: "Calbright should immediately develop a robust implementation plan that aligns with best practices and translates its mission into actionable goals and strategies. After completing its implementation plan, Calbright should review the plan at least every six months, and revise and update it as needed to account for major changes relevant to the college's implementation. By July 2022, Calbright should demonstrate that it has made consistent progress in implementing its plan."
    - This recommendation is paired with Recommendation #2[5], and while listed as partially implemented, both are considered fully implemented by Calbright with the closure of the 2022-2023 fiscal year and Board approval of the 2023-2023 fiscal year budget.
    - The State Auditor's office has shared with the College that it is satisfied with the Implementation Plan, as well as the process and execution of reviewing and updating the plan every six months. Every year, the College also updates its Board of Trustees in a public meeting with regard to progress made against its implementation plan.

---

5   To provide greater accountability regarding its spending and to ensure that it effectively uses the public funds it receives to accomplish the goals for which it was created, Calbright should do the following:

1. By November 2021, incorporate into its implementation plan a spending plan that details how and when it expects to spend the funds the Legislature allocates to it. At a minimum, the spending plan should identify the estimated costs to accomplish the tasks set forth in its implementation plan and a timeline for when it expects to incur those costs. The spending plan should also describe Calbright's strategy for staying within its budget while completing necessary start-up activities and achieving its milestones.
2. Calbright should annually review the spending plan and make adjustments as necessary. It should also annually report to the Board of Governors on its spending to date and explain how its spending has furthered its progress in achieving its mission..

Conclusion

Calbright continues to build more than just a regular community college. As noted, in the last fiscal year, Calbright earned accreditation, enrollment increased by nearly 60%, certificates conferred grew by 144%, and the College has continued to meet or exceed every legislative requirement outlined in its founding legislation. The College looks forward to launching new programs, increasing career opportunities for its diverse student body and alumni, and collaborating on innovative solutions to equip adult learners with the skills needed to succeed in today's workforce.

In the words of IT Support student Alicia Rangel, "I feel like my life has done a complete 180 since I started Calbright. When I started here it was me at a dog day care, hoping and wishing for more. Now I feel like I can't even remember struggling with figuring out what I wanted to do, and finding a path that is right for me." Alicia, of Oakland, recently accepted a paid apprenticeship position with Accenture, where she will serve as a technology consultant.

As a scalable, flexible, and student-centered institution, Calbright's efforts are vital to driving equity and economic mobility for adult learners across the California Community Colleges system and beyond.