

To: Academic Senate
From: Academic Senate Executive Committee
Date: April 19, 2026
Subject: Cover Memo – Resolution on Affirming Support for Adult Learners and Strengthening Institutional Support

This memo accompanies the proposed resolution on *Affirming Support for Adult Learners and Strengthening Institutional Support* and provides brief context and rationale for its consideration.

Adult learners are an essential and growing segment of the California State University student population. CSU Forward (2023–2040) calls for expanding access and serving a broader range of students, including those balancing full-time work, caregiving responsibilities, and re-entry into higher education. This resolution aligns with that systemwide priority while focusing on how our campus can better meet these students' needs.

A central premise of the resolution is that adult learner success is shaped less by individual capacity and more by institutional design. Many of our systems—including course scheduling, advising structures, and student services—were built around a traditional, full-time daytime student model. As a result, adult learners often face avoidable barriers related to access, navigation, and persistence.

The resolution highlights several key areas for institutional attention:

- **Structural barriers:** Limited evening/weekend courses and services, along with competing work and family obligations, constrain student success. Addressing these barriers requires aligning institutional practices with the realities of adult learners' lives.
- **Access to coordinated support:** Expanding availability and integration of advising, financial aid, IT support, counseling, and basic needs resources can significantly reduce friction for working students.
- **Recognition of prior learning:** Strengthening department-level approaches to credit for prior learning supports more efficient and equitable pathways to degree completion while maintaining faculty authority.

- **Learning environments and infrastructure:** Classroom design, scheduling practices, and access to appropriate facilities directly impact adult learners' ability to engage and succeed.
- **Institutional mindset:** The resolution explicitly rejects deficit-oriented perspectives and instead affirms adult learners' strengths, emphasizing institutional responsibility for creating equitable conditions.

Importantly, these efforts are not solely about serving a specific population. Improving flexibility, clarity, and coordination across institutional systems benefits all students. In this way, advancing support for adult learners is aligned with broader goals of student success and equity.

The Academic Senate plays a key role in shaping academic policy, faculty development, and program design. This resolution establishes guiding principles that encourage alignment with CSU Forward, promote research-informed practices, and support collaboration among faculty, staff, and administration.

In sum, this resolution affirms that supporting adult learners is a shared institutional responsibility. It calls for thoughtful attention to the structural conditions that shape student success and positions the university to better serve a diverse and evolving student population.

1 **Academic Senate Resolution on Affirming Support for Adult Learners and**
2 **Strengthening Institutional Support**

3 **Whereas**, the California State University (CSU) system, through its strategic initiative CSU
4 Forward (2023–2040), explicitly commits to expanding access, advancing equity, and serving a
5 broader and more diverse population of learners, including adult learners who often work full-
6 time, and begin or return to higher education after some absence in schooling
7 (California State University, 2023); and

8 **Whereas**, Adult learning theory—particularly andragogy—demonstrates that adult learners are
9 self-directed, bring prior knowledge, are motivated by relevance and application, and benefit
10 from learning environments that respect autonomy and experience (Kasworm, 2003; Merriam &
11 Bierema, 2014; Knowles et al., 2015); and
12

13 **Whereas**, effective pedagogical practices for adult learners include inclusive course design,
14 opportunities for applied and experiential learning, and classroom environments that
15 acknowledge and build upon students’ lived experiences while accommodating the realities of
16 working adults (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Knowles et al., 2015; Kasworm, 2003); and

17 **Whereas**, research consistently demonstrates that adult learners’ persistence is shaped
18 primarily by structural and institutional conditions, including scheduling, financial constraints,
19 caregiving responsibilities, and food/ housing insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019;
20 Samuels et al., 2012; Inside Higher Ed, 2023; Cal Matters, 2023); and

21 **Whereas**, many institutional systems structures, and support services, including course offerings,
22 IT support, academic advising, career services, psychological counseling, and access to basic
23 needs resources, were not originally designed with adult learners in mind. Furthermore, the lack
24 of evening and weekend courses and services such as those listed above contributing to
25 persistent barriers related to access, navigation, and equity for working students (California
26 State University Chancellor’s Office, 2024; EdSource, 2022; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2019); and

27 **Whereas**, the physical and structural conditions of teaching and learning environments,
28 including classroom design (such as flexible and active, technology enhanced, and wellbeing
29 classrooms) and furniture (that accommodates all sizes and is suitable for long-durations,)
30 scheduling, and access to appropriate facilities (specifically buildings and classrooms), impact
31 adult learner success and communicate institutional priorities; therefore, be it

32 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate calls for institutional policies, practices, and resource
33 allocations that align with CSU Forward and intentionally support adult learners through flexible
34 scheduling, recognition of prior learning, accessible and coordinated advising and financial aid,
35 basic needs support, and clear, navigable degree pathways; and be it further

36 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate affirms that adult learners are a vital and valued student
37 population whose presence on campus reflects the core public mission of the university,
38 recognizes their skills, knowledge and prior experiences; and be it further
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40 **Resolved**, the Academic Senate explicitly rejects deficit-oriented frameworks that attribute adult
41 learner outcomes to individual shortcomings rather than institutional conditions; and be it further
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43 **Resolved**, the Academic Senate supports the professional development of faculty to teach in
44 ways that affirm adult learners; and be it further

45 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate acknowledges that most campus programs were not
46 designed for adult learners and calls for rethinking how services are provided so that they are
47 intentionally inclusive of adult learners; and be it further
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49 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate calls for access to services and supports (e.g. IT support,
50 academic advising, career services, counseling, and access to basic needs resources) on
51 evening and weekend aligned with course offerings; and be it further

52 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate calls for supporting a robust system (protocols and
53 practices) for credit for prior learning where decisions are made at the department level; and be it
54 further

55 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate calls for developing metrics for measuring success for
56 adult learners' pathways for outcomes such as workforce, graduate programs, philanthropy, as
57 well as loan indebtedness; and be it further
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59 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate insists the administration evaluate and
60 improve classroom infrastructure, scheduling practices, and access to appropriate learning
61 environments to ensure they meet the needs of working adult students; and be it further

62 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate affirms that supporting adult learners is an institutional
63 responsibility that extends beyond pedagogy to include structural conditions of access and
64 success, including scheduling systems, program design, and student services; and be it further
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66 **Resolved**, that the Academic Senate encourages ongoing collaboration among faculty, staff, and
67 administration to ensure that efforts to support adult learners are grounded in research, aligned
68 with CSU system priorities, and reflective of the lived realities, aspirations, and strengths of our
69 students.
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