California's Workforce Pell List: Methodology

Data and methods behind "85% of California's Jobs Are Now Workforce Pell Eligible: Takeaways for Colleges" · opportunitydata.org/workforce-pell-california-list.html · October 2026

1. The occupation list

The 2026-27 Workforce Pell Occupational List (California Student Aid Commission, October 2026) names 571 distinct six-digit SOC codes, counted from the published PDF on October 20, 2026. The list's statutory standard is California Education Code section 69871: occupations that are high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand, with any one criterion sufficient. The list carries no per-occupation flags or thresholds.

2. Wage and employment join

Wages and employment are the Employment Development Department's Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, California statewide file, May 2025 estimates (published June 2026), matched on six-digit SOC. Of the 571 listed occupations, 546 have a published median hourly wage. Total California employment (18,213,700) is the file's all-occupations row; listed-occupation employment sums to 15,520,300, 85 percent of the total. OEWS employment is a count of filled wage-and-salary jobs, not unique workers and not hours: part-time and full-time jobs each count once, multiple jobholders appear at each job, and self-employed and most private-household work are outside the frame.

Employment in the 259 matched occupations below the living wage sums to 9,299,240: 60 percent of the jobs in listed occupations and 51 percent of all jobs in the state. Five matched occupations carry no published employment estimate and count as zero in these sums, which cannot raise either share. The 25 unmatched codes are mostly teaching occupations, for which OEWS publishes annual rather than hourly wages, plus Legislators, which the statewide file omits; excluding them cannot raise the sub-living-wage share.

3. Living-wage benchmark

The benchmark is the MIT Living Wage Calculator's wage for one adult with no children in California, $30.48 per hour, accessed October 22, 2026. Results against the state's own all-occupation median ($28.63) are reported alongside it: 218 of 546 matched occupations (40 percent) pay below the state median.

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4. Earnings-test estimate

The value-added earnings test (34 CFR 690.95, effective from award year 2030-31) compares published tuition and fees with median completer earnings minus 150 percent of the single-person federal poverty guideline. The 2026 guideline is $15,960 (HHS, 48 contiguous states, applied nationally including California), so the floor is $23,940. Under 34 CFR 690.95(b)(1), median earnings are first divided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis regional price parity for the program's metropolitan area, or for the State where the program is outside one (the preamble confirms division, 91 FR 29254). This note applies the 2024 California all-items parity, 110.7 (BEA, February 2026 release), so in California dollars the floor is $26,506 and, at 2,080 annual hours, a $3,000 program passes at $14.34 per hour ($29,828 annually) and a $9,000 program at $17.53 ($36,471).

Annual figures are the OEWS hourly medians at 2,080 hours, which makes the lowest listed annual median $35,194 (Home Health and Personal Care Aides, $16.92 hourly). All 546 matched occupations clear the $3,000 bar; 544 clear the $9,000 bar. The two that miss it, Home Health and Personal Care Aides (value-added earnings $7,846) and Gambling Dealers ($17.30 hourly, $8,560), hold 985,200 jobs, 6.3 percent of listed employment. The hours-binding illustration uses the Childcare Workers statewide median (SOC 39-9011, $19.73): (23,940 + 3,000) x 1.1072 / 19.73 is about 1,512 annual hours, 73 percent of full time.

Correction, November 3, 2026: the October 27 version of this note and page omitted the price parity adjustment and reported all 546 occupations and all six completer fields clearing both bars. Metro rerun: EDD's May 2025 wage tables for 31 areas (metropolitan statistical areas, metropolitan divisions, and three nonmetropolitan regions) joined to the list and divided by each area's own BEA parity (metropolitan divisions take their parent MSA's parity; the three regions take the State's). No listed occupation fails at $3,000 tuition in any area. At $9,000, 930,000 of 14.74 million listed jobs with area wages (6.3 percent) sit in occupation-and-area pairs that fail: 522,000 in the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale division (ten occupations, led by home health aides, cashiers, and waiters), 129,000 in Anaheim-Santa Ana-Irvine, 83,000 in San Diego, 115,000 in the San Francisco and Oakland divisions (home health aides only), and none in Sacramento, Riverside-San Bernardino, San Jose, or any Central Valley metro. The area-level file is published alongside the joins (ca_list_metro_wage_rpp_20261103.csv).

Caveat: the test itself uses actual completer earnings from federal records, which part-year work and early-career wages can place well below occupation medians, making these estimates generous to programs. The Census Bureau's Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes, the one public program-level earnings series, does not yet include California institutions. The calculation itself applies only to programs with at least 50 Pell recipients who completed and were working, pooled across up to four award years; smaller programs receive no determination.

5. Community college certificate analysis

Certificates are IPEDS 2023-24 completions (C2024, first majors, award levels 20 and 21, certificates of less than one year) at California public two-year institutions (sector 4, 98 institutions). Each field of study is mapped to occupations through the NCES CIP 2020 to SOC 2018 crosswalk and classified by the California-employment-weighted median of its mapped occupations' median hourly wages against the same $30.48 benchmark. 46,795 of 54,863 certificates (85 percent) have a wage match; 18,744 (40.1 percent of matched) are in below-living-wage fields.

The enrolled-student figure divides completions by the 70 percent completion threshold of 34 CFR 690.94 (18,744 / 0.70, about 26,800, stated as roughly 27,000). It is a rate implication, not a measured headcount: a program exactly at the compliance floor has this enrollment, and a weaker one has more.

The home-care field (CIP 51.2602, 39 certificates) sits among the unmatched because EDD publishes the combined SOC 31-1120 rather than the detailed codes the crosswalk uses; assigning it the combined median would move the below-living-wage share from 40.1 to 40.2 percent.

6. Workforce composition

Shares of workers who are women are from the BLS Current Population Survey, 2025 annual averages, Table 11 (employed persons by detailed occupation and sex): Home Health Aides 86.1 percent, Personal Care Aides 79.8 percent, 81.6 percent across the two occupations weighted by employment. These are national figures; the CPS does not publish state-by-occupation detail at this granularity.

7. Legal and regulatory sources

California Education Code section 69871 (list standard). California Health and Safety Code section 1736.1 (certified home health aide statutory training minimum of 75 hours). Home care is the umbrella for the occupation's two halves; on the personal-care side, California requires 10 hours for affiliated home care aides and 8 for Medicaid-waiver personal care (PHI, personal care aide training requirements, verified October 2026). Workforce composition: 85 percent of home care workers are women and 33 percent are immigrants (PHI, Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts 2025, pp. 8-9). Federal program rules: 34 CFR 690.92 through 690.96, published at 91 FR 29254 (May 19, 2026), including the 150-599 clock hour program shape, the 70 percent completion and placement thresholds, and the value-added earnings test.

9. Sensitivity and limitations

Benchmark: replacing the MIT living wage with the state's own all-occupation median ($28.63) lowers the listed-and-below share of all California employment from 51 to 46.5 percent (8,471,140 jobs), so the headline does not depend on the living-wage benchmark. A one-adult, one-child living wage is substantially higher than the one-adult figure used here, which makes the one-adult benchmark the conservative choice. Statewide medians mask regional differences; regional reruns (Bay Area against Central Valley) are a planned extension.

Crosswalk: classifying each certificate field by the unweighted median of its mapped occupations' medians, instead of the employment-weighted median, lowers the struck share from 40.1 to 35.4 percent of wage-matched certificates. The share exceeds one third under either matching rule.

Certificate window: IPEDS award levels 20 and 21 (certificates of less than one academic year) approximate but do not equal Workforce Pell's 150-599 clock-hour window; IPEDS carries no clock-hour field, and the approximation errs in both directions (programs under 150 hours and from 600 to 899 hours are included). The roughly-27,000 enrollment figure is a floor: it assumes completion exactly at the 70 percent threshold, and lower real completion rates imply higher enrollment.

Validation (performed October 28, 2026): actual completer earnings from the Chancellor's Office DataVista platform, Strong Workforce Program metrics 800 (median annual earnings one year after exit) and 802 (attainment of the county single-adult living wage), statewide, 2023-24 exiters, by six-digit TOP code. In the six largest certificate fields (child development, nursing assistant, medical assisting, EMT, welding, accounting), actual earnings clear the $3,000 bar in every field after the 110.7 price parity adjustment; child development ($36,396, value-added $8,932) misses the $9,000 bar by $68 and the other five clear it, nursing assistant by the thinnest margin ($673). Actual earnings sit $4,642 to $12,650 below the occupation medians, confirming the proxy's disclosed direction of error. Caveats: the DataVista metric covers all non-transferring exiters (completers and

skills-builders), not certificate completers alone, and measures the first year after exit; Salary Surfer, the legacy certificate-specific series (unstated vintage), shows the same ordering across fields. The comparison dataset is published alongside the joins. The Census Bureau's PSEO series still does not cover California institutions.

10. Published data and provenance

Both joins are published in full for recomputation: **ca_list_wage_join_20261022.csv** (occupation-level: SOC, title, median wage, employment, living-wage flags), **ca_list_wage_join_rpp_20261103.csv** (the same join with annual, parity-adjusted, and value-added columns under the state, Los Angeles, and San Francisco parities), **ca_bea_rpp_all_items_2024_20261103.csv** (BEA all-items parities, California and its 25 metropolitan areas, 2023-2024), and **ca_cc_cert_wage_join_20261027.csv** (field-level: CIP, title, certificates, assigned median, living-wage flag). Analysis page: **opportunitydata.org/workforce-pell-california-list.html**.

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