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Report: Californians Complacent As State **Higher Education** Struggles

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec. 1 [AScribe Newswire] -- California's higher education system is lagging behind those of other high-growth states -- largely due to a lack of statewide leadership and no sense of urgency among policymakers to address some serious issues. That's according to a recent report by the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy at California State University, Sacramento.

The report says California is far behind in degree and certificate completion rates, and has large education gaps across ethnic groups. The state also has many more high school students who put off college, lowering their chances of ever earning a degree.

As for continued praise for California's higher education promise, the report says, "celebration is unwarranted."

The report, titled "Facing Reality," compared California to seven other states experiencing high growth and demographic change: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Washington. It found that every other state is far ahead of California in identifying statewide challenges and deciding how to address them.

"We are suffering from a lack of statewide leadership on higher education," says Nancy Shulock, the institute's executive director and co-author of the report. "Nobody is driving the agenda statewide. We Californians like to sit back and assume that everything is fine. But it isn't. Yes, we have fine institutions, but collectively they are leaving many important needs unmet. We need to get going and start addressing the problems."

One of the big problems, Shulock says, is the state's continued focus on getting students into college -- and not nearly enough attention to getting them through.

"We've been obsessed with access to higher education at all costs, but shouldn't we also care how they do once they're in, about whether they actually graduate, and how well the system is set up to help students succeed?" Shulock says.

She says major challenges for California include a growing college-age population, learning gaps at the K-12 level, a large number of adults without a college education, a poor system for transferring students from community colleges to four-year universities, and no "culture of completion" at community colleges. California also lacks student-level statewide data, she says, as well as statewide goals and accountability for meeting them that would keep the focus on the needs of the state as a whole.

CONTACTS: For more information or a copy of the report contact the institute at 916-278-3888 or www.csus.edu/ihe. For media assistance, contact the Sacramento State public affairs office at 916-278-6156.

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