

# Paving the Pathways for Oxnard's Future

## Securing the Well-being and Success of Young Adult Residents

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# Introduction

California ranks fifth as the world’s largest economy, but it is also characterized by dramatic income inequality. The gap between high and low-income families worsened during the pandemic, and today young people from lower-income and working-class backgrounds face uncertain futures as the costs of food, housing, health care, and higher education continue to rise. These challenges affect a significant proportion of young adults living in Oxnard, California. Oxnard is home to over 200,000 residents, many of whom have Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous family origins. A coastal city, it hosts a diverse array of industries, but the majority of Oxnard’s young adult residents work in retail and other sectors that offer relatively low wages and lack opportunities for advancement. Like so many Californians from modest backgrounds, they struggle to make ends meet and require guidance, training, and networks to make a better future for themselves and their families.

This report seeks to inform local efforts to facilitate the upward economic mobility of Oxnard’s young adult residents—specifically, those eighteen to thirty-four years of age—so as to increase their well-being and ensure that the city has a thriving future. The analyses presented draw on the results of surveys and interviews to provide a snapshot of Oxnard’s young adult population in a post-pandemic reality. The report addresses demographic characteristics, civic engagement, and the overall well-being of this population. It also examines their educational and occupational experiences and aspirations. Altogether, research findings can guide local government and community leaders in addressing the root causes of inequality and devising solutions for Oxnard and the state of California. By coordinating efforts to counteract social inequalities, Oxnard can serve as a model for other cities with large immigrant and working-class populations.

To support understanding of the significance of this research effort, we offer three main takeaways from the study.

1.



**The economic and health outcomes of Oxnard’s young adults are worse than those for other young adult populations in California.**

When compared to their peers statewide, Oxnard’s young adults disproportionately report poorer health outcomes and are concentrated in jobs that provide limited prospects for upward mobility and well-being. On average, their level of educational attainment is low, and they often lack formal connections to the civic organizations—whether community, labor, or school-based—that can assist them.

2.



**While some young adults remain uncertain about their future educational or career plans, many others who aspire to higher educational degrees and better jobs lack the preparation and guidance necessary to achieve their goals.**

Oxnard’s young adults need better access to the information and the training necessary to obtain educational credentials and good jobs—that is, jobs that pay a living wage and offer benefits and advancement opportunities.

3.



**Oxnard’s educational and civic organizations can improve pathways to higher education, living-wage jobs, and community engagement.**

Local educational institutions can do more to ensure that young adults enroll in institutions that offer bachelor’s degrees. Workforce development interventions, such as the Employee Pipeline Program, can be strengthened to channel a greater number of residents into good local jobs. Investments in civic organizations that support young adults can facilitate networking and create opportunities while enhancing the responsiveness of civil society institutions to the interests and needs of lower-income residents. Ultimately, investing in educational and civic organizations that are operating in Oxnard will benefit the economic, educational, and civic lives of young working adults and their families.

The overarching objective of this report is to provide (a) detailed evidence of the challenges that Oxnard’s young adults encounter, and (b) solutions that can help Oxnard’s youth thrive. The analyses shared here rely on multiple sources of data, including national and statewide datasets and findings from the 2023–24 Thriving Youth Study (TYS), a youth-led effort to collect community-specific data on the needs of young adults.<sup>1</sup> Students from Oxnard College, CSU Channel Islands, and UCLA administered 3,031 original surveys to Oxnard’s young adult residents. Results were weighted to generally reflect Oxnard’s young adult population. Forty in-depth follow-up interviews with young adults who were not students guided the interpretation of select statistical findings. A technical report contains more information about the data used in this study (Terriguez 2024).

This research was sponsored by the City of Oxnard and made possible through partnerships with Oxnard College, CSU Channel Islands, and Clinicas del Real. The UCLA Labor Center, Future Leaders of America, and Mixteco Indigena Organizing Project (MICOP) also provided input into data collection instruments and data analysis.





## Oxnard's Young Adult Population

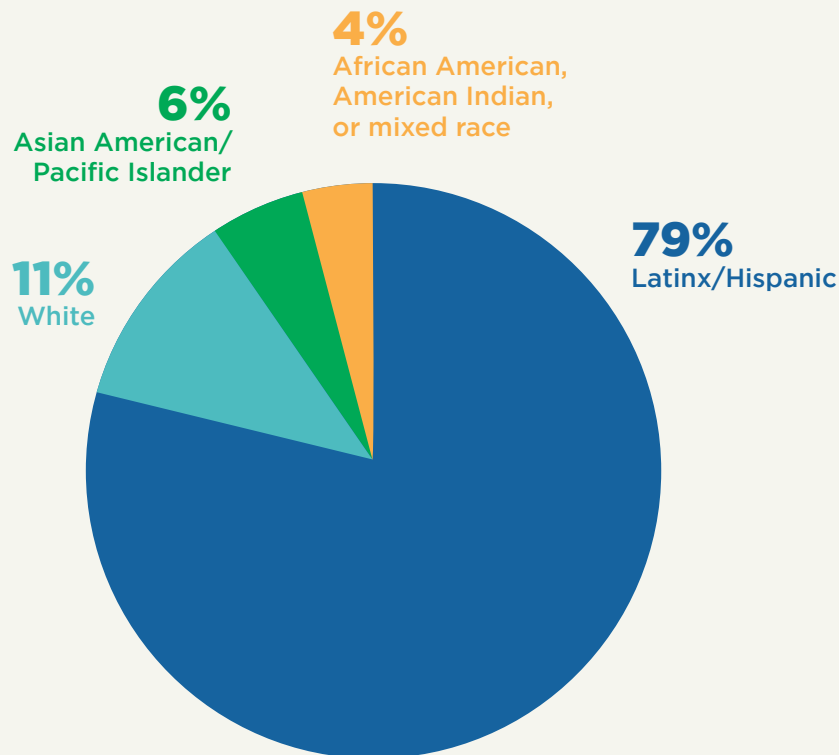
Oxnard was founded in 1898 in the ancestral homeland of the Chumash people. Its growth was initially fueled by a local agricultural industry that attracted a racially diverse workforce. In the mid-twentieth century, the development of local harbor facilities, followed by the establishment of manufacturing industries and a tourist sector, further spurred growth. As one of the more-affordable cities in Ventura County, Oxnard is a destination for many immigrants and their families, who have found employment locally and in the surrounding area. Oxnard's residents are relatively young: according to American Community Survey estimates for 2018-22 (hereafter ACS), half the population was under the age of thirty-five. As such, the success of these young people has major implications for the city's future.



## Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Composition

Like so many other working-class cities across California, Oxnard's population is predominantly of Latinx/Hispanic origin. ACS data indicate that 79 percent of Oxnard's young adult residents identified as Latinx or Hispanic. Approximately 11 percent identified as non-Hispanic White, 6 percent as Asian American–Pacific Islander, and 4 percent as African American, American Indian, or mixed race (fig. 1).

**Figure 1.**  
**Oxnard's Young Adults (Aged 18–34), by Race/Ethnicity**  
Source: American Community Survey, 2018–22



Oxnard's large population of Indigenous residents are primarily from Mexico. Many came to Oxnard as agricultural migrant workers, then settled in the city. Unfortunately, government data do not provide reliable estimates for this population. Our survey, however, suggests that a large segment of Oxnard's young adult population is of Indigenous descent: 23 percent of respondents reported either that their ethnic origin is Indigenous or that they spoke a Mexican Indigenous language at home.

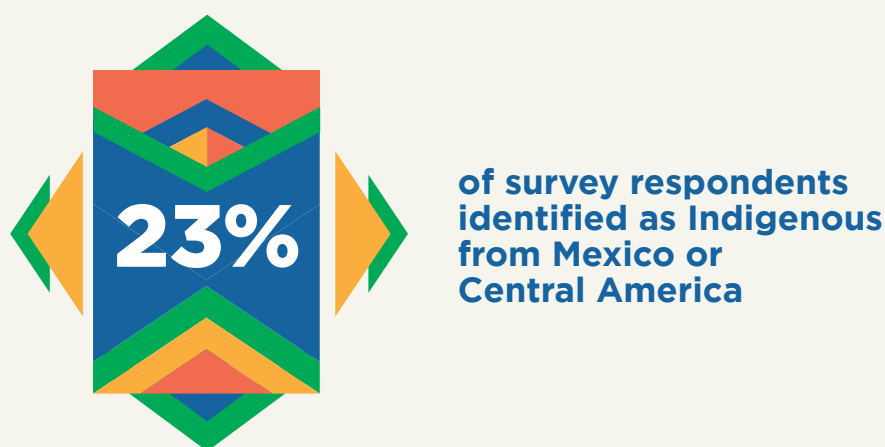
Most respondents reported ethnic ties to Mixteco and Zapoteco Indigenous groups from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, but some identified as Purépecha, Otomí, Maya, or another Indigenous group. Owing to the city's civic organizations with strong cultural and ethnic ties, Oxnard's immigrant Indigenous community is highly networked and resilient (Rivera-Salgado 2015). However, these diverse Indigenous immigrants

often encounter significant linguistic barriers, as some grew up speaking neither Spanish nor English. Overall, young adult members of the Indigenous community experience high levels of poverty and encounter various forms of exclusion, including racial discrimination from non-Indigenous Latinx residents. A separate report utilizes the TYS to compare the Indigenous population to other Oxnard residents (Terriquez, González et al. 2024).

The TYS survey suggests that 50 percent of residents identify as men, and 48 percent identify as women. Another 2 percent do not identify along the gender binary.

**Figure 2.**  
**Indigenous Young Adults**

Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,031)



### **An Immigrant Gateway City**

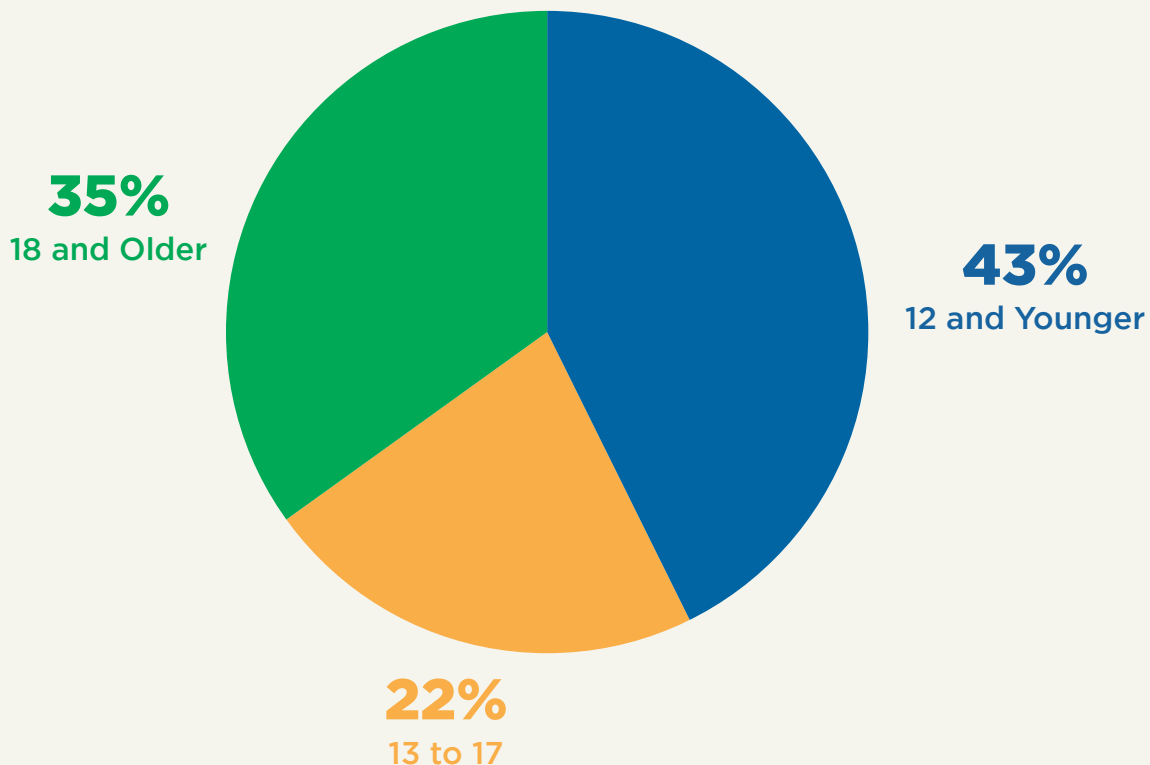
Many first-generation immigrants (those born abroad) have made Oxnard their home. According to ACS data, 28 percent of Oxnard’s young adults were foreign-born, with about four out of five hailing from Mexico. The city is also home to smaller percentages of Central American and Filipino immigrants, as well as immigrants from other parts of the world.

Most first-generation immigrants in Oxnard occupy low-wage sectors of employment. Their employment trajectories are in part shaped by the age at which they immigrated, which can determine educational opportunities, familiarity with US culture, and fluency in English. It is noteworthy that an estimated 43 percent of Oxnard’s immigrant population arrived in the United States when they were twelve years of age or younger and, consequently, they are likely to share many similarities with the US-born children of immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). A smaller group, 22 percent, arrived as adolescents (ages thirteen through seventeen), which may have presented greater challenges as they adjusted to their new life in the United States and navigated employment



opportunities as young adults. The transition to Oxnard classrooms—school is mandatory for all California children between the ages of six and eighteen—may have been challenging for this group, depending on their educational experience in their home country within and outside of school settings. Finally, approximately 35 percent of young adults arrived in the country at the age of eighteen or older, and they likely had little exposure to K-12 education in the United States (fig. 3). For those coming from a non-English-speaking country, acquiring English language skills may have been difficult, since it is harder to learn a new language as an adult than as a child. Adult migrants without English-language skills typically have limited job options.

**Figure 3.**  
**Oxnard’s Young Adult Immigrants (Aged 18–34), by Age at Arrival**  
Source: American Community Survey, 2018–22



In terms of language acquisition, approximately 44 percent of Oxnard’s immigrant young adult population reported speaking English well or very well. Accordingly, the majority of respondents might benefit from English-language classes. Although immigrants can get by in Oxnard without speaking or reading English, learning English can expand their job opportunities and make it easier for them to navigate US institutions.



In addition to language and education, citizenship status serves as an indicator of immigrants' social incorporation and sense of belonging, as it determines access to certain services, protections, and rights. Immigrants who naturalize tend to earn higher wages and enjoy better working conditions, access to healthcare, and housing than those who do not (McConnell 2015; Ortega et al. 2007; Pastor et al. 2012). ACS data indicate that only 21 percent of Oxnard's young adult immigrants are naturalized citizens, and TYS findings suggest that a relatively small percentage of Oxnard's young adult immigrants are legal permanent residents who may be eligible to naturalize. While some young immigrants have secured DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) authorization or another type of work permit, it is likely that more than half of Oxnard's young adult immigrants have a precarious legal status. This correlates with lower wages and poorer mental health, and it can lead to a range of additional hardships, not only for the individuals with temporary or no legal documentation but also for their families (Donato and Armenta 2011; Dreby 2015; Pedroza 2022).

Regardless of citizenship status, the immigrant experience shaped the lives of many survey respondents. Findings from the study indicate that 83 percent of young adults in Oxnard come from immigrant families: they are immigrants themselves or the US-born children of immigrants. Young people from immigrant families often serve as translators for their parents and help them navigate US institutions, and some shoulder significant household responsibilities (Kwon 2022; Orellana 2009). At the same time, their ties to the culture and language of their homeland can, in some cases, be an advantage in the job market (Waters et al. 2010).



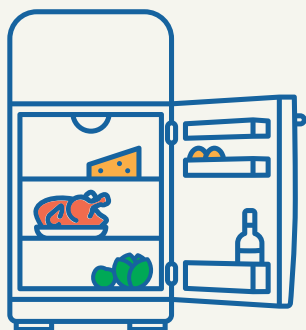


# Income Background and Economic Challenges

A significant proportion of Oxnard residents struggle economically. According to ACS estimates, 29 percent of young adults in Oxnard were low-income—that is, with an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This figure is slightly lower than the 31 percent of young adults across the state who were estimated to be low-income. However, it is likely that the ACS undercounts Oxnard’s low-income noncitizen immigrant and Indigenous populations (Anderson and Beveridge 2022; Kissam 2017), especially considering the low-wage, often seasonal jobs that they occupy. ACS estimates also indicate that the median income for employed young adults in Oxnard was \$30,000, which was lower than the \$35,000 estimated as the median income for young adults statewide.

The TYS provides other indicators of economic well-being. Results suggest that Indigenous residents encounter more economic challenges than other Oxnard residents. Specifically, Indigenous residents were significantly more likely than others to face food insecurity, with 41 percent reporting that it was often or sometimes true that the food they bought ran out before they had enough money to buy more. Forty percent stated that it was often or sometimes true that they could not afford balanced meals. These survey results correlated with residents' ability to pay for housing, with 46 percent stating that they encountered difficulties covering housing costs. The city's limited housing stock and gentrification pressures are likely contributors to the lack of affordable housing for Oxnard residents.

**Figure 4.**  
**Respondents Who Reported Food and Housing Insecurity**  
Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,031)



**▶ 41%**  
**of respondents indicated that the food they bought ran out before they had money to buy more**



**▶ 46%**  
**encountered difficulties covering housing costs**



## Family Care Work

Family care work can pose significant constraints on young adults' educational and professional success. The rising costs of childcare, coupled with the inaccessibility of quality care for the growing senior population, can place a burden on young adults. Furthermore, even if they have no children of their own, young adults may find themselves caring for younger siblings and relatives.

Overall, approximately 17 percent of TYS respondents reported caring for family members other than (and sometimes in addition to) their own children, including younger siblings, parents and grandparents, and other adult family members. Follow-up interviews confirmed that some young adults devoted significant time to assisting their families.

The TYS underscores the extent to which familial responsibilities define the daily routines of many low-income young adults. For example, the survey found that 30 percent of young adults who were students were performing family care work. While students' schedules may be conducive to assisting with family care work, this added responsibility limits the time they have to focus on their own academic success and career development. As detailed in a separate report, Latinas in particular spend significant time providing unpaid family care (Chavarria et al. 2024).





## Health Indicators and Access To Health Insurance

There is cause for concern in regard to the health outcomes of Oxnard's young adult residents. Survey results indicate that young residents have poorer self-reported health than their peers across California. In the TYS survey, only 35 percent of Oxnard respondents reported excellent or very good health. This compares to an estimated 60 percent of young adults statewide who reported excellent or very good health a year earlier, according to the 2022 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS). A similar gap was seen at the opposite end of the scale, with 27 percent of Oxnard TYS survey respondents reporting their health status as fair or poor. In contrast, only 13 percent of residents statewide reported fair or poor health in 2022, based on estimates from the CHIS (fig. 5).<sup>2</sup>

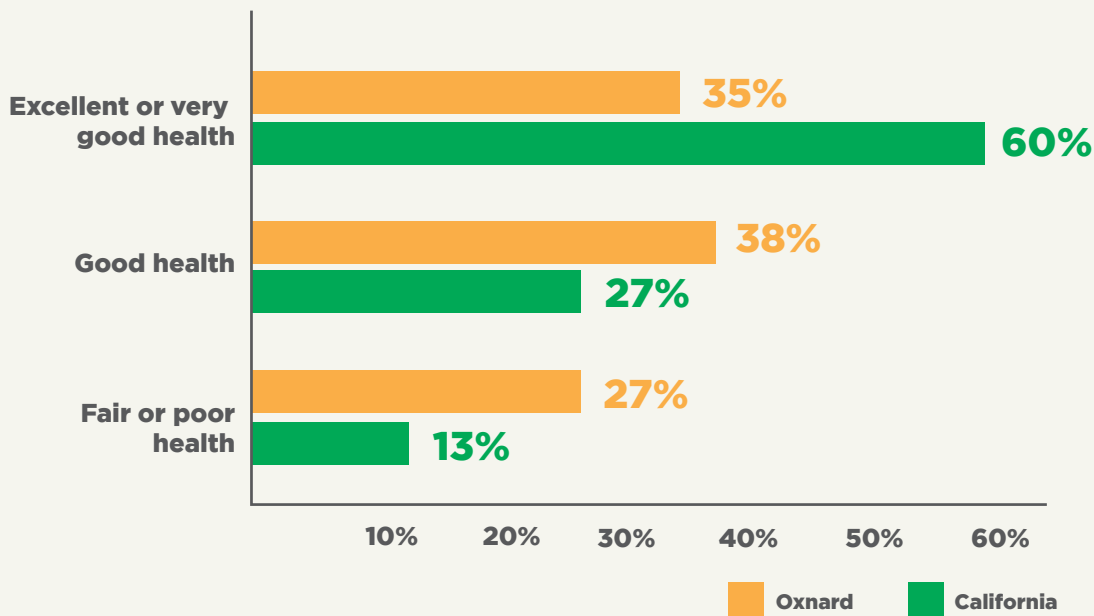
Young adults in Oxnard also disproportionately lacked health insurance when compared to young adults statewide, according to the ACS. Approximately 81 percent of Oxnard residents had health insurance, compared to 90 percent of California residents. There appears to be little difference, however, for young adults who rely on public health insurance: 28 percent of Oxnard residents, compared to 27 percent of California residents. In addition, when compared to young adults across the state, a smaller percentage of Oxnard residents relied on employer-provided health insurance (66 percent and 57 percent, respectively). These results indicate that young adults in Oxnard are less likely than their California peers to secure employment in jobs that provide health benefits.



**Figure 5.**

**Self-Reported Health of Young Adults in Oxnard and California (Aged 18–34)**

Source: California Health Interview Study, 2022; Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,031)



Follow-up interviews with a subsample of survey respondents suggest that many of Oxnard’s young adult residents are not considering benefits when looking for a job, as their priority is to immediately secure employment to be able to afford basic necessities. A handful of interviewees did not know that health care, sick leave, and retirement benefits are offered by some employers. These respondents had very little understanding of the types of benefits that might be available. This lack of awareness might be explained by the fact that many of these young people were raised by immigrants who do not enjoy these benefits themselves and thus did not relay the importance or desirability of such perks.

Individuals who lack health insurance face risks to their well-being and can pose public health challenges. Consequently, the survey asked uninsured respondents to list one or more reasons for lacking health insurance. The most common reason was high cost, reported by 57 percent of uninsured respondents, illustrating the link between economic hardship and poor health outcomes. Furthermore, although in California immigrants can legally obtain health insurance regardless of their legal status, 28 percent attributed their lack of insurance to immigration-related concerns. This demonstrates that misinformation can persuade immigrants that they might be at risk of deportation if they seek public health benefits, deterring them from enrolling in a health insurance program (Haley, González, and Kenney 2022). Other reasons for not being insured included the loss of benefits after leaving a job, leaving school, or aging out of their parents’ health insurance plan. Approximately 6 percent believed that they did not need health insurance. A separate accompanying report details particularly high uninsurance rates among Oxnard’s immigrant population (Terriquez, Vega et al. 2024).

Young adults who were trying to manage spending said that health insurance was a lower priority than other budget considerations. This was particularly the case for respondents who did not have children. For those starting a family, a pregnancy sometimes deepened their understanding of why securing health insurance was critical for them and their children.

TYS results reveal the need not only for lower health insurance costs and wages that can support the purchase of health insurance but also for expanded efforts to educate young adults about the importance of coverage and immigrants' eligibility for health insurance plans.

**Table 1.**  
**Reasons for Not Having Health Insurance among Uninsured Oxnard Residents (Aged 18-34)**  
 Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (*n* = 570)

REASON	RESPONDENTS AGREEING (%)
The cost is too high	57
Immigration reasons	28
You became ineligible because of your age or because you left school	10
You lost your job or changed employers	8
You don't have a need for health insurance	6
Other reason	4



# Civic Engagement and Opportunities for Upward Mobility

Oxnard has a vibrant history of community engagement (Barajas 2012; García 2018), and community-, labor-, and school-based organizations carry on that legacy today. This work is important for young people’s well-being and economic success, because these civic groups provide them with valuable labor market information, contribute to their sense of belonging, and facilitate community building (Terriquez, Xu, and Reyes 2021).

TYS results show noteworthy variations in the extent to which Oxnard’s young people are involved in the city’s civic groups and activities. Of the 63 percent of respondents who attended schools in the Oxnard Unified High School District (OUHSD), the majority, 69 percent, had participated in some kind of religious, sports, leadership, or civic activity

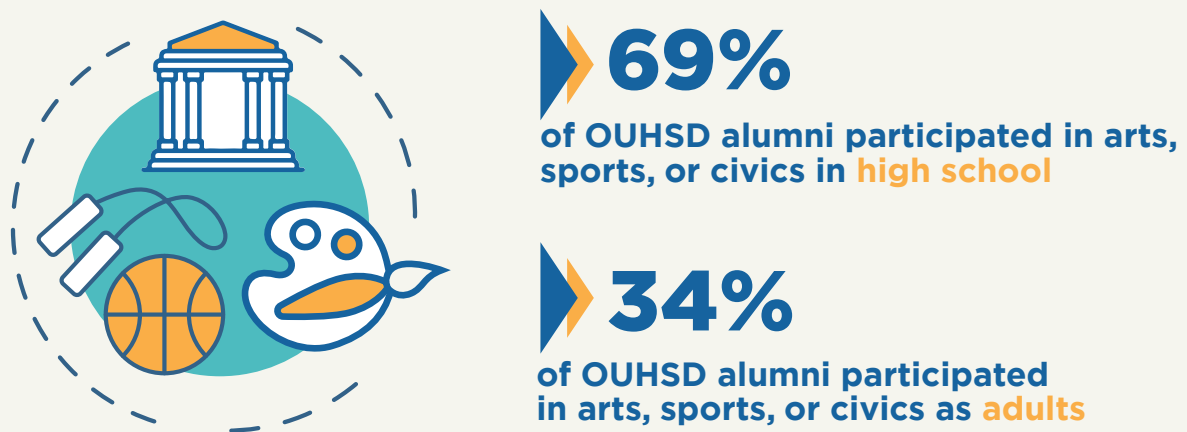


while they were in high school. High school students' involvement in structured school extracurricular and community-based activities can have lasting positive implications for students' health, professional growth, and community leadership (Callahan and Muller 2013; Terriquez 2015; Terriquez, Xu, and Reyes 2021).

Findings based on OUHSD students suggest that many young residents are interested and willing to become involved in civic activities. However, opportunities for involvement decreased after high school, with only about one-third of OUHSD alumni and other respondents reporting some kind of organizational involvement. This finding suggests that Oxnard, like many other working-class cities, can do more to provide structured civic opportunities for its young adult population, especially since young adults who do not attend a four-year college often lack the chance to join civic organizations and benefit from their networking opportunities.

**Figure 6.**  
**Extracurricular Participation among OUHSD Students**

Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,031)



Educators and community-based organizations (such as Future Leaders of America, CAUSE, and MICOP) have made efforts to engage young adult residents in local public debates and to encourage their electoral participation. Oxnard, as noted earlier, is a Latinx-majority city, and its voter turnout among young adults was 22 percent, roughly matching the turnout for Latinx young adults across the state.

Civic engagement is an essential component of success as young adults strive to attain higher education and good jobs. Activities organized by civic groups—for example, the community college, local community organizations, and high school and college alumni groups—help build trust among residents, facilitate the sharing of valuable information, and enhance residents' participation in local government decision-making. Expanding upon the already existing civic infrastructure within community-based organizations will encourage young people's participation and foster greater local institutional responsiveness to their interests and needs.



## The High-School-to-College Education Pipeline

An analysis of young adults' schooling experiences provides important insights into their future prospects. Overall, this research demonstrates that the educational attainment of Oxnard's young adult residents was lower than that of their same-aged peers across the state. At the same time, those who graduated from local high schools attended community college at comparatively high rates, which can inform local interventions.

A high school diploma can evidence the acquisition of the basic academic skills required for some jobs, but not all. ACS estimates for 2018–22 show that 13 percent of all Oxnard young adults lacked a diploma, compared to 9 percent of young adults across the state

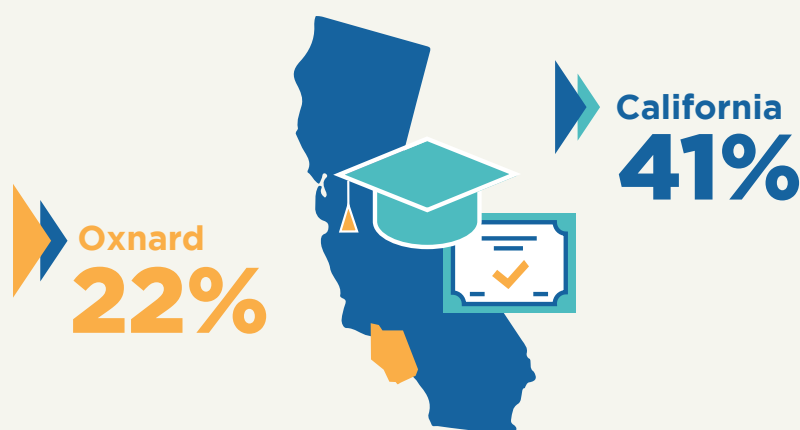
The estimates also show that the percentage of individuals without a high school diploma varied by nativity. While only 7 percent of US-born young adults in Oxnard did not attain a diploma, an estimated 28 percent of the city's foreign-born young adults did not attain a diploma. Oxnard's agricultural and other industries attract immigrants who may not have had the opportunity to attend high school in their home country.

In general, individuals who earn a bachelor's degree tend to enjoy greater job opportunities, higher wages, and better health, and they tend to be more civically engaged than peers who have not attained such a degree. According to ACS estimates, 22 percent of Oxnard's young adults aged twenty-five to thirty-four had attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Women were more likely than men to achieve a higher education degree, with 24 percent of women attaining such a degree compared to 19 percent of men. (These gendered patterns are further discussed in a report on Oxnard's Latinx residents.) But overall, it is important to note that the percentage of all Oxnard residents with a bachelor's degree pales in comparison to the 41 percent of young adults in this age bracket statewide who earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

**Figure 7.**

**Respondents Aged 25–34 Who Earned a Bachelor's Degree**

Source: American Community Survey, 2018–22



Of course, it is likely that some US-born young adults who achieve a bachelor's degree leave Oxnard for more affluent communities. Hence, examining the postsecondary preparation and enrollment patterns of students who attend local schools can provide additional insights into the educational trajectories of Oxnard's young population.

**College Preparation and Enrollment Patterns**

The City of Oxnard is home to nine public high schools, one private high school, and one community college. State and national data sources offer some indicators of the postsecondary achievement of young adults who attend Oxnard Union High School District's (OUHSD) public high schools and those who enroll in Ventura County Community College District schools, including Oxnard College. The upshot is that a community college tends to be the primary destination for many local students, with relatively few attending institutions that offer a bachelor's degree.

Colleges and universities that grant bachelor's degrees function as engines of upward economic mobility for young people from modest backgrounds. California's public four-year institutions are part of either the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) systems. The rate at which OUHSD students complete the courses required to be admitted to a UC school (known as the A-G courses) offers important insights into their academic preparation and access to higher education. These preparatory



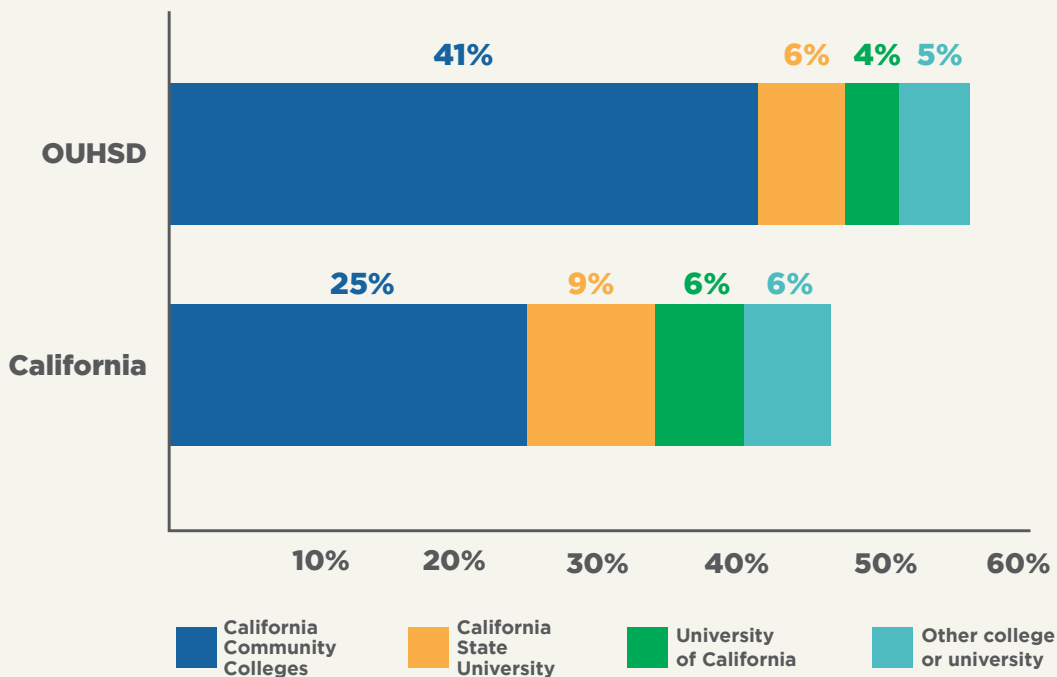
courses are not always available to students who wish to enroll in them. Thanks in part to community demands, OUHSD passed a resolution to increase access to A-G courses in 2018 (Terriquez, Cazárez, and Negrete 2022). Nevertheless, a smaller percentage of OUHSD students in the graduating class of 2021 completed the required courses when compared to their peers statewide: 31 percent and 39 percent, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

The percentage of students who completed A-G coursework correlated with graduates' admission to UC or CSU. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) indicate that only 4 percent of OUHSD students enrolled in a UC school in 2021, compared to 6 percent across the state, and 6 percent enrolled in a CSU school, compared to 9 percent statewide. OUHSD graduates also enrolled in private and out-of-state institutions at lower rates (fig. 8).

Although the OUHSD students who graduated in 2021 exhibited low A-G completion rates, the majority, 55 percent, enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution within a year of graduation. This exceeded the 47 percent of students in the same cohort statewide.

**Figure 8.**  
**Postsecondary School Enrollment of High School Graduates**  
**in Oxnard and California, 2021**

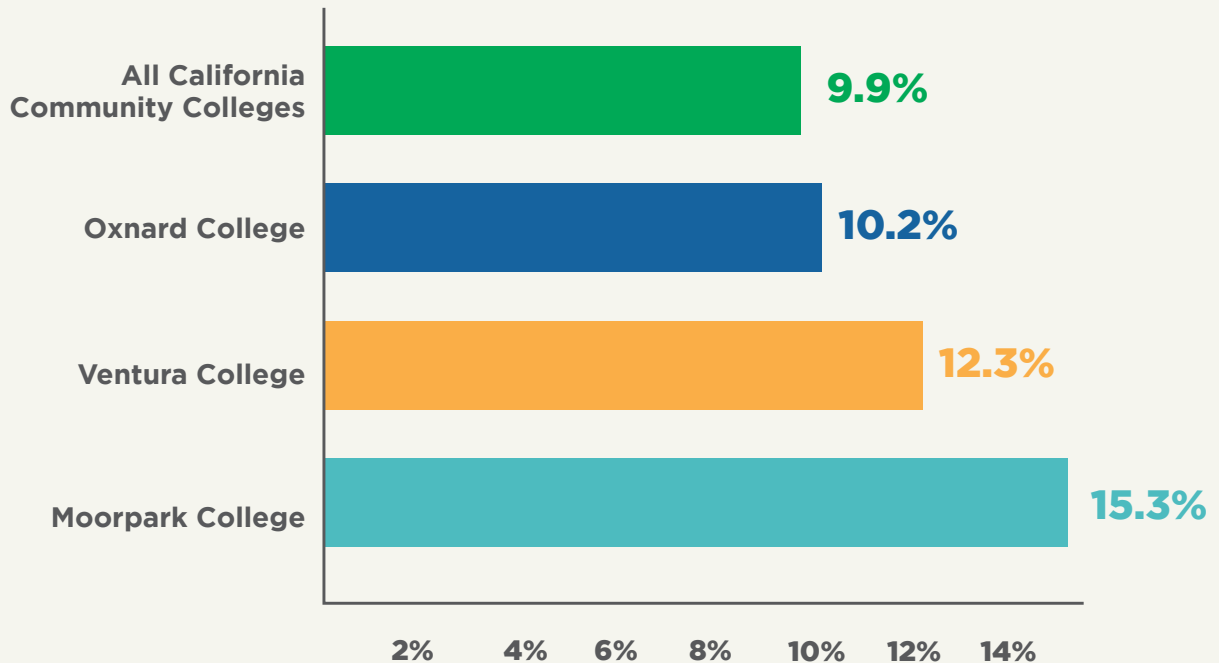
Source: California Department Education, 2020–21;  
 National Center for Education Statistics, 2021



NCES data indicate that OUHSD students attend community college at a disproportionate rate when compared to their peers across the state. Forty-one percent of OUHSD students in the class of 2021 enrolled in a public community college within a year of graduation, in contrast to 25 percent of students statewide. It is worth noting that transfer rates from community colleges to four-year institutions are generally low across California. Data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office show that in 2022, 9.9 percent of the students who were attending a community college in California successfully transferred to a four-year college or university. Within the local Ventura County Community College District, the percentages were 10.2 percent at Oxnard College, 12.3 percent at Ventura College, and 15.3 percent at Moorpark College (fig. 9).

These figures demonstrate the importance of the community college system as a learning destination for a large segment of OUHSD graduates and other Oxnard young adult residents, including immigrants who did not have the opportunity to finish high school or its equivalent. Oxnard College in particular serves as a vital, geographically accessible higher education institution for local residents.

**Figure 9.**  
**Community College Transfer Rates to Four-Year Colleges and Universities**  
Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2021-22



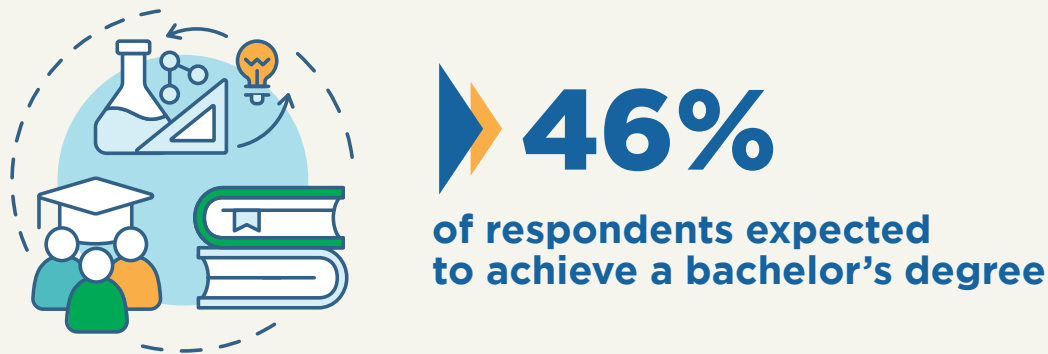
## Educational Aspirations and the Promise of the American Dream

Despite the low educational attainment levels of young adults and the low transfer rate of community college students, many respondents had high educational aspirations. Nearly 46 percent reported that they expect to attain a four-year college degree. Among those who were attending Oxnard College, 70 percent of students said they expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, these expectations do not align with current transfer rates.

**Figure 10.**

### **Respondents' Educational Aspirations**

Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,031)



Young residents in Oxnard will likely need significant guidance to set practical expectations for degree attainment and a path forward. Complicating matters, very few can rely on their parents for such guidance, as our survey showed that only 9 percent of respondents were raised by at least one parent with a bachelor's degree.

While residents' educational aspirations exceeded local patterns of degree attainment, most respondents (55 percent) did not expect to attain a bachelor's degree, and they were asked to provide one or more reasons for not doing so. The most common reason, given by 38 percent, was family obligations—specifically, caring for their own children and/or other family members. Another 35 percent reported that they could not afford a bachelor's degree. Rising tuition fees and living expenses can make attending a college or university cost-prohibitive, and the price tag can be especially daunting for Latinx families, who tend to be averse to taking on student debt (Elengold et al. 2020). Aside from family obligations and economic barriers, respondents provided other reasons for not pursuing a degree. For example, 19 percent reported that they did not know what they wanted to study, while 18 percent said that they didn't speak enough English to pursue a degree. Twelve percent said that they didn't feel prepared to succeed in school, 12 percent said that they didn't need a bachelor's degree for the job they wanted, and 11 percent said that they didn't like school. Only 4 percent agreed that a bachelor's degree would not benefit them or their families (table 2). In sum, a number of factors limit residents' educational aspirations, thus constraining their pursuit of bachelor's and advanced degrees that might offer pathways for upward economic mobility.



**Table 2.**  
**Reasons for Not Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree among Oxnard Residents**  
**Who Were Not Seeking One**  
 Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (*n* = 1,264)

<b>REASON</b>	<b>RESPONDENTS AGREEING (%)</b>
I need to take care of children or other family members	38
I can’t afford paying for school	35
I don’t know what I want to study	19
I don’t speak English	18
I don’t feel prepared to do well in school	12
I don’t need more education/bachelor’s degree for the job I want	12
I don’t like school	11
I don’t believe that a bachelor’s degree will benefit me or my family	4

All young people should be supported in achieving viable educational and career goals and should be made aware of various educational and job training options. This is especially the case when educational institutions do not have the resources to meet the wide-ranging learning and other needs of their low-income, first-generation students. Improving students’ preparation for matriculating at or transferring to a four-year college or university should be complemented with more training for jobs that provide a living wage and benefits but that do not necessarily require a bachelor’s degree. And, as shown in an accompanying report on Oxnard’s Latinx population, school enrollment and educational attainment patterns are highly gendered. Latinas are significantly more likely than their male-identified counterparts to enroll in higher education, and they are more likely to attain degrees. Interventions should therefore attend to these gendered dynamics and should assist students in defying gender stereotypes if they so wish (Chavarría et al. 2024).

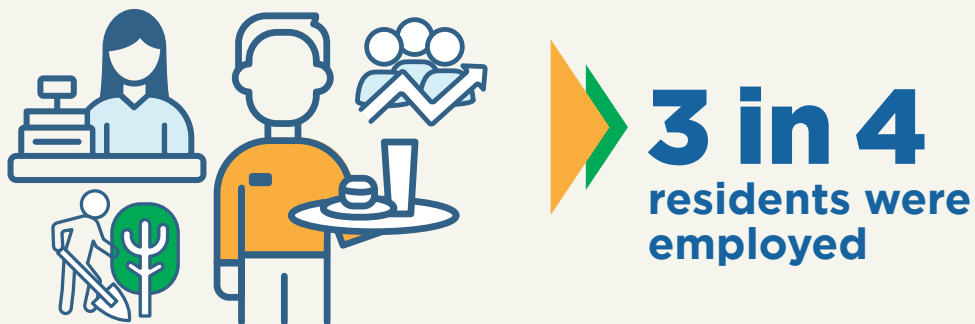


# Employment and Work Status

Notably, the portion of young adults employed in 2018–22 was higher in Oxnard than in the state overall. ACS estimates show that 76 percent of Oxnard’s young adult residents were employed, compared to 72 percent of this group statewide. Such a robust employment rate, though, does not guarantee the short-term or long-term economic well-being of Oxnard’s young adults.

Oxnard’s young adults tended to be employed in jobs with limited opportunities for upward mobility, according to ACS estimates. Similar to findings for young adults across the state, the largest concentration of Oxnard’s young workforce, 17 percent, was found in retail occupations, which typically have stagnant wages and offer limited career options.

**Figure 11.**  
**Respondents’ Employment Rate**  
Source: American Community Survey, 2018–22

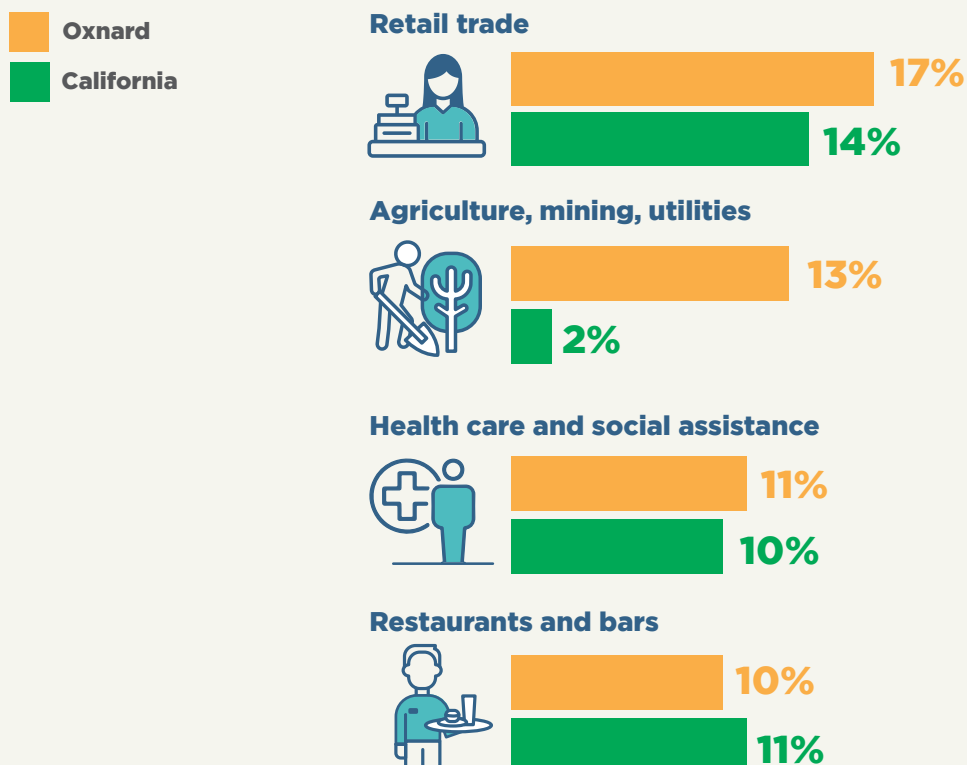


A fairly large portion of Oxnard’s young adults, 13 percent, worked in what the US Census Bureau calls “agricultural, mining, and utilities industries,” compared to 2 percent across the state. In Oxnard, this primarily entails laboring on local farms in low-wage, physically taxing jobs that do not offer health benefits or opportunities for career advancement. Another 10 percent of young adults worked in restaurants and bars, primarily in occupations that, similarly, do not provide economic security.

ACS estimates also show that 11 percent of Oxnard’s young adults were employed in healthcare and social assistance industries, and some of the occupations in these industries provide opportunities for upward economic mobility. Jobs in the healthcare industry and related occupations may offer young adults a pathway to economic security, especially if they have access to proper training for higher-paying positions with benefits.

In our TYS follow-up interviews, many of the young adults said they relied heavily on family and peer networks to learn about and secure jobs. Because they were immigrants or children of immigrants embedded in working-class communities with few college-educated adults, these networks usually connected them to local, lower-level positions with limited or no employee benefits. Our findings align with previous studies that demonstrate the centrality of co-ethnic networks in enabling employment as well as the entrenched nature of systemic inequality.

**Figure 12.**  
**Industries That Employed Respondents**  
 American Community Survey, 2018–22





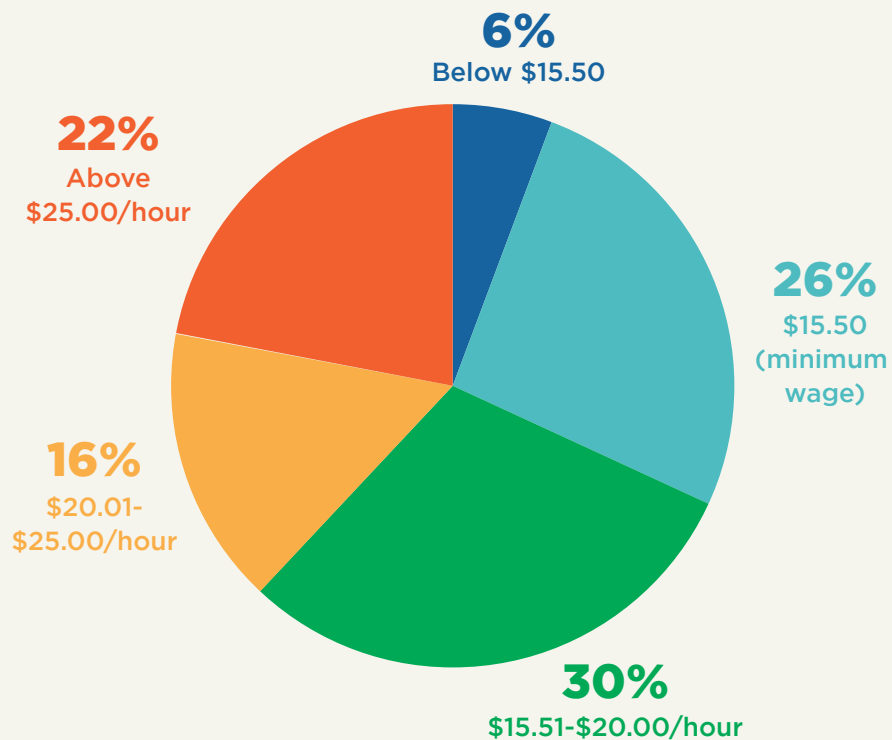
In short, the results highlight how these networks often channel job seekers into low-status occupations (Joassart-Marcelli 2014; Luthra and Waldinger 2010).

As might be expected, wages for young adults tend to be at the lower end of the compensation spectrum (fig. 13). Six percent of survey respondents reported earning below \$15.50, California’s minimum hourly wage in 2023. About a quarter, 26 percent, earned the minimum wage, 30 percent earned between \$15.51 and \$20.00 an hour, and 22 percent earned above \$25.00 an hour.

The TYS also gathered other indicators of job quality. Union jobs tend to offer better wages and working conditions than similar nonunionized jobs. Our survey results suggest that unionization rates among Oxnard’s young workers are on par with state levels: 14 percent of employed Oxnard survey respondents reported that they were part of a union, compared to 13 percent of young workers statewide.

In terms of other job quality indicators, survey results show that 41 percent of employed respondents received their work schedule less than one week in advance. An unpredictable schedule can be highly disruptive to a young adult’s ability to attend school,

**Figure 13.**  
**Hourly Earnings Reported by Oxnard’s Employed Young Adults (Aged 18–34)**  
Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (*n* = 2,003)



manage household responsibilities, and pay bills (Ramakrishnan et al. 2023). Results also indicate that some respondents experienced other labor law violations: 16 percent of employed respondents reported that they were asked to work extra hours before or after their shift, and another 16 percent reported not getting paid for all hours worked. Research indicates that immigrant workers, particularly those who lack legal status, tend to experience particularly acute workplace exploitation (Milkman 2020). As such, state and local agencies should do more to enforce labor laws. In addition, workers and employers would benefit from labor law education and outreach.

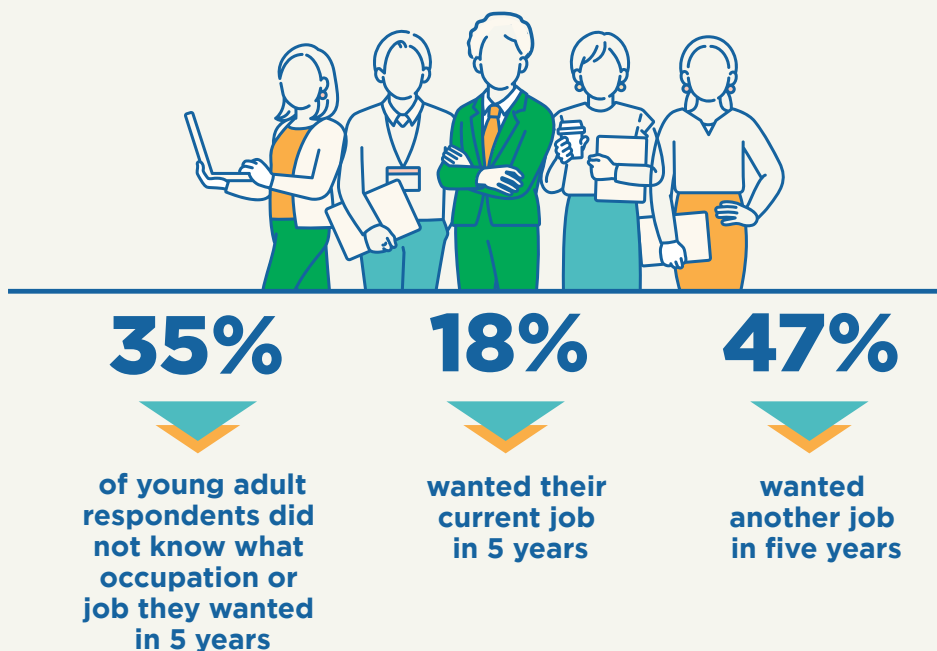
## Job Aspirations

Oxnard's young adults often find themselves in less-than-ideal employment situations, and many would like to move up the occupational ladder. Understanding the job aspirations of young adults is important for developing programs that will support their career goals. To gather data about study participants' employment aspirations, the survey asked them about the job they wanted to have in five years.

Results suggest that most young adults need guidance, support, and training to advance in their careers and better understand possible professional options. Over a third of respondents, 35 percent, indicated that they had no specific job in mind. Exposing young adults to viable jobs that provide a living wage and career advancement could encourage them to begin planning a career.

**Figure 14.**  
**Respondents' Aspirations for Employment or Occupation**

Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (N = 3,003)



Survey results also indicate that 18 percent of young adult respondents wanted to remain in their current occupation. This may be an indicator of job satisfaction or fear of becoming unemployed. The oldest group (aged thirty to thirty-four) and those who had a bachelor's degree or higher were the most likely to indicate that they wanted to remain in their current occupation. These older and/or more-educated respondents may seek greater occupational stability than their younger or less-educated peers, perhaps because they are satisfied in their current jobs or because perceived alternatives (including lack of employment) are less desirable. Survey results also indicate that 22 percent of agricultural workers said they wanted to stay in their current positions. These laborers might think that their job options are limited, or they may prefer the seasonal nature of agricultural work.

For the most part, our findings indicate that Oxnard's young adults aspire to better jobs. The largest share of respondents, 47 percent, reported that they would like an occupation other than the one they held at the time of the survey. Responses to open-ended questions revealed that most wanted a professional, skilled, or civil service occupation that offers a good salary and benefits.

In a follow-up question, this group of respondents was asked about the training requirements for their desired position. Forty percent said that their desired job would require a bachelor's degree, but 76 percent had not yet earned a degree. Some of these respondents might benefit from college counseling or other forms of advising to achieve their aim, whereas others may need to reassess their expectations if they are not on track to secure a bachelor's degree.

Among respondents who had a career in mind, the majority, 60 percent, envisioned a job that did not require a bachelor's degree. Some were interested in a job that requires an associate's degree, vocational training, more work experience, on-the-job training, or some combination of these. Specifically, 9 percent said that their expected job required an associate's degree, and about half of this group had already earned the degree or were enrolled in a school that offered one. Seventeen percent said that their expected job would require a vocational degree. Unfortunately, survey results do not provide a reliable estimate of the percentage of respondents who were on track to receive the vocational training that was required. A large group of respondents, 45 percent, reported that their expected job required accruing more work experience, and 33 percent said it would require on-the-job training.

Of the respondents who had a future occupation in mind, 6 percent reported that they were already qualified for the job and did not need additional training or a degree, and 8 percent were unaware of the type of training required or did not answer the question.

Finally, while our survey results indicate that some residents have their sights set on a future occupation, only a minority of the respondents, 38 percent, knew where to obtain the training or degree needed for the position. Overall, these survey results suggest that the majority of Oxnard's young adults require guidance on viable career and training options.





## The Oxnard Employee Pipeline Program: A Promising Model

The Oxnard Employee Pipeline Program is one intervention that can bolster the economic well-being of Oxnard’s young adult population. Operated by a partnership comprising Oxnard College, the City of Oxnard, and the West Ventura County Business Alliance, this program helps local residents obtain job readiness skills through classes at Oxnard College. Participants who finish the classes receive a certificate and a guaranteed job interview with Oxnard companies that offer health benefits. In most cases, these companies offer entry-level wages that are above average and provide opportunities for career advancement. Oxnard College offers the classes in English and Spanish, free of charge. This program aims to channel participants into local jobs and has plans to expand.

Our TYS survey demonstrates significant interest in the program (table 3). Among the young adults surveyed, 58 percent indicated that they were interested in learning more about it. As might be expected, there is some variation in interest in the program. Current high school and college students (about four of five were already enrolled at Oxnard College) were especially interested in the program, with 74 percent indicating they wanted to learn more. Informal conversations with Oxnard College students revealed that some were

especially eager to learn about the program given that they were already familiar with the school; they were also attracted by the potential for higher wages. A majority of nonstudents, 54 percent, were also interested in the program. Furthermore, the youngest respondents (aged eighteen to twenty-four) were most interested in the program, with 64 percent wanting to learn more, compared to 56 percent of the middle tier (aged twenty-six to twenty-nine) and 53 percent of the oldest respondents (aged thirty to thirty-four).

**Table 3.**  
**Young Adults’ Interest in Oxnard’s Employee Pipeline Program**  
 Source: Thriving Youth Study, 2023 (*n* = 2,320)

<b>RESPONDENT CATEGORY</b>	<b>RESPONDENTS INTERESTED (%)</b>
All respondents aged 18–34	58
<b>STUDENT STATUS</b>	
Nonstudents	54
Students	74
<b>AGE GROUP</b>	
18–24	64
25–29	56
30–34	53
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>	
Not working for pay	70
Employed	55
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	
Latinx	60
Non-Latinx	51
<b>GENDER</b>	
Male	57
Female	58
Nonbinary	51
<b>NATIVITY</b>	
US-Born	58
Immigrant	58

Young adults who were not working for pay at the time of the survey were especially interested in the program, with 70 percent expressing interest. The majority of respondents with jobs, 55 percent, also desired more information.

Furthermore, survey results indicate that 60 percent of Latinx residents and 51 percent of non-Latinx residents were interested in learning more about the program. Notably, there was no difference in interest between US-born and foreign-born young adults nor between male-identified and female-identified young adults. The small number of individuals who did not identify as male or female were least likely to express interest in the program.

Nonstudents who expressed interest in the program were asked follow-up questions about their scheduling preferences. Forty-four percent of respondents preferred evening courses, while 35 percent preferred daytime courses and 35 percent preferred weekend courses. Just over a third, 35 percent, indicated that they might need childcare to participate in the program.

As of March 2023, the Employee Pipeline Program had established partnerships with seventeen Oxnard employers, all of which offer health benefits to their employees. A high school diploma is not required for all the jobs that might be offered to program participants, and only a couple require English-language proficiency. As such, many of these jobs may be ideal for immigrants from modest educational backgrounds, including those who are still learning English. Overall, the Employee Pipeline Program is one promising effort to prepare Oxnard's young adult residents for good jobs with benefits.







## Summary

The findings in this report indicate that while some of Oxnard's young adults are on track for bright careers and healthy lives, the majority encounter obstacles that impact their health, their finances, and other aspects of their lives. A large portion of young adults in this predominantly Latinx immigrant and working-class city experience food and housing insecurity. Some do not have healthcare, largely because of the cost and/or the misperception that their immigration status will put them at risk of deportation. Stress, including financial stress, is likely to worsen health outcomes for this group, which already disproportionately experiences health-related challenges. Additionally, many young adults lack connections to civic groups that could enhance their well-being, professional networks, and ability to contribute to their community.

Findings on labor market and educational outcomes suggest that most young adults are at risk of being trapped in jobs with low wages that do not keep up with the rising cost of living. Some of these young residents have yet to consider career possibilities and educational opportunities, while others aspire to occupations and educational goals that may be difficult to achieve given their educational background and circumstances. In general, our survey and interview analyses indicate that too many young residents lack the understanding, preparation, and/or networks to obtain good jobs—those that offer a living wage, benefits, and opportunities for advancement—and/or a bachelor's degree. To further complicate matters, some young adults care for family members—in addition to their own children, in some cases—limiting their ability to focus on their own development.

These findings are troubling, but Oxnard has significant potential to help its young residents thrive. Oxnard’s young adults exhibit above-average employment rates, suggesting a strong attachment to the labor market—they are able and willing to accept employment. Many aspire to occupations with good pay and benefits, and they often enroll in community college after high school as a means to expand their knowledge and skills. A notable portion of young adults, particularly those already enrolled in a community college, want to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Oxnard has a tradition of activism, and its high school students have a robust level of engagement with civic organizations, all of which can strengthen valuable social networks and increase institutional accountability. Indeed, the future success of the Oxnard community rests on its young adult population and fostering opportunities for them to pursue.



## Recommendations

Findings from this report highlight the critical importance of preparatory programming that readies students to enroll in a four-year college and/or channels them into a good job. Young adults in Oxnard require information, academic support, job training, and leadership development to create a better life for themselves and their families. These young residents can significantly benefit from tailored opportunities designed to address financial stability and well-being. The following offers recommendations for Oxnard’s high schools, community college, and civic and philanthropic institutions that can help young adults realize their goals.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OXNARD HIGH SCHOOL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (OUHSD)

**OUHSD should expand efforts to prepare more students for enrollment in a four-year college immediately after high school.** In accordance with the district's A-G resolution, OUHSD should seek to increase the number of graduates completing the requirements for applying to California's public four-year colleges and universities. To this end, district high schools should attempt to demystify higher education options for students and their families and incorporate popular education options for those who have little to no experience with the US higher education system. For example, they could recruit successful alumni to educate students about possible pathways.

The district should fortify these efforts by offering comprehensive education about financial aid options and encouraging students and their families to complete the FAFSA (financial aid application) and/or AB 540 affidavits (to access in-state tuition for those born out of state or out of the country). Recognizing that students and families often view community college as the best option because it is the most affordable, the district's high school counselors need to be transparent about the low number of community college students who successfully transfer to a four-year institution. High school students who aspire to earn a bachelor's degree need this information to make informed decisions about their postsecondary educational options.

**OUHSD schools should strengthen their workforce readiness programming.** In line with California Assembly Bill 800, which designates May as Labor History Month, schools should incorporate lessons about workforce preparation and workers' rights into their curricula. In Oxnard, where many young residents are underinsured, it is particularly important for students to acquire an early awareness of jobs that provide health insurance as well as other benefits that will contribute to their well-being and financial stability over their life course.

**OUHSD schools should continue to build on their track record of offering students wide-ranging extracurricular offerings and services.** Most OUHSD students become involved in school or community-based activities focused on the arts, sports, and/or leadership. High-quality extracurricular activities can have a lasting impact on students' ongoing community involvement, and these activities can increase their awareness of local opportunities that foster personal well-being and financial security, not only for the students but also for their community. Schools must continue to solicit community partnerships and philanthropic support to assure that these extracurricular offerings are available to all students. California's Community Schools Partnership Program may provide some opportunities and models for broadening students' engagement and providing access to wrap-around services.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OXNARD COLLEGE

**In coordination with other higher education institutions, Oxnard College should strengthen policies and practices that bolster transfer rates to four-year colleges and universities.** As an affordable and geographically accessible institution, Oxnard College is an important destination for many OUHSD high school graduates and other community members. Oxnard College's transfer rate is low, however, reflecting an ongoing problem throughout California's community college system. The school has significant potential to serve as an entry point to higher education for the large number of students who seek a bachelor's degree. To this end, the school's leadership should continue working alongside those at other educational institutions to enable more students to complete course requirements and successfully matriculate into a four-year college or university.<sup>4</sup>

**Oxnard College should expand the Employee Pipeline Program and other vocational programs that link students to local jobs that provide a living wage, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement.** Currently, a bachelor's degree is out of reach for most young adult residents of Oxnard. This fact points to the crucial importance of Oxnard College's function as a bridge to good local jobs that can provide residents with greater financial stability. Investments must be made to strengthen the existing Employee Pipeline Program and to increase the number of students who can participate. Moreover, coursework should continue to be made available in Spanish and Indigenous languages (whenever possible) to help immigrant residents, and the college should provide childcare so that young parents can enroll in the program. Furthermore, Oxnard College should build on successful vocational certificate programs and explore a partnership with the Central Coast Labor Council to better channel students to jobs with higher wages, health insurance, and other benefits. The school-to-career pipeline could also be strengthened through coordination with OUHSD's workforce readiness programs.

**Oxnard College should seek additional resources to expand its role in facilitating civic engagement and networking.** Oxnard College is one of the main institutions serving young adults in the community, and it already hosts a range of student organizations and community-based activities. Yet it also possesses significant potential to build additional bridges that will connect students with civic organizations and local businesses that offer opportunities for leadership development, information sharing, and career development.





## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS, GOVERNMENT, AND HEALTH AGENCIES

**Local civic organizations and health agencies with a track record of effectively serving the community should expand their services.** Given the extent of community need, local organizations with a track record of success should build on current programming that prepares young residents for college, careers, and/or civic leadership. Civic groups can leverage the relatively high levels of extracurricular involvement among high school students to expand their outreach to the alumni of local high schools. Additionally, Clínicas del Camino Real and other agencies that serve immigrant and other low-income residents (including those of Indigenous family origins) should be prioritized when additional support for health education and comprehensive health services becomes available.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

**Philanthropic organizations should pool funding for a “Thriving Youth” or other related fund that bolsters the capacity of local institutions to support the educational attainment, career success, and civic engagement of Oxnard’s young population.** Such funding can also provide resources for cross-organizational collaborations that can enhance young residents’ access to wrap-around services (comprehensive family-based assistance) and valuable information. The concentration of wealth in certain Central Coast communities offers opportunities for philanthropic investments in Oxnard’s young population. Well-coordinated and targeted investments for young people encountering multiple poverty-related challenges can help improve health, safety, and well-being for the broader region.

Coordinated efforts by Oxnard’s community stakeholders can counteract the broad systemic inequalities that harm young adults’ ability to thrive. With inspired leadership and proper investments, civic organizations and educational institutions will have the necessary staffing and multilingual resources to adequately serve this population. To be clear, the above recommendations will not address all poverty- and immigrant-related challenges that residents encounter, nor will the recommendations always sufficiently mitigate the racial discrimination experienced by residents, especially those of Indigenous origin. Still, focused attention to strengthening pathways to a better future for Oxnard’s young population can have overall positive implications for the local economy, public health, and civic life.

## NOTES

1. This report draws on publicly available data from the Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2018–22; California Department of Education (CDE), college-going data for 2020–21; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021; UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2022 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS); and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, student success metrics, 2021–22.
2. The 2022 California Health Interview Survey is available at <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/california-health-interview-survey-chis>.
3. These percentages are calculated based on the number of A-G eligible graduates in 2021 divided by the number of students enrolled in ninth grade in the fall of 2017.
4. See “Five Barriers to Transfer for California Students: Why Coordination Is the Path Forward,” California Community Colleges website, <https://transformtransfer.org/>.

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