



# The 10 Best Trade and Vocational Schools in California



<https://www.rwm.org/california-trade-schools/>

## Methodology<sup>1</sup>

In order to determine the best vocational schools in California, we took a hard look at data in eight categories that students care about. The top accredited technical schools in California turned in good numbers across the board, on metrics like affordability, program variety, flexibility and successful student outcomes. Find out who took the top spots below.

### 1. Mt. San Antonio College (Walnut)

Originally founded in 1946, Mt. San Antonio College offers more than 260 degree and certificate programs and features over 50 student clubs. Younger vocational students should have a fairly large peer group here -- the majority of the student body in 2016-17 was under 24 years of age.

**What vocational programs Mt. SAC offers:** Two distinct types of certificate are offered at Mt. SAC. "Certificates of achievement" function as standard non-degree programs, while "skills certificates" require fewer credits and teach specific skills. Associate of Science (A.S.) plans in fashion merchandising, psychology and [kinesiology and wellness](#) are a few of the options in the Walnut institution's two-year degree catalog. Multiple certificates in animation, [architectural design](#) and aircraft and airframe maintenance are also available.

---

<sup>1</sup> Using the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, we generated a list of schools that met the following criteria:

- Institution type is less than 2 years, greater than 2 & less than 4 years
- Accredited by at least 1 agency (institutional accreditation)
- The school falls under one of the following classifications: (Carnegie Classification 2015: Undergraduate Instructional Program)
  - Associate's Colleges: Mixed Transfer/Vocational & Technical
    - These institutions awarded associate's degrees but no bachelor's degrees with 30-49% of awards (degrees and certificates) in career & technical programs.
  - Associate's Colleges: High Vocational & Technical
    - These institutions awarded associate's degrees but no bachelor's degrees with more than 50% of awards (degrees and certificates) in career & technical programs.
  - Special Focus: Two-Year Institution
    - These institutions awarded associate's degrees but no bachelor's degrees with typically more than 75% of awards in a single career & technical program

We ranked the resulting colleges on the following criteria:

1. Cost of attendance, based on the average net price for students receiving scholarship and grant aid, and the total cost of tuition, fees, books and supplies, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016-17
2. Number of Associate degree and undergraduate Certificate programs offered, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016-17
3. Percent of undergraduate students enrolled in any distance education classes, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017
4. Full-time student retention rate & part-time retention rate (if full-time retention rate is not available, then use part-time retention rate), National Center for Education Statistics, Fall 2017
5. The graduation rate in 150% time, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017-18
6. Percent of students working and not enrolled 6 years after entry, College Scorecard, 2014-15
7. Flexibility and student services, based on whether the school offers the following services, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017-18
  1. Academic and career counseling
  2. Job placement services for graduates
8. Mean annual earnings for students working 10 years after entry, College Scorecard, 2014-15

## 2. City College of San Francisco (San Francisco)

More than 26,000 students attend classes at City College of San Francisco. An online career match survey can help you narrow down what program might be right for you, and several Transfer Admissions Guarantee (TAG) programs are available for students who need a bachelor's degree before hitting the workforce.

**What vocational programs CCSF offers:** [Automotive technology](#) subjects are among the most popular certificate programs at this San Francisco school. Automotive students can choose from a list of six specialties that includes hybrid and electric vehicle technology, which can be especially helpful for mechanics in a regulations climate that's tough on emissions. Associate degree students can pursue an education in biological sciences, child development and [visual media design](#), among other subjects.

**School initiative to note:** The **Basic Skills Initiative** at City College of San Francisco focuses on generating student success by improving general learning and study skills as well as reading, writing and math abilities. Instruction is provided in developmental education classes as well as across the entire curriculum.

## 3. Santa Rosa Junior College (Santa Rosa)

Santa Rosa Junior College maintains two full-service campuses, two instructional centers and a 365-acre outdoor learning lab that provides hands-on instruction to students in agriculture and natural resources programs. Known as Shone Farm, the outdoor lab is located in the Russian River Valley and features a 90-acre winery.

**What vocational programs SRJC offers:** Wine-loving students can take advantage of SRJC's expansive agricultural land through an associate degree or certificate program in [viticulture](#), which teaches them about how wine grapes are grown and vineyards are managed. Certificates for aspiring emergency personnel are among the most popular non-degree study plans here, with more than 800 graduates in 2017-18 completing [emergency medical technology \(EMT\)](#) programs.

## 4. Glendale Community College (Glendale)

This long-standing institution in Los Angeles County welcomed its first class of 139 students in 1928, and it's grown in leaps and bounds since then. Today, more than 25,000 students are enrolled in GCC programs and two new learning facilities have opened up to better serve students in the area.

**What vocational programs GCC offers:** How do market forces influence housing prices? What is a grant deed in California? A [real estate broker](#) certificate from GCC can help answer these questions and set you up for an exciting and lucrative career in the property business. Students

who are interested in careers like finance and management can look into the school's most popular degree: an Associate of Arts (A.A.) in [business administration](#).

## 5. San Diego Miramar College (San Diego)

The San Diego Community College District works hard to provide college access for students in its service area. Through the San Diego Promise Program, eligible full-time students who are fresh out of high school may qualify for two full years of tuition-free study at Miramar or one of its two sister schools in the city.

**What vocational programs Miramar offers:** Automotive technology, child development and [biotechnology](#) are a few popular certificate programs at Miramar. All three subjects can also be taken as Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees, and child development students may also choose an A.A. plan. Two-year degrees for first responders -- in fire protection technology, EMT and [administration of justice](#), as they're called in the catalog -- are also common among students here.

## 6. Long Beach City College (Long Beach)

The stated goals of Long Beach City College focus primarily on closing achievement gaps and improving college readiness for the students it serves. One way it does this is through Viking Advantage, a program for incoming students that offers registration assistance, transitional support and a special first-year course designed to promote college success.

**What vocational programs LBCC offers:** The transportation technologies of tomorrow are on the menu at LBCC. Students can pursue an A.S. degree or certificate in electric vehicles or [alternative fuel technology](#). Health care degrees are common here as well, including an associate degree in nursing for aspiring RNs, an A.S. in diagnostic medical imaging and an A.A. or certificate in medical assisting.

## 7. San Diego City College (San Diego)

San Diego City College is another San Diego Promise institution, so recent high school graduates planning to attend college full time may qualify for a break on tuition. It's also one of the oldest trade schools in California, having celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2014. Roughly 17,000 students attend classes here each semester.

**What vocational programs City College offers:** Programs in [machine technology](#), such as an A.S. in computer-aided manufacturing and a certificate in computerized numerical control (CNC) technology, are available for students who want to angle their training toward the machine shop. Cosmetology and [esthetician training](#) are also popular certificates at City College, and associate degrees in electricity and the construction trades can help expand your journeyman skills.

## 8. Fresno City College (Fresno)

A few vocational or technical schools in California can claim 100 years of history, but Fresno City College has got them all beat. This San Joaquin Valley institution was founded in 1910, earlier than all other two-year schools in the state. It also offers a tutoring service called Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS), which recently won an award for its innovative approach.

**What vocational programs FCC offers:** [Heating, ventilation and air conditioning \(HVAC\)](#) is one of the top technical subjects offered at FCC, along with industrial control systems technology and telecommunications engineering. Students seeking office-oriented vocational programs can enroll in A.S. or certificate programs that train [paralegals](#), accountants, computer network administrators and more.

## 9. College of the Sequoias (Visalia)

Located less than an hour from the gates of Sequoia National Park, the area around College of the Sequoias offers extra value to students who love natural beauty. It's also the smallest of all the California vocational schools that made our list, educating just over 12,200 students in the 2017-18 academic year.

**What vocational programs COS offers:** The training programs in [child development](#) attract a high percentage of enrolled students here, especially at the certificate level. In fact, more than 50 percent of all one-year certificates earned at COS in 2017-18 were in child care disciplines. Criminal justice is one of the top associate-level vocational plans at this Visalia institution, and the wide range of available agricultural programs includes ornamental horticulture, equine science and [agribusiness](#).

## 10. Oxnard College (Oxnard)

Founded in 1974, Ventura County's Oxnard College is a relatively recent addition to the roster of California vocational schools. Its student body is fairly young, as well: the average student age here is 25, but more than half of the student population is 22 years of age or younger.

**What vocational programs OC offers:** Firefighting and [fire technology](#) are big programs at Oxnard -- so big, in fact, that the college features its own regional fire academy that's accredited by the Office of the California State Fire Marshal. It's also a top destination for [culinary arts](#) hopefuls seeking hands-on experience, thanks to a campus restaurant that serves three-course, fine dining lunches and is run and staffed by Oxnard students.

**School initiative to note:** The **Oxnard College Promise** is an initiative designed to remove barriers to entry from incoming first-time Oxnard students by waiving the cost of tuition and fees and placing them in supportive programs during their first year.