

# America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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## Features

### Two Steps Forward, One Major Step Back



U.S. Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court struck a decisive blow against the Voting Rights Act this week, while upholding affirmative action in our universities and expanding rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) couples. Each of these decisions will impact our ability as a nation to build an equitable economy in which all can participate and prosper.

The court went outrageously wrong in gutting the Voting Rights Act, erroneously assuming we have become a post-racial America no longer in need of the legal protections that have preserved voting rights for nearly a half-century. America will be a viable democracy and strong economy only if leaders reflect and address the needs of the emerging majority — made up of people of color — and oppose efforts that would cut them out of the political process.

In upholding affirmative action in public universities, the court rightly recognizes that our country's future prosperity depends

## In Brief

### Earn \$32,000 Less for Being Latina??

If you are a Latina with a college degree, on average you earn \$32,000 less per year than a white male college graduate. A new, interactive website from the Economic Policy Institute uses cartoon animations to illustrate how inequality hurts all of us, and what we can do about it. Find out where you fit in at [inequality.is](http://inequality.is).

### Metros: Where Innovation Happens

America's metros are not only on the front lines of demographic change — they are incubating the innovations needed to catalyze inclusive economic growth. Houston's Neighborhood Centers, Inc. (home of the [Gulfton Promise Neighborhood](#)), for example, is bridging the gap between isolated immigrant communities and the regional economy. Read the [The Metropolitan Revolution](#), a new book by Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley of the Brookings Institution, to learn more (also check out their great [website](#) and [free ipad app](#)).

on a pipeline of diverse political leaders, entrepreneurs, researchers, and workers. The country needs leaders who reflect our growing racial diversity and have a deep understanding of the needs, experiences, and strengths of all communities.

And finally, the court's decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act and Proposition 8 in California is an important step forward. LGBT couples in California and other states that already recognize same-sex marriage will now have access to important federal benefits, expanding economic security for over 100,000 families.

Today, we take a moment to celebrate the victories and commit ourselves to the fight ahead not just to guarantee the right to vote but to deepen democracy. We must also continue to increase educational opportunities for students of color and ensure the rights of the LGBT community.

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## The Doctor Is In: Preparing Tomorrow's Health-Care Workforce



**Palm Desert High School's Medical Health Academy grand opening.**

Palm Springs, California, is best known as a playground for the rich, not as a hotbed of equitable economic growth. But hundreds of business leaders and educators in the region have joined in an ambitious forward-looking initiative that prepares low-income students and students of color to work in health care and other high-potential careers.

"I'm extremely grateful for the opportunities I've had," said Faith

Villanueva, a college senior who was inspired and supported by the initiative to pursue a career in sports medicine. "I honestly don't know how I would have been able to get through college without it."

By creating career pathways from kindergarten through college, the initiative aims to improve outcomes and opportunities for the growing numbers of young people in need, while grooming a skilled local workforce for a more diversified, inclusive economy. Led by the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) in partnership with local school districts, colleges, and businesses, the effort is based on a widespread recognition that the knowledge, talents, and success of today's youth will determine the health and prosperity of the rapidly changing region.

"Without the right intellectual capital, we could not build the economic future we need," said Sheila Thornton, CVEP Vice President Workforce Excellence.

Like many places in America, the Coachella Valley, in the desert southeast of Los Angeles, has pockets of wealth amid extreme poverty. More than half the population is Latino. Low-income students of color have typically ended up in the region's low-wage leading industries — hospitality and agriculture — cementing the gap between rich and poor, old and young, white communities and Latino, Asian, and black.

### **Linking education with industry needs**

The strongest demand is for primary care providers to serve the lowest income members of the community. Health professions hold great career and economic promise for students including nursing – which pays an average salary of \$75,000 in the region – yet the local workforce has not been prepared to take these jobs. At the outset of the initiative, local employers indicated that they were recruiting for high wage positions from outside the region about eighty percent of the time, Thornton said. Without bold intervention the problem would have worsened, especially when considering the population of the region will approach 500,000 by 2017; one in four residents of the Eastern Coachella Valley live at or below the Federal poverty level, and need for health care services is expected to expand dramatically under the Affordable Care Act.

The work required true commitment to a common regional

vision. Six high school health academies across the valley's three school districts serve 1,100 students. There are health career clubs, field trips to hospitals and other settings, and internship opportunities with local business partners.

Preliminary data show that graduation rates for academy students is now 93 percent and college enrollment and persistence rates are higher than non-academy students, Thornton said.

The local community college recently opened a large nursing center, replacing a building designed for 18 students. The new complex has 240 students and trains nurses, nursing assistants, and emergency medical technicians. The state university campus in the region also has a new health sciences building, with state-of-the-art labs for nursing students.

### **How leaders are born**

Faith Villanueva was always interested in helping people through a career in medicine. In high school, at the Palm Springs Academy of Learning Medicine, her courses combined career relevance in health care and academic rigor. Even more importantly, she received guidance on pursuing her dream, a two-year \$10,000 college scholarship that made it possible, and paid internships during summer breaks.

Raised by a single mother, an immigrant from the Philippines who struggled to make ends meet, Villanueva says college and career would have been a pipe dream without the emotional and financial support of the pathways program.

During an internship with the Coachella Partnership, Villanueva designed the Emerging Health Professionals Workgroup to give high school students a greater voice in their education and the health pathways programs. After she completes the Athletic Training Education Program from California State University of Fullerton, she plans to return to the valley to work as a certified athletic trainer and mentor the next generation of aspiring health professionals.

"I want to be a leader and do for other students what people did for me."

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*America's Tomorrow* highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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