

2021 FEDERAL PRIORITIES

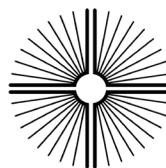
The California Community Colleges (CCC) system is the backbone of higher education in the state and the leading provider of career and workforce training in the nation. Nearly one-quarter of all community college students in the United States attend a California Community College (CCC). Our system is made up of 116 colleges in 73 districts that serve 2.1 million students in rural, urban and suburban communities throughout the state.

The footprint of California Community Colleges cannot be understated. CCC institutions are the primary pathway to educational and economic mobility in the state. Forty-two percent of our students are over the age of 25, and two-thirds of California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) bachelor degree earners started at a California Community College. Our colleges serve the diverse needs of working adults looking to boost their skills as they move up the career ladder, immigrants striving to improve their English language skills, entrepreneurs looking to start a small business, and seniors endeavoring to maintain cognitive abilities and to stay active in the community. Additionally, California has the largest and most comprehensive free tuition program in the nation, ensuring 100% of Pell Grant dollars go directly to students to help them afford their non-tuition costs of college.

Nevertheless, far too many California Community College students continue to face significant challenges. Older and working adults are often left behind due to lack of financial support needed to help balance work, childcare, and academic demands. **Many students struggle to make ends meet due to nonacademic costs such as food, housing, transportation, among other basic needs. These challenges have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further widened equity gaps among our most vulnerable students. Comprehensive federal action is more important than ever to support our students and our public colleges.**



California
Community
Colleges



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SUPPORT OUR UNDOCUMENTED AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS



California Community Colleges support continuing protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) students, coupled with legislation establishing a pathway to citizenship. Of the estimated 800,000 national DACA recipients, 223,000 are Californians. Approximately 72,000 undocumented students are enrolled in one of our 116 institutions. For comparison, there are approximately 4,000 and 9,500 undocumented students enrolled in the UC and CSU, respectively. Supporting DACA students is not only a moral imperative, but also an economic investment. Community colleges are essential vehicles for social mobility for DACA students, a population that is poised to make significant contributions that will help our nation recover from the economic crisis. **The support of the federal government to provide DACA students with access to federal student aid programs that help them stay enrolled in and complete their educational studies will further strengthen the economic future of our country. Further, California**

Community Colleges urge the passage of comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship for eligible undocumented students. While many DACA students serve our communities as **teachers, business owners, medical professionals, and first responders,** they face a future of uncertainty without a permanent pathway to citizenship.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACT

Efforts that are designed to expand access to a community college and ensure that low-income students are able to afford the full cost of attendance should also focus on addressing non-tuition costs. These costs are often the most burdensome for students and could determine their ability to stay enrolled in school and complete their studies. California has the largest free tuition program in the nation. In fact, nearly half of all community college students receive support that waives their tuition. But we know our students need more support than tuition-waivers. The success of California Community Colleges and our students is dependent on the state's strong partnership with the federal government. In approaching the Higher Education Act re-authorization, California Community Colleges urge Congress to consider the following priorities and principles:

Keep Total Cost of College Affordable

California's commitment to college affordability, through tuition waivers for community college students and state financial aid programs, coupled with federal Pell Grant investments, will help students and families keep college affordable by covering the total costs of college. Yet, students face substantial non-tuition financial barriers to completion. According to a survey conducted by the California Student Aid Commission in May 2020, 90% of respondents reported concerns about the shift to online instruction, 71% indicated a loss of some or all of income, and nearly half reported a change in their living situation. Further, 24% of students surveyed said they dropped one or more courses in the spring term because of a hardship associated with the pandemic.

Increased access and funding for Pell Grants, **expanding campus-based aid and emergency aid programs, as well as expanding access to programs supporting parent learners ensure fiscal stability and essential investments to reducing debt burdens and enhancing college completion for low- and moderate-income students.** Our partnership with the federal government to support state investments and efforts to lower the costs of college will directly impact the success of our students and our state.

Support the Diverse Needs of Today's College Students

California Community Colleges strongly support efforts that serve the needs of our diverse student population, including adult learners, student parents and high school students. Forty-two percent of California Community College students are over the age of 25, many of them are working adults and/or parents. Older and working adults are often left behind due to lack of financial support needed to help balance work, childcare, and academic demands. Many adult students struggle to make ends meet due to a financial aid structure that does not provide sufficient assistance with non-tuition related costs. Now, more than ever, it is important that we support our adult learners, many of whom have been unemployed due to COVID-19, with resources to stay in or re-enroll in college.

Therefore, **we strongly urge new federal investment to support the needs of today's adult learners by providing Pell Grants for high-quality training programs and incentives for colleges to provide competency-based education programs aligned with the knowledge and skills needed in our economy.** While we are encouraged by the recent increase in the Pell Grant award in the latest Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, **we urge Congress to build upon these efforts by further increasing the maximum Pell Grant award for low-income students, indexing it to inflation, and removing lifetime eligibility limits.**

Additionally, **we call on Congress to revise the Federal Work-Study allocation funding formula to be weighted based on institutions that serve more students with greater need,** so that a greater proportion of community college students may access to work-based learning opportunities.

Maintain Borrower Protections and Simplify Processes for Low-risk Colleges

The U.S. Department of Education should serve as the primary gatekeeper for federal student loans and ensure colleges are providing students with pathways to well-paying careers, not leaving them with unaffordable debts. **The California Community Colleges support strong borrower defense to repayment allowances, streamlined Income Based Repayment options, and preventing the use of collections and default practices by predatory loan practices that harm students.** Strong oversight protects borrowers and minimizes taxpayer exposure for student loan defaults. We encourage Congress to continue protections for institutions with low loan-participation rates in any proposed accountability framework, and we ask for measures to simplify the process.

Simplify Financial Aid

Our colleges and students have benefited from changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including allowing the use of prior-year tax data and ensuring the early availability of the FAFSA. Further, we are appreciative of recent efforts included in the December 2020 omnibus spending package to further simplify the FAFSA by removing burdensome and duplicative questions and provisions to clarify Pell Grant eligibility guidelines for students. Additionally, we are grateful for allowing the new Student Aid Index (SAI) to calculate a student's index below zero if their parents have not filed a federal tax return in the past year, which enables campus admission offices to more effectively target financial aid programs to the neediest of students. **We support efforts to further improve and make more accessible the FAFSA by aligning aid eligibility to other means-tested programs and efforts**

to reduce unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles associated with annual application renewals that can act as a barrier to students and families receiving critical aid for which they are eligible.

A WORKFORCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Targeted investments in workforce education are key to increasing the nation's economic competitiveness. California Community Colleges are well-positioned to work with the federal government to prepare a skilled workforce that meets the needs of a changing job market. Through a continued partnership with the federal government, California Community Colleges will continue providing the workforce education necessary to re-build our economy after the unprecedented impacts of a global health pandemic. Specifically, to ensure that this partnership is successful, we recommend a laser focus on investments to the following programs:

Perkins Act Grants

We strongly support new federal investments to states in expanding career and technical education programs for emerging sectors, particularly in strengthening career pathways and serving adult learners to prepare the future workforce, especially the underserved and underrepresented populations, to be successful in the digital economy. Of great importance is updating the technological capacity and infrastructure to enable flexible delivery of both in-person and virtual learning activities, as well as an expansion of work-based learning supports for students and employers.

Community College and Industry Partnership Grants

We call on Congress to substantially increase funding for “Learn and Earn” opportunities and to support community colleges and consortia to develop and scale career training programs that support high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors and occupations. These

programs would be developed in consultation with employers to ensure that students gain the skills and competencies necessary to meet future employment demand. Funds could also be used to provide supportive services to students enrolled in these programs.

Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act

California Community Colleges have numerous partnerships with local Workforce Development Boards to provide job training to dislocated workers, low-income adults and at-risk youth. Such partnerships and programs highly benefit the communities by creating opportunities for the underrepresented and underserved populations, changing lives. We ask for Federal support to expand funding to replicate successful proven programs across the colleges.

Strengthening Community College Training Grants

California Community Colleges are grateful for the creation of this new competitive grant program. It will permit colleges to create workforce development pathways similar to those funded under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Program.

