



California
Community
Colleges



COMMUNITY
COLLEGE LEAGUE
OF CALIFORNIA

California Community Colleges 2024 Federal Policy Platform

The California Community College system is comprised of 116 colleges and serves 1.9 million students in rural, urban, and suburban communities. Collectively, the California community colleges represent nearly one-quarter of all community college students in the United States. The California community colleges are a leading provider of career and workforce training in the country. They provide an affordable pathway for Americans to receive the education and training needed to obtain a high-quality job that pays family-sustaining wages and remain competitive in the modern workforce. Today, 70 percent of jobs are held by people with more than a high school diploma. Faced with changing job requirements that necessitate education or training beyond a high school diploma, an increasing number of working adults and other nontraditional students enroll in community colleges as their pathway to economic mobility.

The **2024 California Community Colleges Federal Policy Platform** articulates policy priorities that support student success and strengthen our economy. California community colleges will continue our strong partnership with the federal government focused on workforce readiness, reducing equity gaps, preparing for the economy of the future, addressing the diverse needs of students, and expanding college access and affordability.

PRIORITIZING AFFORDABILITY AND BASIC NEEDS TO INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS

California community colleges have the lowest tuition fees (\$46 per unit) in the country; however, students do not receive sufficient financial aid to cover the total cost of attendance. The growing gap between financial **need** and financial **aid** threatens students' ability to earn a degree, transfer to a four-year university, or gain a credential, which affects our economy. We applaud Congress for passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act in December 2020, which included provisions to amend the Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education (FUTURE) Act and the FAFSA Simplification Act—a sweeping redesign of processes and systems used to award federal student aid, intended to make it easier for students and families to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. **The California community colleges urge Congress to invest in student retention and success by strengthening financial aid in the following ways:**

Create a Federal-State Partnership for Tuition-Free Community College

Despite low tuition rates and existing financial aid programs, California community college students face significant need. A federal-state partnership that can waive tuition for all students would allow for a state like California to redirect dollars toward addressing the growing gap between financial aid and total cost of attendance. A recent proposal considered during the 117th Congress (2021-22) would have directed an estimated \$2.5 billion annually in federal funds to California to not just waive tuition but address cost of attendance. **California community colleges urge Congress to make two years of community college tuition-free for all Americans.**



Strengthen and Expand Access to the Pell Grant

The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of federal student aid, providing need-based grants to 372,226 low-income California community college students. We urge Congress to ensure the long-term impact of the Pell Program and increase college completion and degree attainment by supporting the following:

- **Double the maximum Pell award** to \$13,000 per award year to enhance college affordability for low-income students. By increasing Pell's purchasing power, students with the greatest need will be more able to cover the *total cost* of attendance.
- **Provide annual increases to the maximum Pell award, based on inflation, and transition the program from discretionary to mandatory funding.** At its peak, the maximum Pell Grant covered more than three-quarters of the cost of attending college. Today, it covers less than one-third of the cost. We strongly urge Congress to restore permanently the grant's automatic annual adjustments for inflation and reduce future erosion of the grant's purchasing power.
- **Restore lifetime Pell Grant eligibility to 18 semesters (full-time equivalent).** Extending lifetime eligibility preserves college access and affordability for adult learners who, for any number of personal reasons, take time off from their studies to care for themselves or family.
- **Extend Pell eligibility for short-term job training programs.** An estimated 8 million+ working Californians between the ages of 25-64 lack a college credential and could benefit from short-term training programs that prepare them for high-quality, living-wage jobs. Consideration of guardrails for these programs could ensure success in educational and employment outcomes for students.
- **End Taxation of Pell Grants.** Current law taxes the portion of a Pell Grant that exceeds a student's tuition and fees. This not only reduces the amount of the student's grant, but it also contradicts the program's core purpose. Taxation of Pell awards denies full eligibility for the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) to hundreds of thousands of students attending public institutions nationwide. We recommend adjusting the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit to provide 100% for the first \$2,000 of tuition and fees paid by those taking job-focused training courses at community colleges.
- **Provide Maximum Pell Grant Eligibility for Recipients of Means-Tested Benefits.** Upon implementation of FAFSA simplification changes, we urge guaranteed eligibility for a maximum Pell Grant to FAFSA applicants who have received a means-tested federal benefit (such as SNAP or Medicaid) within the previous 24 months. This would eliminate redundant eligibility verifications.

Strengthen and Expand Access to SNAP

Nearly half of California community college students grapple with food insecurity, but only 10% of them are currently receiving SNAP. Social safety net programs like SNAP play a pivotal role in alleviating economic strain, enabling our students to dedicate themselves to their education without compromising their basic needs. However, certain SNAP restrictions prevent community college students from accessing these critical benefits. **We request that Congress amend the Food and Nutrition Act to include postsecondary credentials from a community college under definitions of "Employment and Training (E&T) Program."** Enrolling in a community college program is equivalent to enrolling in an E&T program.

SUPPORTING THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

Faced with changing job requirements that necessitate education or training beyond a high school diploma, an increasing number of working adults and other nontraditional students decide to enroll in community college. We must be ready to respond to the changing demographics in higher education. Services, such as on campus job training centers, childcare, and transportation assistance, are critically important to ensuring learner success.

Support Veterans and Older Adult Learners Seeking Higher Education

Veterans and working adults seeking a higher education bring years of transferable military and industry expertise. Credit for prior learning (CPL) recognizes these vital non-classroom skills. Studies have shown that adult learners who receive credit for prior learning will graduate at almost twice the rate (49% vs. 27%) than those who do not. Additionally, we are innovating strategies to reward students for *what* they have learned rather than the *amount of time* they spend in a classroom. This concept is known as Competency Based Education (CBE). CBE is a flexible way for students to build on their knowledge and skills by learning more at their own pace and can lead to more efficient student outcomes. By investing in and scaling strategies such as CPL and CBE, thousands of working adults, many of them Black and Latinx, could be on their way to earning degrees and higher wage jobs. We look forward to working with Congress on ways to support these efforts.

Expand Federal Student Aid Eligibility to Undocumented Students

Broadening federal financial aid will enable undocumented students to access the critical financial support they need to enroll, persist, and complete their education goals. **We urge Congress to broaden eligibility for Title IV financial aid programs—including Pell Grants, federal student loans, and Federal Work-Study—for DACA recipients and those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED).** A study by the CATO institute notes that the elimination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) would cost the federal government \$60 Billion in tax revenues.¹



Establish Pathways for Undocumented Students to Generate Income.

Undocumented students are aspiring teachers, medical professionals, first responders, and business owners, among others. The Center for American Progress estimates that over the next decade, DACA Program beneficiaries will contribute \$460.3 billion to the U.S. economy.² Of the nation's estimated 800,000 DACA recipients, 223,000 are Californians and tens of thousands of undocumented students are enrolled in California community colleges. However, not all undocumented students benefit from DACA or have a pathway to employment after they earn a college degree. They deserve to have options that generate income and make a living wage. **We urge Congress to identify opportunities for undocumented students who earn a college degree or credential to earn a livable wage.**

¹ www.cato.org/blog/economic-fiscal-impact-repealing-daca

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/daca-recipients-economic-educational-gains-continue-grow/>

Expand Benefits of Residency to Undocumented Students

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) prevents undocumented students from paying in-state tuition despite establishing residency in states where they seek higher education. Section 505 of IIRIRA prohibits states from providing any higher education benefit based on residence to undocumented immigrants *unless* the same benefit is provided to U.S. citizens in the same circumstances, regardless of their residence. This law discourages many states from offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented students, since they would need to provide that benefit to out-of-state students as well. This places an unnecessary and inequitable financial burden upon undocumented students who attend school where they call home. **We urge Congress to repeal Section 505 of IIRIRA to allow undocumented students to pay the same tuition as their fellow in-state students.**

CAREER AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS STRENGTHEN OUR ECONOMY



Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA, last reauthorized in 2014, establishes the nation's public workforce development system and authorizes funding for American Job Center operations, as well as career training and workforce programs. WIOA programs are designed to support parents and working adults who want to quickly enter or reenter the workforce, but the language has not kept up with the needs of employers in emerging and in-demand industry sectors. At the time of this writing, Congress is considering an update to WIOA. As it considers much needed revisions, **we urge Congress to include language in WIOA legislation that would**

authorize the co-location of American Job Centers on community college campuses, thereby allowing students easier access to career counseling and job placement services while creating strategic linkages between community colleges and workforce development programs.

Workforce Training Programs

California community colleges **urge Congress to preserve funding for investments that equip students with the skills and education they need to thrive in today's economy and society.** These investments include in a wide array of education and workforce training programs, such as Perkins Career Technical Education, Higher Education Act, Title III and V, Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), TRIO, Gear Up, and the Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG) program, which expands and improves community college workforce education capacity and business productivity through competitive grants to community colleges.



its commitment to fund these vital programs.

Equitable Pathways to a Baccalaureate Degree

Community colleges provide students with an affordable pathway to earn a four-year degree in cutting edge and high-demand fields. With the support of the California state legislature, California community colleges can now offer baccalaureate degrees in certain subjects. To date, California community colleges offer more than 30 baccalaureate degrees. Grant programs, such as the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Program and the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Grant Program, can support colleges to design and/or scale baccalaureate degree programs and meet crucial workforce needs. **We urge Congress to continue**

Improve Climate Job Readiness

Steep growth in technology is merging with unprecedented climate instability, leading to the emergence of new, cutting-edge climate tech jobs as well as increased need for pragmatic approaches to climate resilience, such as vegetation management and fire prevention. Federal programs, such as NOAA's Climate Ready Workforce Initiative, help ready our climate workforce for the future. The California community colleges are well positioned to adapt to the workforce needs brought on by the climate crisis. **We urge Congress to improve climate job readiness by investing in community college programs that prepare the future workforce for climate tech and climate resiliency jobs.**

Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities

Apprenticeships provide key opportunities for learners from all backgrounds to access training opportunities that lead directly to employment. Through our apprenticeship programs, California community colleges foster connections between employers and potential workers that grow careers and fill high-demand workforce needs. **We urge Congress to support and invest in the expansion of apprenticeship programs.** Federal support for apprenticeships, such as the American Apprenticeship Act and the Department of Energy's Career Skills Training Program, strengthen apprenticeship programs, support workforce needs, and connect learners to high-paying jobs.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS AND STABILITY

Support for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

Supporting minority serving institutions provides significant economic investment and impact. We support expanding institutional grant opportunities that incentivize community colleges to design evidenced based strategies that support college retention, transfer, and completion for vulnerable populations. **We urge Congress to continue to support new investments made toward student recruitment and retention in the College Completion Fund for Postsecondary Student Success, to assist HBCUs, MSIs, HSIs and TCUs.** These institutions are critical to driving economic prosperity among low-income communities and students of color. According to a

recent study, HSIs promote student upward mobility at a rate three times higher than non-MSIs; and MSIs move more students from the lowest income quintile to the top income quintile than non-MSI institutions.³



Maintain Borrower Protections and Simplify Processes for Low-Risk Colleges

The California community colleges support strong borrower defense to repayment allowances, streamlined income-driven repayment (IDR) plans, and monitoring collections and default practices by predatory lenders. The U.S. Department of Education should serve as the primary gatekeeper for student loans and ensure that colleges are providing students with pathways to well-paying careers, without unaffordable student loan debt. Strong oversight protects borrowers and minimizes taxpayer exposure to student loan defaults. Due to California's generous tuition and first-dollar financial aid policies, very few community college students borrow federal funds to attend our colleges. **We encourage Congress to continue protections for institutions with low-participation rates and to simplify the process.**

The **California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office** is the state agency body that provides policy guidance, allocates state funding and provides leadership and technical assistance to its 116 community colleges. The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges is appointed by the Board of Governors and leads an office with 200 authorized employee positions. The Chancellor plays a key role in the consultation process, makes policy recommendations to the Board of Governors, and implements the policies adopted by the Board.

The **Community College League of California (the League)** is the professional membership association of the California Community College districts, whose voluntary membership consists of the 73 local public community college districts in California. The League supports locally elected trustees and community college CEOs to serve their students and communities by advocating on their behalf at the state and federal levels, providing continued professional development, and delivering services that employ economies of scale to minimize cost.

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³ Espinosa, Lorelle L., Robert Kelchen, and Morgan Taylor. 2018. *Minority Serving Institutions as Engines of Upward Mobility*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.