

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

2022 FEDERAL POLICY PLATFORM



Consisting of 116 colleges in rural, urban and suburban communities throughout California, California community colleges are the backbone of higher education in the nation's largest state. The colleges serve 1.8 million students every year, representing nearly one-quarter of all community college students in the United States. California community colleges are the leading provider of career and workforce training in the nation. In California, they serve as the primary entry point for transfer students. As engines of social and economic opportunity, California community colleges serve the diverse needs of students seeking to earn a degree or transfer to a four-year institution, working adults looking to boost their skills to advance in their careers, immigrants striving to improve their English language skills and entrepreneurs looking to start a small business.

As the nation grapples with the widespread disruption of a global health pandemic, the importance of investing in and strengthening our nation's community colleges has never been more important. Today, 70% of jobs are held by people with more than a high school diploma. American workers need and deserve additional support to build their skills, increase their earnings, remain competitive and share in the benefits of the new economy. As affordable and versatile institutions, community colleges provide the best pathway for Americans to obtain the education and training they need to obtain a high-quality job that pays family-sustaining wages.

California's community colleges have led the way in providing a low-cost pathway into our higher education systems. We have both the lowest tuition fees in the country and the largest free tuition program. However, our students still face obstacles in earning a degree, transferring or obtaining a high quality workforce credential. Our partnership with the federal government via federally funded financial aid and other programs is critical to help us continue to serve our students. The 2022 California Community Colleges Federal Policy platform articulates how we can strengthen that partnership with a student-centered strategy that supports workforce preparedness, reduces equity gaps and expands college access and affordability for all.

69%

OF CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES
STUDENTS ARE PEOPLE
OF DIVERSE ETHNIC
BACKGROUNDS

51%

OF CSU GRADUATES
STARTED AT A CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

29%

OF UC GRADUATES
STARTED AT A CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

19.6%

STUDENTS' AVERAGE
ANNUAL RATE OF RETURN



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COMMUNITY COLLEGE
LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA

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Average Total Cost of Attendance*

Expense	Average Cost
Textbooks	\$1,791
Transportation	\$1,242
Room and Board	\$12,492
Personal/Misc.	\$2,916
Subtotal	\$18,441
Tuition (\$46 Unit)	\$1,380
Total	\$19,821

* Students attending colleges in high cost of living regions incur greater than average cost of living expenses.

AFFORDABILITY AND BASIC NEEDS

America's College Promise

The proposed America's College Promise Act would usher in a most-needed, significant expansion of access to higher education. California Community Colleges urges Congressional support for the proposal. Establishing a federal-state partnership based on the principle of broad-based eligibility would ensure that all Americans—regardless of immigration status or income level—are entitled to tuition-free community college. It is essential that eligibility be extended to adult learners with some college experience but no degree, so that they can return to school and receive the education and skills needed to enter or re-enter the workforce. Further, the federal-state partnership should recognize the tuition-free community college investments made by states, like California, and allow states to utilize excess funds to help with the total cost of attendance for students.

Strengthen and Expand Access to the Pell Grant

The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of federal student aid, providing need-based grants to 660,000 low-income California community college students. We recommend that Congress take the following actions to ensure the long-term impact of the Pell Program, i.e., to increase college completion and degree attainment:

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, thereby increasing the likelihood of retention and decreasing the need to accumulate substantial student loan debt.

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. California Community Colleges strongly urges Congress to restore permanently the grant's automatic annual adjustments for inflation and reduce future erosion of the grant's purchasing power. Further, we urge Congress to establish Pell Grants as a mandatory program to ensure stability for recipients.

Restore lifetime Pell Grant eligibility to 18 semesters (full-time equivalent). We urge a restoration of lifetime eligibility to 18 semesters. 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. In California alone, it is estimated that there are more than eight million working adults between the ages of 25-64 who lack a college credential and could benefit from short-term

training programs that equip them with the right skills to secure a high-quality, living-wage job. California Community Colleges urges Congress to extend Pell eligibility for adult learners who participate in high-quality, short-term job training programs. This would recognize and assist the different needs of adult learners, many of whom are working, supporting a family, and balancing complex life responsibilities.

End Taxation of Pell Grants. Current law taxes the portion of a Pell Grant that exceeds a student's tuition and fees, which undermines the program's core purpose and, in effect, reduces the amount of the student's grant. Taxation of Pell awards denies full eligibility for the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) to hundreds of thousands of students attending public institutions nationwide. California Community Colleges recommends adjusting the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit (LLC) 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 the implementation of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) simplification changes for award year 2024-25, FAFSA applicants who have received a means-tested federal benefit (such as SNAP or Medicaid) within the previous 24 months should be guaranteed eligibility for a maximum Pell Grant. This would eliminate redundant eligibility verifications.

19%

OF STUDENTS
EXPERIENCE
HOMELESSNESS

THE MAXIMUM PELL
GRANT COVERED MORE
THAN 75% OF THE COST
OF COLLEGE AT ITS PEAK,
TODAY IT COVERS LESS
THAN ONE-THIRD

TODAY, JUST 10,000
OUT OF 1.8 MILLION
CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY
COLLEGE STUDENTS
RECEIVE A FWS AWARD

IN CALIFORNIA ALONE,
THE EATS ACT WOULD
ENSURE THAT MORE
THAN 300,000 STUDENTS
ARE PERMANENTLY
ELIGIBLE FOR SNAP

Maintain Borrower Protections and Simplify Processes for Low-Risk Colleges

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 and not leaving them with unaffordable debts. California Community Colleges supports strong borrower defense to repayment allowances, streamlined Income-Based Repayment options and monitoring collections and default practices by predatory lenders. 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.**

Federal Work-Study

Of 1.8 million California community college students, only 10,000 receive a Federal Work-Study award. This is the result of an inequitable formula structure that primarily disburses Federal Work-Study funds based on past funding levels, rather than the number of low-income students an institution serves. This outdated clause has led to four-year and private, non-profit institutions receiving a disproportionate amount of annual funding, while high-need institutions with much higher percentages of low-income students, like community colleges, receive much less funding per student. **We urge Congress to revise the Federal Work-Study funding formula so that disbursements are targeted to institutions based on their number of students in need.**

Further, **it is vital that Congress substantially increase federal investment in the Federal Work-Study program.** In 2019-2020, the average Federal Work-Study annual award for California community college students was just over \$3,000. Federal Work-Study awards have not kept pace with rising non-tuition related costs. Unless Congress takes swift action to boost the size of the awards, student participation in the program could drop because the financial benefit is inadequate to meet basic needs.

Enact the Enhance Access to SNAP (EATS) Act and other Basic Needs Supports

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges of meeting basic needs, particularly among low-income students and students of color. It is critical to ensure that no student should have to choose between focusing on school and finding their next meal. **We support the passage of the EATS Act, which would permanently expand Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility by amending the Food and Nutrition Act to include “attending an institution of higher education” as a form of qualification.** In California alone, the EATS Act would ensure that more than 300,000 students are permanently eligible for SNAP.



**DACA recipients will contribute
\$460 billion to the U.S. economy in the
next decade.**

Source: [Center for American Progress](#)

SUPPORT FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Enact the DREAM ACT to Establish a Comprehensive Pathway to Citizenship.

The Center for American Progress estimates that over the next decade, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program beneficiaries will contribute \$460.3 billion to the U.S. economy. Of the nation's estimated 800,000 DACA recipients, 223,000 are Californians and approximately 72,000 undocumented students are enrolled in California community colleges. These "Dreamers" are aspiring teachers, medical professionals, first responders, and business owners, among others. For far too long, undocumented students have lived through years of uncertainty without a permanent pathway to citizenship. **Now is the time to pursue codification of a comprehensive pathway to citizenship so that undocumented students can have stability to achieve their higher education and career goals and contribute to the vibrancy of their communities.**

Expand Federal Student Aid Eligibility to Undocumented Students

Congress should **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).** Broadening federal financial aid will enable undocumented students to access the critical financial supports they need to become enrolled, persist and complete their education goals.



WORKFORCE AND JOB TRAINING

Community College and Industry Partnership Grants

Through our *Strong Workforce Program*, California Community Colleges focuses on matching employers in high-skill, high-wage industries with trained and qualified workers. Many are “essential workers” who have been on the front lines of the COVID pandemic. **We support the establishment of a competitive grant program that incentivizes community colleges to create or grow industry or sector partnerships that expand workforce development programs in high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors.** We suggest that federal grants require states to pursue efforts to develop and expand flexible training models, such as learn and learn, and utilize no less than 15% of awarded grant funds to provide supportive services, career services and job placement assistance to individuals with barriers to employment.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization

WIOA, which was 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. **California Community Colleges urges Congress to modernize WIOA to orient and structure job training programs to equip students with the skills they need to thrive in a dynamic 21st Century economy and meets the needs of employers in emerging and in-demand industry sectors.** Also, the co-location of American Job Centers on community college campuses will allow students more easy access to career counseling and job placement services, and create strategic linkages between community colleges and workforce development programs.

Perkins Act Grants

California Community Colleges strongly supports **new federal investments to states to expand career and technical education programs for emerging sectors and to strengthen career pathways**, particularly for the underserved and underrepresented populations, in the digital economy. Of great importance is updating technological capacity and infrastructure to enable flexible delivery of in-person and virtual learning activities, as well as expanding work-based learning supports for students and employers.

More than 57% of California Community Colleges’ permanent facilities are 25 years or older and more than 47% are more than 40 years old.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES

Modernize Community College Facilities

Over time, state and local support for community college facilities has fallen far short of need. The result is an increasing backlog of unaddressed projects and a mounting number of deferred maintenance needs. This harms education quality, as well as the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff. We estimate that, among California Community Colleges’ 115 physical campuses, unmet or deferred maintenance needs total more than \$1.2 billion. As critical engines of economic and workforce development, our California community college facilities and classrooms must be renovated with safe and reliable materials that leverage 21st Century technology.

California Community Colleges calls on Congress to provide dedicated funding for community college infrastructure, which would significantly improve our educational programs. Dedicated funding will compliment student

enrollment and retention efforts, and ensure that students receive the skills and training they need to secure employment in growing and in-demand industries.