

California Community Colleges 2026 Federal Policy Platform

The California Community Colleges (CCC) system comprises 116 colleges that serve more than 2,000,000 students – equal to nearly 25% of *all* community college students in the United States. A leading provider of career and workforce training nationally, California’s community colleges offer an affordable pathway for Americans to receive the education and training necessary to obtain a high-quality job that pays family-sustaining wages. **The California Community Colleges 2026 Federal Policy Platform supports investments that are critical for student success, as well as strengthening our nation’s workforce and economy.**

Enhance Economic and Workforce Development

California’s community colleges are the workforce and economic engine of the State of California. Providing career education to nearly 1,000,000 learners annually, CCC programs provide students with the education and training to obtain high-wage careers in an ever-changing economy. **We urge federal policymakers to support the following investments in workforce and career education.**

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 provide students, many of whom are working adults, with career pathways in current and emerging industries to meet employers’ growing workforce needs to be able to compete in the global marketplace.

Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities

Apprenticeships provide key opportunities for learners from all backgrounds to access training opportunities that lead directly to employment. California Community Colleges apprenticeship programs foster connections between employers and potential workers that grow careers and fill high-demand workforce needs.

Improve Job Readiness in Energy and Environmental Resiliency

Steep growth in technology is merging with unprecedented climate instability. This is leading to the emergence of new, cutting-edge climate tech jobs, as well as a stronger need for pragmatic approaches to resilience, such as vegetation management and fire prevention. Federal programs are needed to help prepare the workforce for more frequent and severe wildland fires and other natural disasters, for which community colleges often serve as incident command centers.

Fully Fund Workforce Pell

Employers across all industries are eager to find qualified workers, and job creators have found that skills-based credentials can effectively prepare workers. The Workforce Pell provisions of Public Law 119-21 will help low-income students participate in short-term training programs to prepare for in-demand jobs and careers. Congress must enact sufficient appropriations to ensure full funding for the Workforce Pell program.

Support Veterans and Adult Learners Seeking Higher Education and Career Opportunities

Veterans and working adults seeking advanced education bring years of transferable military and industry expertise. Studies have shown that adult learners who receive academic credit for their prior learning (CPL) will graduate at almost double the rate of those who do not (49% vs. 27%). Federal support for approaches like CPL will help students reach their education goals and advance in the workforce more quickly.

Establish Pathways to Generate Income, Expand Federal Student Aid Eligibility and Benefits of Residency

Undocumented students include aspiring teachers, medical professionals, first responders, and business owners. However, not all undocumented students benefit from DACA or have a pathway to employment after they earn a college degree. Undocumented students who earn a college degree deserve a chance to earn a living wage and contribute to the economy.

Make College and Career Education Accessible for All

California Community Colleges have the USA's lowest tuition fees (\$46 per unit). However, students do not receive sufficient financial aid to cover the *total* cost of attendance, (including housing, food, and books/supplies). The growing gap between financial **need** and financial **aid** threatens a student's ability to learn, attain a degree, transfer to a four-year university, or gain a credential. This, in turn, adversely affects our nation's economy. **We urge Congress to support the following investments to make college and workforce education affordable.**

Strengthen and Expand Access to the Pell Grant

The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of federal student aid, providing need-based grants to nearly 400,000 low-income California community college students each year. CCC urges Congress to strengthen the Pell Grant.

- Double the maximum grant award to \$14,790 per award year.
- Annually Increase the maximum Pell award based on inflation.
- Restore lifetime Pell Grant eligibility to 18 semesters (full-time equivalent).
- End the taxation of Pell Grants.
- Provide maximum Pell Grant eligibility for recipients of means-tested benefits.

Strengthen and Expand Access to SNAP

A 2023 survey showed that 47% of California's community college students face food insecurity and 58% face housing insecurity.¹ Programs such as SNAP (called CalFresh in California) play a pivotal role in alleviating the health and economic strains on students, thereby enabling them to focus more on their studies. Yet, despite the high rates of food insecurity, fewer community college students than University of California students are eligible for SNAP due to program rules associated with household income, FAFSA filing eligibility, and student exemptions.

Support Institutions to Meet the Needs of All Students

Community colleges play a crucial role in shaping the economic vitality of our country. CCC programs equip students with the skills and knowledge to ensure a well-prepared and competitive workforce. Moreover, they provide critical pathways to higher education and career opportunities. **We urge Congress to continue supporting the diverse needs of all community college students.**

Preserve Critical Funding to Empower and Equip Students

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, Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG) – expand and improve workforce education capacity and business productivity through competitive grants to community colleges.

Fully fund authorized programs for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).

Investments in minority student recruitment, retention, and success are critical for those institutions to reap significant, positive impact for their students, their communities, our state and our nation.

¹ https://www.ccleague.org/wp-content/uploads/basic_needs_among_california_community_college_students-final-2023.pdf