

California Community Colleges 2025 Federal Policy Platform

The California Community College system comprises 116 colleges and serves over two million students. Collectively, the California community colleges represent nearly one-quarter of all community college students in the United States and they 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 to obtain a high-quality job that pays family-sustaining wages as we address growing workforce demands. **The 2025 California Community Colleges Federal Policy Platform supports critical investments necessary for student success and strengthening the workforce and economy.**

Enhance Economic and Workforce Development

The California Community Colleges are the workforce and economic engine of the State of California, providing career education to nearly one million learners annually. Our programs provide students with the education and training needed to obtain high-wage careers in an ever-changing economy. We call on federal policymakers to make the following investments in workforce and career education for community college students:

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 successful career pathways to meet employers' growing workforce needs in areas that include emerging and in-demand industry sectors.

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.

Improve Job Readiness in Clean Energy and Climate Resiliency

Steep growth in technology is merging with unprecedented climate instability, leading to the emergence of new, cutting-edge climate tech jobs as well as an 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.

Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act

Employers across all industries are eager to find qualified workers, and job creators find that skills-based credentials beyond a traditional degree can effectively prepare workers. Unfortunately, many programs are unaffordable for low-income students. The proposed Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act would help low-income students participate in short-term job training programs to prepare for careers in in-demand industries.

Support Veterans and Adult Learners Seeking Higher Education and Career Opportunities

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 CPL will graduate at almost double the rate (49% vs. 27%) than those who do not. Federal support for approaches like CPL will help students reach their educational goals and enter the workforce in a timely manner.

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

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

Make College and Career Education Accessible for All

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 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 372,226 low-income California community college students.

- Double the maximum Pell award to \$13,000 per award year;
- Extend Pell eligibility for short-term job training programs;
- Provide annual increases to the maximum Pell award based on inflation;
- Restore lifetime Pell Grant eligibility to 18 semesters (full-time equivalent);
- End 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 community college students face food insecurity and 58% face housing insecurity.¹ Programs such as SNAP (in California, this program is called CalFresh) play a pivotal role in alleviating economic strain, enabling students to focus on their studies. Despite these high rates of food insecurity, fewer community college students are eligible for SNAP than University of California students. This is 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. Through our programs, students are equipped with skills and knowledge to ensure a well-prepared and competitive workforce. Moreover, they provide critical pathways to higher education and career opportunities. We urge policymakers 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, and the Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG) program, expand and improve community college workforce education capacity and business productivity through competitive grants to community colleges.

Support 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)

Minority-serving institutions provide significant economic impact. Investments made toward student recruitment and retention in the College Completion Fund for Postsecondary Student Success are critical.

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