

# CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES FEDERAL PRIORITIES

FEBRUARY 2019

## Background

California Community Colleges (CCC) is the largest system of public higher education in the United States. Our 115 colleges across 73 districts serve 2.2 million students, which includes two-thirds of the undergraduate students in the state of California. One in four community college students in the nation is enrolled at our colleges, and our tuition is the lowest in the country.

The CCC system and its individual colleges are the backbone of higher education in the state and the leading provider of career and workforce training in the country. Our students generally are over the age of 25, and they come to us from urban and rural parts of the state. Most students who attend our community colleges say they aspire to move on to a four-year college or university. CCC institutions also serve the diverse needs of mid-career professionals 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 retirees looking to take up a new interest to maintain their cognitive skills.

Nevertheless, community colleges continue to face significant challenges. Older and working adults too often are left behind due to the lack of financial supports needed to help balance work, childcare, and academic demands. Many of our students struggle to make ends meet due to a financial aid structure that does not provide sufficient assistance with non-tuition related costs. Federal leadership is more important than ever to strengthen this largest system of higher education in America.



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# Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival

Faculty and campus leaders support continuing protections for DACA participants, coupled with legislation establishing a pathway to citizenship. Of the 223,000 DACA participants in California (out of 800,000 nationally), approximately 72,000 are enrolled in one of the CCC institutions.

In addition to its social and humanitarian imperatives, DACA has vast economic benefits for our country. A study by CATO Institute notes that the elimination of DACA would cost the federal government \$60 billion in tax revenues, with the overall economy likely to shrink by \$215 billion.

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The proposed cancellation of the program has put the educational future of many of our students in doubt. Thus, we urge Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that, at a minimum, would accomplish the following.

- Codify DACA protections into law.
- Provide a permanent path to citizenship for DACA students.
- Provide eligibility for Title IV grant aid, including Pell Grants and Work-Study.



## A Workforce for the 21st Century

Targeted investments in workforce education are key to increasing the nation's economic competitiveness. CCC institutions 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 help provide the career education necessary to build economic growth in the 21st Century. Specifically, to ensure that this partnership is successful, we recommend increased funding for the following programs.

- Perkins Act Grants help both high school and community colleges offer career technical education courses and incentivize the two systems to build strong partnerships.
- Workforce, Innovation and Opportunity Act programs provide vital funding for job training to dislocated workers, low-income adults and at-risk youth.

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# Higher Education Act Reauthorization

The success of the California Community Colleges is dependent on continuing our strong partnership with the federal government. In approaching the Higher Education Act reauthorization, the California Community Colleges encourage Congress to consider the following priorities and principles:

**Keep College Affordable.** California has the largest "free tuition" program in the nation; nearly half of all community college students and 70 percent of full-time students receive tuition waivers under the California College Promise Grant. Yet, students face substantial financial barriers to completion. More than a third of our students experience housing insecurity and 12 percent experience food scarcity. Inadequate financial aid forces students to take fewer classes or work longer hours – choices that make them less likely to be successful academically. Increased access and funding for Pell Grants and keeping federal student loans affordable are essential to reducing debt burdens and enhancing college completion for low- and moderate-income community college students.



**Maintain Protections and Simplify Processes.** The Department of Education rightly should serve as a gatekeeper regarding subsidized student loans and target subsidized loans to students in programs that will provide clear pathways toward well-paying careers. This not only serves as a form of consumer protection for students, but it also minimizes the exposure taxpayers face when a student defaults on his or her loan. However, the CCC system has a very low loan-participation rate, greatly increasing the significance of just a few loan defaults. We request continuation of 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 benefitted from changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including allowing the use of prior-year tax data and early availability of the FAFSA. However, too many community college students continue to face obstacles in completing the FAFSA, including verification burdens that disproportionately impact low-income students. It is our strong hope that Congress and the Department of Education will engage students and community college leadership in the next iteration of FAFSA simplification.

**Ensure Effective Oversight.** The federal government has a responsibility to ensure that colleges receiving taxpayer funds provide a quality education to students. CCC has invested in accountability frameworks aimed at measuring success, including the Student Success Scorecard and the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) Indicators. Similarly, Congress should consider ways to ensure robust oversight that protects students from bad actors, largely concentrated in the for-profit sector, and allows public colleges to focus more on educational outcomes and less on administrative tasks.



**Expanding Access to Student-Level Data.** CCC has made great strides to expand access to data that allow students and the public to receive accurate, relevant, and representative information to be able to know what they can expect in return for their investment of time and money. However, our institutions have a difficult time providing complete data because only the federal government has access to national earnings information. Disclosure, accountability, and program and institutional integrity would be greatly improved if the current federal limitation on data collection could be lifted for students who receive federal financial aid.

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