

# CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERAL PRIORITIES

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA

California's Community Colleges are the largest system of public higher education in the United States. Our 114 colleges across 72 districts serve 2.1 million students; two-thirds of the undergraduate students in the state of California and one-tenth of the nation's undergraduates. Our colleges serve one of the most diverse student bodies of any system: in 2015-16, more than 67 percent of students were people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and more than 40 percent of students were over the age of 25, including students in both urban and rural parts of the state. Over 50 percent of all students attaining bachelor's degrees at the California State University and nearly 30 percent at the University of California start their four-year studies at a California community college. Our colleges train 70 percent of California's nurses and 80 percent of the state's firefighters, law enforcement personnel, and emergency medical technicians.

Community colleges also face challenges as a system. Our students struggle to make it to their desired goal, and those who do complete their associate degree goals take a long time to do so, an average of 5.2 years. Older and working adults are too often left behind due to a lack of supports and programming that serves adults who must also balance work, childcare and household demands. Our students struggle to make ends meet, and the current financial aid structure does not provide sufficient assistance with non-tuition related costs of attendance. Serious achievement gaps exist for low-income and students of color and for regions in the state.

To address these challenges head-on, in September of 2017 the California Community Colleges Board of Governors voted to approve the **Vision for Success\*** and called for the system to work toward the following system-wide five-year goals:

- 1 Increase by at least 20 percent the number of CCC students annually who acquire associate degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job.
- 2 Increase by 35 percent the number of CCC students system-wide transferring annually to a UC or CSU.
- 3 Decrease the average number of units accumulated by CCC students earning an associate's degree, from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units.
- 4 Increase the percent of exiting CTE students who report employment in their field of study, from the most recent statewide average of 60 percent to an improved rate of 69 percent.
- 5 Reduce equity gaps across all of the above measures by 40 percent within 5 years and close those achievement gaps for good within 10 years.
- 6 Reduce regional achievement gaps across all of the above measures, with the ultimate goal of closing regional achievement gaps for good within 10 years.



\* "Vision for Success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to Meet California's Needs." California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. July 17, 2017: <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Reports/vision-for-success.pdf>.

# HIGHER EDUCATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION

The success of the California Community Colleges is dependent on a continued 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:

- **Keeping 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. Over 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; these choices make them less likely to be academically successful. 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.
- **Simplifying Financial Aid.** While our colleges and students have benefitted from changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including allowing the use of prior-prior year tax data and early availability of the FAFSA, overall, too many community college students continue to face obstacles to completing the federal financial aid application including verification burdens that disproportionately impact low-income students. Congress and the Department of Education should engage students and community college leadership in the next iteration of FAFSA simplification.
- **Driving Strong Student Outcomes.** The Federal Student Aid programs are a vital resource to provide low- and moderate-income students the opportunity to enroll in and succeed at our institutions. Colleges have a responsibility to ensure we are working towards strong outcomes for our students and being good stewards of public funds. A critical part of meeting that responsibility is ensuring that we are holding colleges accountable for measurable outcomes and that students have reliable, comparable, and consumer-friendly program-level information about cost and outcomes. Congress should ensure career colleges are incentivized to focus on improving student outcomes, and prevent poor performing colleges that leave students with unaffordable debts and poor employment prospects from participating in the federal students aid program.
- **Ensuring Effective Oversight.** The federal government has a responsibility to ensure colleges that receive taxpayer funds provide a quality education to students. California’s community colleges have 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 allows public colleges to focus more on educational outcomes and less on administrative tasks.



# PROSPER ACT

The California Community Colleges appreciate the House of Representatives efforts to re-authorize the Higher Education Act, and have the following comments and suggestions to strengthen the PROSPER Act (HB 4508) in support of student access, success and equity.



- **Support Additional Resources for Full-Time Pell Grant Recipients**  
PROSPER would provide a bonus of \$150 per semester for students taking at least 15 units. By providing additional resources to students with financial need to attend full-time, this proposal will increase student access and completion.
- **Support Pell Grant Eligibility for Short-Term Programs**  
Under PROSPER, students in programs that last at least five weeks would now be eligible for Pell Grants. This has the potential to provide significant benefit to students seeking high-quality short-term education and training opportunities; and, in order to protect the taxpayer investment and ensure students are getting the knowledge and skills needed in our workforce, expanded access to Pell Grants should accompany accountability that ensures short-term programs have strong labor market outcomes.
- **Concern over Liability for Unearned Financial Aid (Title IV Funds)**  
PROSPER would change the rules for how much Title IV aid a college must return to the Department of Education for students that withdraw during an enrollment period and require colleges to pay back any unearned federal grant aid when a student withdraws from classes early. As open access institutions, community colleges serve populations that often are forced to reduce their course load due to work, familial responsibilities, or other emergencies. These provisions should be removed, as they fail to recognize the needs of our students and place an additional burden on a college's scarce resources.
- **Concern over Changes to Financial Aid Resources for Students**  
PROSPER eliminates many important financial aid programs that enable students to attend college. While we strongly agree with the effort to simplify the federal financial aid system, we oppose the reduction in available financial aid resources for students that make college more expensive for students, resulting from the elimination of the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant for low- and moderate-income students, the in-school interest subsidies for low- and moderate-income federal student loan recipients, and the time-based and public service loan forgiveness programs.
- **Concern over the Elimination of Title III-A: Strengthening Institutions Program**  
PROSPER eliminates Title III-A of the Higher Education Act, a competitive institutional aid program that supports minority serving colleges and those located in rural areas. The elimination of this program could restrict the ability to make continued programmatic investments that improve student access, success and equity.

- **Concern over Reduced Oversight and Consumer Protection** PROSPER eliminates the separate designation for proprietary institutions overlooking important sectorial differences. Well-documented abuses in a large share of entities in the for-profit higher education industry led to state and federal accountability and oversight structures aimed at ensuring public funds are appropriately spent and that students are protected from poor performing career college programs. In California, far too many students enroll in career-training programs with the promise of high-wage jobs, only to find themselves with a credential not valued in the market place and insurmountable student loan debt. Public institutions are often faced with the aftermath of these practices and their impact on students. There is strong rationale for maintaining the distinction between proprietary and public institutions and limiting proprietary institutions' access to specific federal funds and grants.

We are similarly concerned about the proposed elimination of baseline requirements to maintain the integrity of the federal student loan programs like the Department of Education's State Authorization requirement, which ensures state level oversight of consumer protections and the Gainful Employment regulations, which ensure students debt-to-earnings ratios stay within reasonable limits. We are also concerned about the proposed elimination of the 90/10 rule, which prohibits for-profit educational institutions from receiving more than 90 percent of their revenue from federal financial aid, another baseline for quality assurance that requires institutions whose primary objective is making a profit to maintain some skin-in-the-game.

## Protect California Dreamers: Codify Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA)

California Community Colleges urge support for the immediate enactment of legislation that will protect those eligible for the DACA program, as well as provide them with long-term security and an opportunity to apply for U.S. citizenship following a thorough application process. Of the 800,000 DACA recipients across the country, 97 percent are in school or currently employed. More than one in four of these young people reside in California, while estimates find over 75,000 undocumented students enrolled in our public colleges and universities. Losing, or even underutilizing, these talented students poses a threat for California's workforce and economy, as the state is already poised to be 1.7 million college educated workers short by 2025. DACA recipients have been raised in our communities, educated in our public schools, and abide by our laws. California's growth and continued prosperity relies on our ability to develop and tap into the potential of these talented young people.

## A Workforce for the 21st Century

Targeted investments in workforce education are key to increasing the nation's economic competitiveness. California's community colleges are well positioned to be key players in working 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's community colleges will help provide the workforce education necessary to build economic growth in the 21st century. Specifically, to ensure that this partnership is successful, funding for the following programs should be increased:

- Perkins Act Grants – These resources help both high school and community colleges offer career technical education courses and incentivizes 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.

To improve oversight and compliance, Congress should align various reporting and outcome standards contained in the Higher Education Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

