

# 2023 COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## **Bolster The Role of Community Colleges in Workforce Development**

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### **Strengthen the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

Enhance WIOA, and with that the national economy, by bolstering the role of community colleges in the federal workforce development system. Community colleges should be a guaranteed part of the leadership apparatus for workforce development policy at both the state and local levels. The system should prioritize credential attainment and streamline reporting requirements. Greater training opportunities should be provided.

### **Authorize a Major Community College-Led Job Training Program**

Congress should once again enact major support for the community college workforce education mission, as it did previously with the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) program. The TAACCT program led to a major increase in credential attainment and job placement, but the skills gap persists. Congress can achieve this goal by authorizing and growing the Strengthening Community College Training Grants program in a WIOA reauthorization or reauthorizing the TAACCT program itself.

## **Fund Key Education and Workforce Programs**

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### **Support Student Access and Success**

Boost the Pell Grant maximum award, at minimum by an inflationary adjustment, and set the long-term goal to double the Pell Grant from the 2021-22 award year. Pell Grants enable millions of low-income community college students to pay tuition and fees and meet other college expenses and is the foundation of all other student aid. Increasing the maximum award promotes affordability and student success for low-income students, while reducing their need to borrow.

Funding increases should also be provided for key financing and student support programs such as the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG), Federal Work-Study, TRIO, GEAR UP, Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), Postsecondary Student Success, and Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students programs.

### **Strengthen Under-Resourced Institutions**

Increase funding for institutional aid programs including Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Title III-A Strengthening Institutions; Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs); Tribal Colleges; and other programs serving traditionally underrepresented populations. Robust funding for these programs will help reduce achievement gaps at community colleges and other institutions.

### **Bolster Job Training and Career and Technical Education**

Continue to support community college training programs that lead to jobs in in-demand industries by increasing funding for the Strengthening Community College Training Grants program administered by the Department of Labor, now entering its fourth year.

Enhance funding for Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, Adult Basic and Literacy Education State Grants, state grants under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

## **Support Dreamers**

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### **Enact the Dream Act**

Enact the Dream Act, once and for all, to give Dreamers permanent legal status. The Dream Act provides a path to citizenship for undocumented young people, including the thousands of students currently enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Dreamers were brought to the U.S. as minors and frequently know no other nation besides America. More importantly, they make substantial contributions to the U.S. economy and society. Dreamers should also be able to access Title IV student aid funding. The DREAM Act has traditionally garnered bipartisan support and work toward this goal must continue.

## Reform Student Aid for Today's Students

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### **Support Workforce Pell Grants for Students in Short-Term Programs**

Establish Pell Grant eligibility for shorter-term programs, accompanied by rigorous and relevant quality standards. Currently, programs must be two-thirds of a year in order to be eligible for Pell Grants. This excludes many community college workforce-oriented programs that greatly benefit both students and local businesses. Many students cannot participate in these programs because of their cost. Community colleges support lowering the threshold for Pell Grant eligibility to 150 clock hours, as in the JOBS Act and the REAL Reforms Act, which would increase access to these programs.

### **Invest in Basic Needs Supports for Students**

Support policies that address the needs of students by providing greater access to basic needs services. Title IV assistance is rarely generous enough to cover all necessities such as food, housing, transportation, childcare, and medical expenses for many community college students. Congress should address the basic needs of the whole student by:

- Increasing the capacity of community colleges to connect students with supportive services to help them persist and succeed in postsecondary education. The promising new Basic Needs and Postsecondary Student Success programs tackle some of these issues and should be greatly expanded. Title IV student aid programs also can be better integrated with income-maintenance programs.
- Strengthening existing federal programs, including the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to meet students' true needs.
- Ensuring health care programs for low-income individuals are accessible to community college students.

### **Allow for Responsible Borrowing Loans**

Support responsible student borrowing by tying borrowing limits to enrollment intensity. Limiting part-time students to pro-rated debt will help students manage debt load through program completion and decrease the likelihood they will face difficulties in repayment.

### **Utilize Accountability and Transparency Policies that Reflect Needs of Community Colleges**

Create a federal student unit record system to generate accurate, meaningful student-level data on postsecondary outcomes, including post-completion earnings. Ensure that cohort default rates or any loan-driven accountability measures reflect the incidence of student borrowing and the student body generally. The combination of these proposals will provide accountability and transparency that is responsive to the community college mission while maintaining integrity in the student aid programs.

## Focus Student Tax Policy on Those Who Can Benefit Most

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### **End the Taxation of Pell Grants, and Modify the AOTC & LLC**

Make Pell Grants tax-free. Under current law, community college students must pay taxes on any portion of their Pell Grants that is used to help meet living expenses. These expenses are every bit as tangible as tuition and should not be taxed as this practice further dilutes the aid students rely on.

Community colleges also support altering the \$2,500 American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) so that Pell Grant awards are not subtracted from a student's eligible expenses. This would dramatically enhance the ability of low-income students to qualify for the credit. Making this change would help hundreds of thousands of community college students receive the maximum credit of \$2,500 each year.

These changes were embodied in the "Tax Free Pell Grant Act," which received bipartisan support in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. Similar legislation should be enacted in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress.

## Farm Bill

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### **Support Rural Community Colleges**

Create federal funding streams for community colleges to support rural economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector. Rural community colleges play an increasing role in training workers to support agriculture and ag-related fields. Providing grants to assist community colleges for agricultural and natural resources would support the growing need for an agricultural workforce that needs skilled training.

### **Increase Access to SNAP**

Support streamlining of access to SNAP benefits for community college students, preventing bureaucratic barriers and increasing participation among eligible students.