



2009 Community College Federal Legislative Priorities

Economic Recovery (Stimulus) Legislation

In this time of severe fiscal stress, community colleges both need and appreciate federal assistance to help them play a vital role in the economic recovery. Pending economic stimulus legislation will spark immediate economic development, create jobs, and increase productivity. Community colleges strongly support the following positions:

Pell Grants: The Pell Grant program is critical in helping needy students attain higher education. Both the House and Senate provide significant expenditures, but the higher House funding will enable more students to gain essential skills. Community colleges support the House funding for the Pell Grant program because disadvantaged students need these crucial funds that will be spent in short order. We urge Congress to provide a \$5,350 maximum Pell Grant in FY2009, as in the House legislation.

Infrastructure: Community colleges are pleased that the House and Senate Committee-reported bills recognized their infrastructure requirements. They strongly endorse language that, at the state level, ensures that community colleges receive funding commensurate with their relative share of student enrollments. The House's funding level of \$6 billion should be adopted.

Training: Both the House and Senate bills provide vitally important training funding through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). However, community colleges support the House's larger allocation for job-training programs. Dedicated funding for Green Jobs Act training and health careers will help community colleges train more workers in these high-growth fields. Community colleges strongly support Senate language that allows Workforce Investment Boards to contract with community colleges to provide direct training.

Tax Policy: The new American Opportunity Tax Credit should allow students to claim as eligible expenses all those covered by the federal student financial aid programs—the student's "total cost of attendance"—as defined in the Higher Education Act. The absence of this definition in the tax credit badly disadvantages community college students and prevents the lowest-income students from receiving credits. Transportation costs are particularly onerous for community college students. Congress could apply the current Hope income phase-outs (lower than those in the pending legislation) to "pay for" this change and to enhance refundability.

Budget and Appropriations

Congress should increase the federal investment in higher education and workforce development across the board. Community colleges recommend the following funding levels for programs that are especially important to their mission of serving the nation's educational and workforce needs:

- 1) **Increase the Pell Grant Maximum:** Community colleges strongly support the Pell Grant program, which each year helps more than 2 million of their financially disadvantaged students pay for tuition, books, living expenses, and transportation. In FY2010, community colleges request that Congress build on funding through the economic recovery legislation.
- 2) **\$1.4 Billion for the Perkins Act Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs:** The Perkins CTE programs are the largest federal source of institutional support for community colleges, helping them to improve all aspects of cutting-edge CTE programs that provide workers with the skills they need for the 21st century economy. Increased funding for the Perkins Basic State Grant and Tech Prep programs is crucial to the continued success of preparing the 21st century workforce.

- 3) **\$250 Million for the Community-Based Job Training Grants:** Currently funded at \$125 million, the Community-Based Job Training Grants (CBJTG) program serves a vital national need—enhancing community colleges’ capacity to train workers in high-demand, high-growth industries. The CBJTG program brings together community colleges, local businesses, and the federal workforce system to meet the training needs for industries such as health care, advanced manufacturing, and energy.
- 4) **Support higher education programs:** This includes Strengthening Institutions (Title III-A of the HEA), Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Predominantly Black Institutions. Providing funding for new Higher Education Act programs, including those that promote sustainability, encourage articulation between higher education institutions, and assist veterans and students in rural communities.

Workforce Development Legislation

In reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Congress should include community colleges as a key partner within the legislation and make public institutions of higher education automatically eligible as training providers. Congress should also authorize the Community-Based Job Training Grants program, which serves as a model for restructuring the delivery of training services in the Title I programs. Congress must close the gaps between workforce training, adult basic education and postsecondary education to give workers the skills and knowledge they need in today’s economy.

Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act

Congress should pass the DREAM Act, which grants legal status to certain undocumented students who were brought to the U.S. as children, easing the path to higher education for potentially more than one million U.S. high school graduates. Congress needs to clarify these students’ status and grant states the ability to set their own tuition policies.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

As Congress works to reauthorize the ESEA (No Child Left Behind), Congress should take the opportunity to support the curriculum alignment between K-12 schools and community colleges and other colleges to ensure that students are prepared for college. Congress should also create new programs focused on dual enrollment or early college that will create a pathway to higher education.

If they have not done so already, please urge your Senators and Representatives to join the Senate and House Community College Caucuses, which were established to educate Congress about our institutions and their key legislative issues. To join in the Senate, offices should contact Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) or Senator Richard Burr (R-NC); in the House, Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) or Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE) should be contacted.