



Martha J. Kanter Jane Oates

SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT OBAMA AT NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY College earlier this year, the historic Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 included \$2 billion for the Community College and Career Training Grant Program. To be overseen by the Department of Labor in partnership with the Department of Education, the CCCTG program funding of \$500 million per year over four years is four times larger than the Career Pathways program, formerly the signature federal program for community colleges.

Representing the Education and Labor departments, respectively, Martha J. Kanter and Jane Oates spoke with *Trustee Quarterly* about the grant program, its long-term impact on community colleges, and how the partnership between their two federal agencies can serve as a model for community college leaders.

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Q: What is the timetable for the grant notice for application and deadline? And when will the funds be distributed?

OATES: The funds for the first year of this program will be available beginning Fiscal Year 2011, or October 1, 2010. We anticipate that the Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA) will be released sometime that month. Generally, the deadline for submitting applications is between 45 and 90 days from the date the SGA is published, but a firm timeline for this competition has not yet been established. As specified by law, the funds will be distributed no later than September 30, 2011.

Q: How will the Departments of Labor and Education ensure that sufficient applications and programs will be funded in each state? How will this stipulation ensure competitiveness within some of the smaller states, which

may not have local competition and otherwise would have to compete nationally?

OATES: ETA will include in the solicitation a description of the process to ensure that each state is represented by at least one fundable application from an eligible institution to meet the funding requirements established by the law. It will essentially set aside at least \$2.5 million per state — or 0.5 percent of the total available funds each year — to meet that requirement. Eligible institutions will be able to submit a single application or be a part of a consortium of colleges. The only limitation will be that each institution will be limited to being the lead on only one application.

Q: The CCCTG program has narrower eligibility guidelines than the American Graduation Initiative. What specific types of activities will be covered under CCCTG? Will these grants be targeted to certain populations? What can community colleges do now to help prepare for this competition?



OATES: This program will help eligible institutions develop, offer, or improve education and career training programs suitable for workers who are eligible for Trade Adjustment Act assistance. Basically, this grant money is intended to create new programs or revamp existing programs to make sure that both their delivery and the content are available to those workers in a timely manner and lead to good local jobs. We also hope that these funds will give colleges the resources to rethink assessment, remediation, and the relationship between credit and non-credit programs.

Community colleges should reach out to their state workforce agency that administers the Trade Act to begin developing a better understanding of the workers they are serving under that law. Information to seek may include what workers' needs are, where they are located, and whether there are program enrollment gaps in the area.

KANTER: Agreed. I would underscore the remediation point — we need to address the needs of those workers or unemployed Americans with challenges entering or re-entering the job market who may not yet have the skills they need to succeed in credit-bearing courses. As for what colleges can be doing now to prepare, they can identify the biggest roadblocks to student success at their colleges and think about what strategic partners might help students complete and move into further education or training leading to and resulting in gainful employment. Finally, I would note that although the programs must be developed to address the needs of TAA-affected workers, the courses are not limited to these students. In fact, we expect many others will benefit.

Q: ACCT has embraced President Obama's goal of increasing the total number of degrees, certificates, and completed transfers. In fact, ACCT recently signed a "Completion Agenda" that commits to advancing community and technical colleges toward reaching this goal. Will the grant prioritize completion-related efforts?

KANTER: The President has called on us to reclaim our place as "the best-educated, most competitive workforce in the world" by 2020, and community colleges are critical to reaching that goal. In order to get there, we must acknowledge and overcome the completion problem — too few of our students are making it through. We are thankful for ACCT's leadership on the completion agenda and believe a completion movement is well underway. For example, the National Governors Association, under the leadership of Governor Manchin, recently issued a report called "Complete to Compete" laying out how certificate and degree completions are essential to a thriving, sustainable workforce and America's economic prosperity. The NGA is also calling on states to adopt a common set of progress and outcome metrics for higher education.

We believe community colleges are vital to reaching the President's 2020 completion goal. This grant program will enable community colleges to dramatically improve their completion rates so students will be competitive for 21st century jobs.

OATES: Martha is absolutely right. Our colleges have to help their students think smarter about industry recognized credentials and earning a degree.

Q: How will you measure the success of this program?

OATES: The question of identifying appropriate measurements of success is being discussed between Labor and Education as we develop the grant solicitation. Ultimately, the success of these grants will be measured by the outcomes from innovative new programs and accessible courses that provide individuals with opportunities to obtain credentials and employment while also meeting the needs of employers. Personally, I would hope to see many more clearly articulated, "stackable" credentials leading to degrees, more variety in how courses are offered, including non-campus online offerings, improved articulation, and many more employers drawn into collaborations with colleges to develop curricula.

KANTER: Absolutely. We also hope that innovation and continuous improvement will not end once the funding ends.

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Our goal is to help catalyze systemic change at community colleges by providing funding for new approaches and structures that will improve and accelerate education and employment outcomes for students.

Q: The funding level for these programs is lower than what the Obama Administration had sought through the American Graduation Initiative. We know that President Obama has been vocal in his support of the nation’s community colleges. What can you share with us about further legislation or other federal initiatives to support community colleges?

KANTER: When the President signed the bill funding this historic federal investment, he also called for a White House Community College Summit to highlight the importance of this sector to our nation’s present and future. The summit is being organized by longtime community college professor and champion Dr. Jill Biden, and will be held at the White House this fall.

As we focus on completion more broadly, we are taking a close look at higher education accountability measures. We recognize that community colleges have varied missions and roles, which makes relying solely on traditional measures of success inadequate. To that point, Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently announced the creation of the Committee on Measures of Student Success, which will recommend success measures for two-year institutions. I’m pleased that ACCT is already working with AACC and The College Board on a Voluntary Framework of Accountability for community colleges, and we encourage you to share your thoughts with our committee as we move forward. The first meeting will likely be in the fall.

Community colleges have major support in this administration, starting with the President. Our administration understands that community colleges are at the center of our education and workforce development systems, and we want to do all we can to help catalyze progress at community colleges to ensure that more students will succeed in college, in the workplace and throughout their lives.

OATES: Secretary Solis has sent a clear message each and every

time that she visits an employer — your local community college is the place to go for world-class training. As a former trustee in her home state of California, she knows the power of the education and training options at community colleges. But getting more employers to recognize the importance of that connection is critical to the long-term sustainability of the good work that we are able to seed with federal money.

Q: There has been a great deal of public interest in the collaboration between the Departments of Education and Labor. What motivated this partnership, and what are the advantages of a collaborative effort?

OATES: I could point to several joint efforts — our work on AGI and TAACC, listening sessions on adult learning strategies, the work on better addressing the needs of professional new immigrants, and a number of webinars and guidance. But the most important aspect of the collaboration isn’t fancy — it’s the way we shoot each other e-mails, refer people back and forth and just routinely say to staff, “check with Education.” We recognize and respect each other and understand that our heartfelt collaborations are more than just good government — our stakeholders deserve no less than our very best efforts.

KANTER: I absolutely agree with Jane. What motivates this partnership is our shared desire to see students and workers succeed. We understand that a high school diploma will not cut it today. The disparity in earnings and unemployment for those with and without degrees and credentials is striking. Working together, Labor and Education are developing better aligned approaches that will benefit communities across our nation. I think this is a good lesson for community colleges — it may seem like a lot of work to make outreach to adult education providers, the K-12 system, or the business community and really engage in a meaningful way. It does take patience and time to develop trust and learn each others’ language. But in the end, it will pay off, and you’ll soon have each other on speed dial. We are modeling at the federal level the type of collaboration and partnership that is also the key to success at the local and state level.