AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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BACKGROUND BRIEFING INFORMATION

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Federal Legislative Landscape

The first session of the 112th Congress was mired in partisan divide over federal tax, debt, and appropriations. The economy and deficit reduction took center stage in a fight where political ideologues often stifled compromise. In a year where we saw nine continuing resolutions for appropriations, a failed Super Committee on deficit reduction, a potential default on US debts, and numerous last-minute aversions of government shutdown, Congress has appeared to be anything but a well-oiled machine.

While Congressional committees spent a great deal of time examining the current state of education and workforce programs, consensus and compromise remained elusive in plans to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

As we move into a Presidential election-year where all of the House and one-third of the Senate are up for reelection, the dialogue has shifted towards jobs, policy plans to generate economic revitalization, and the middle class. Yet, the issue of federal spending also remains on the forefront as Congress must navigate new spending caps and an impending sequestration that is set to occur in less than a year's time. Overall, 2012 is shaping up to be another rocky year for Congress and the Administration.

Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations

In December, the House and Senate finally reached agreement on the omnibus appropriations package, marking the completion of all 12 annual appropriations bills for fiscal year (FY) 2012. While the funding levels were largely similar to those of FY 2011, the compromise demonstrated a progression over the 2011 funding battle that was not settled until mid-April of last year.

New spending caps set in August under the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) paved the way for this compromise. Unlike FY 2011, when there was a large partisan divide over the top-line budgetary numbers, 2012 numbers were largely set by the BCA, which helped to eliminate a major roadblock in the budget and appropriations process.

The final FY 2012 omnibus included a 0.189% across-the-board cut to most education and labor programs. The Pell Grant program was exempt from this particular cut. Overall, there were small cuts made to Institutional Aid programs, with Hispanic Serving Institutions experiencing the largest cut at around $4 million. Federal Work Study, SEOG, GEAR UP, and WIA all saw small cuts. Perkins CTE and TRIO received slight increases.

The FY 2012 omnibus package also included significant eligibility changes to the Pell Grant program. In order to cover a $1.3 billion shortfall and generate future savings, Congress chose to implement four changes to eligibility: elimination of ability-to-benefit students; changes to income levels for zero expected family contribution (EFC); elimination of eligibility for students whose calculated award is at least 5 % but less than 10% of the maximum award; and reduction in the maximum number of semesters. The bill also included a temporary suspension of the interest subsidy on undergraduate Stafford loans during the six-month grace period.

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget and Appropriations

On February 13, President Obama is expected to release his FY 2013 budget request. This begins the Congressional appropriations process and serves as the baseline to which the House and Senate appropriations bills will be developed. The BCA sets new spending caps for FYs 2012– 2021 and appropriators may not exceed these caps. For FY 2013, the discretionary cap is set at $1.047 trillion, which is $4 billion over the FY 2012 appropriations package.

Looming in 2013 is the threat of sequestration. Since Congress and the Super Committee were unable to pass a plan reducing federal spending by $1.2 trillion, cuts will be enforced by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) through a process known as sequestration. In January 2013, most federal discretionary programs will receive an across-the-board cut. Estimates put this cut somewhere in the 7.8 to 9 percent range. For years 2014 – 2021, it is up to the Congressional appropriators to determine where the cuts are made, however they must find at least $54.7 billion in savings annually. The Pell Grant program is exempt from sequestration in 2013, but it would be eligible for cuts by the appropriators beginning in FY 2014.

These cuts were mandated in the BCA as part of the deal to raise the federal debt ceiling last summer. While the failure of the Super Committee triggers sequestration beginning in January 2013, Congress has until then to figure out a possible alternative. There have been some proposals to change the rules for sequestration that currently require half of all cuts come from defense spending and the other half from non-defense spending. The defense community is pushing for removal or reduction of defense cuts, leaving a larger burden on the non-defense programs. However, President Obama has signaled he would veto any change to the sequestration formula, and would also veto any alternative plan that does not find $1.2 trillion in savings.

Support the Federal Pell Grant Program

For community college students, the Federal Pell Grant program remains by far the most important student aid program. Pell Grants are now being made to more than nine million postsecondary students each year, and approximately one-third of these students attend community colleges. Pell Grants represent the federal government's commitment to ensuring that qualified students from all financial backgrounds can attend college.

Pell Grants play a much more prominent role in community college student financing than in other sectors for two primary reasons. Community college students, on average, have the lowest incomes, and they also pay the lowest average tuitions—in the fall of 2010, $2,713 for a full-time, full-year student. This means that Pell Grants cover more expenses for community college students than for those attending other types of institutions. This helps to minimize student borrowing; just 10% of all community college students take out federal loans.

During the summer of 2011, the Pell Grant program was facing an $18.3 billion shortfall over the next two academic years. Congress opted to infuse the program with $17 billion during the debt ceiling negotiations, leaving a more manageable $1.3 billion shortfall for AY 2012 – 2013. In order to maintain the $5,550 maximum and address the $1.3 billion shortfall for AY 2012 – 2013, Congress implemented the four following changes to Pell Grant eligibility in the final FY 2012 omnibus funding package:

1. Elimination of Ability-to-Benefit Students: Ability-to-Benefit students are those who have not received a high school diploma or GED but have demonstrated their capacity to benefit from college access through testing or course completion. As of July 1, 2012, *new* students lacking a GED or high school diploma will no longer be eligible for federal student aid. Consequently, 65,000 students who would have received an average grant of $3,932 will not be eligible to receive any Pell Grant funding in 2012 – 2013.

2. Changes to Income Levels for Zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC): The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is the amount a student or family is expected to contribute toward college costs. Generally, the lower the EFC, the more financial aid a student is eligible to receive. Under the omnibus, the maximum income for automatic zero EFC students has been reduced from $32,000 to $23,000. This will eliminate 12,000 students from eligibility for an average Pell Grant of $4,098. An additional 274,000 recipients will receive an average of $715 less in Pell funding, but remain in the program, as a result of this change.

3. Elimination of Students Qualifying for Less than 10% of the Maximum Award: Students eligible for less than the minimum Pell Grant award of $555 no longer qualify to receive Pell as of July 1, 2012. In 2012 – 2013, this means about 3,000 recipients will not receive an average grant of $506.

4. Reduction in the Maximum Number of Semesters: Students currently may receive a maximum of 18 full-time semesters of Pell Grant awards. Starting on July 1, 2012, this will be reduced to 12 full-time semesters, and it will retroactively impact students currently exceeding 12 full-time semesters. For students who are less than full-time, the cap is applied proportionally to their enrollment. As a result, about 63,000 recipients will not receive an average award of $3,905 in Pell grants in award year 2012 – 2013.

These changes will generate $11 billion in savings over the next 10 years, but they will also knock hundreds of thousands of students out of the program in the coming decade. In the short term, 145,000 recipients will not receive awards in AY 2012 – 2013. For community colleges, elimination of the Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) students represents the greatest impact. However, it is important to note that other proposed changes, such as elimination of less than half-time students and changes to the income protection allowance, were avoided during this round of cuts.

For AY 2013 – 2014, the Pell Grant program is on stronger ground, with a projected $1.5 billion surplus. This is due in part to the infusion of $17 billion during the debt ceiling negotiations last summer and the eligibility changes made in December. According to estimates, the program will face another shortfall exceeding $8 billion for AY 2014 – 2015. The Administration has signaled that additional changes to the program may be necessary to ensure Pell is sustainable. AACC and ACCT strongly support the Pell Grant program, and believe that keeping the program whole is essential for expanded access and increased college completion for community college students. Congress should continue to preserve the appropriated base of $4,860 for the Pell Grant, which combined with mandatory funding will produce a projected Pell Grant maximum award of $5,635 in award year 2013-2014.

Funding Priorities: Helping Community Colleges Respond to Demand for Education and Training

Given the large number of unemployed and under-employed individuals seeking training and retraining, targeted federal investments in education and workforce training programs are more important than ever. Since the fall of 2007, student enrollments grew approximately 22% at community colleges. This reflects a growing demand for postsecondary education and career training programs across the nation. Funding for federal programs that enable community colleges to serve more students is essential.

Priority programs include:

TAA Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program
Community colleges across the country were intensively engaged in the first round of grants awarded in late September under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act's Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program. This program was created in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and funded in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (This reconciliation legislation included a major component of the health care reform legislation, along with a variety of higher education provisions.). The TAACCCT was funded at $2 billion over four years, distributed in increments of $500 million per year. This funding is mandatory and not subject to the annual appropriations process. The program marked a historic commitment to community colleges, even if it was less than that originally proposed in President Obama's American Graduation Initiative (AGI), the original legislative vehicle designed to provide targeted aid to the sector.

The first round of grants reflected a wide variety of innovative and exciting programs, even though many applicants came away disappointed (roughly $3 billion in requests were made for the $500 million). The application process was very time-intensive—it usually required new types of program design and assessment and generally necessitated the orchestration of many broad multi-institutional arrangements, some state-wide. The awarding of funds also was complicated by the fact that each state was required by law to receive a minimum of $2.5 million.

The second competition for funding is expected to take place in early 2012. AACC and ACCT are working to ensure that applicants are provided with as much information as possible to submit applications that dovetail with the ambitious program goals of serving TAA-eligible individuals and others with innovative, flexible programs targeted to solid job opportunities.

This landmark program remains in legislative jeopardy. The $2 billion originally provided is vulnerable to cuts, with Congress seeking ways to reduce federal expenditures and looking for offsets for other expenditures. It is a large chunk of funds that has been provided but remains unspent. In 2011, proposals in both the House and Senate were floated to eliminate or reduce this funding; these efforts were met with outcries from the community college community and never gained traction. However, the funds remain highly vulnerable, especially since those trying to eliminate them could argue that, with $500 million already distributed, community colleges have already received significant support from this source.

It is imperative that all community college advocates speak out in strong support of this program. This is by far the largest single federal program targeted to community colleges, and it is particularly important at a time when community colleges are commonly asked to do more with less.

Federal Student Aid

Community colleges and their students recognize the importance of the federal student financial aid programs to expand access to postsecondary education and increase college completion. In addition to the Pell Grant program, community college students utilize the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study. Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and the TRIO programs also help low-income, first-generation college students prepare for, enroll in, and graduate from college.

Career and Technical Education and Adult Education

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 provides federal support for career and technical education (CTE) programs by authorizing funds for postsecondary institutions, states, and local school districts. Perkins CTE programs are one of the largest federal sources of institutional support for community colleges, helping them to improve all aspects of cutting-edge career and technical education programs.

The Perkins Act gives postsecondary institutions the flexibility to identify local priorities and use the Basic State Grants to fund innovation in occupational education programs. Community colleges use funds for a variety of purposes, including: training first responders and public safety officers; helping students meet challenging academic, vocational, and technical standards; improving curricula; purchasing equipment; integrating vocational and academic instruction; and fostering links between colleges and the business community. AACC and ACCT support maintaining current funding levels for the Perkins CTE programs.

Community colleges enroll millions of adults each year in Adult Basic Education programs and support investments in this important program to enable those Americans who lack a high school diploma to prepare for and complete the coursework necessary to be ready for college.

Institutional Aid

In addition to student financial assistance, there is a tremendous need for increased investments in direct institutional aid to those colleges that serve a disproportionate number of minority, low-income, and first-generation college students. Title III and Title V of the Higher Education Act provide grant funds under the Strengthening Institutions Program (Title III-A), the Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Program, the Strengthening Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program (Title V), and other programs directed at those institutions serving other specific populations.

Workforce Development

Narrowing the current skills gap is an essential part of our nation’s ability to compete globally. American businesses are facing a shortage of workers with the requisite skill levels, and the situation is certain to become more pressing as the economy recovers and the demand for skilled workers increases. The Workforce Investment Act’s (WIA) job training and adult basic education programs provide workers, particularly those with little means or skills, with the education and training they need to meet this growing demand. In FY 2011, WIA saw a significant cut in funding levels and the elimination of funding for the Career Pathways Innovation Fund – a program that provided $125 million annually to community college collaborative training programs. In FY 2012, WIA programs experienced a nominal cut. Continued funding for WIA is a priority for community colleges in order to maintain access and programs for training workers.

National Science Foundation
Another priority program for community colleges is the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program. The ATE program serves as the primary source of federal support for technician education, an often-overlooked but crucial aspect of the STEM workforce. The ATE program provides students with the core knowledge and skills required by the industries of our present and future economy, such as biotechnology, alternative energy, and nanotechnology. The program is equally prized by the large number of business partners that work with ATE grantees and employ their graduates. The ATE program has also played a vital role in the preparation of future K-12 science and math teachers.

Enhance and Make Permanent the American Opportunity Tax Credit

The American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) has become a key component of college financing, providing up to $2,500 per year for four years of undergraduate education. According to the IRS, nearly 9 million individuals received almost $15.5 billion through the program in 2009, making the program almost half the size of Pell Grants.

The AOTC was created in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, replacing for two years the smaller Hope Scholarship created in 1997. The AOTC bears some relation to the tax credit proposal of then-presidential candidate Obama. The AOTC has a number of significant advantages compared to the Hope Scholarship. First, it is simply larger. Second, it is structured to provide greater benefits to students attending lower-tuition colleges. Third, in addition to tuition, it covers "course materials," a long standing community college priority. Finally, the credit is 40% refundable, in some cases allowing individuals to receive a check from the federal government of up to $1,000 to cover college expenses.

Tax credits will never be quite as important to community college students as grant funds, which are provided up front to help students meet pressing educational expenses, but they have become an important source of additional financial support.

Unfortunately, the AOTC is a temporary tax provision, and without extension, it will expire at the end of 2012. If this occurs, the pre-existing Hope Scholarship tax credit will replace it, and significant resources for community college students will be removed. Compared to the Hope Tax Credit, the AOTC is tilted towards lower-income students attending lower-cost institutions. This is critical, since tax credits and related incentives provided through the Internal Revenue Code disproportionately benefit relatively affluent students.

The AOTC was extended for two years in a post-2010 election measure that extended Bush-era tax cuts and as well as longer-term unemployment insurance benefits. However, that legislation did not have to be "paid for" (i.e., Congress chose not to subject it to its own "PAYGO" rules). PAYGO, or pay-as-you-go, requires that new mandatory spending or tax cuts be offset by expenditure reductions or tax increases.

The challenge now facing community colleges is how to secure extension of the AOTC in an environment that will in all likelihood require offsets in the midst of what will be a fierce debate concerning the budget deficit and tax policy as the national elections draw near. AACC and ACCT continue to support making the AOTC a permanent component of our tax code. Additionally, the AOTC needs to be altered so that Pell Grant students are not prevented from receiving the tax credit. This is a longstanding community college priority.

Facilitate Partnerships between Business and Community Colleges

As part of President Obama's State of the Union Address, he proposed funding to create partnerships between community colleges and the business community in order to train and place two million skilled workers. These partnerships would enable community colleges to work strategically with business to tie educational programs to industry needs.

Community College Modernization

In September, President Obama proposed a $5 billion community college infrastructure modernization initiative as part of the American Jobs Act. This $5 billion for community colleges has been included in bills introduced in both the House and Senate, as H.R. 2948 and S. 1597, respectively. These bills are titled the "Fix America's Schools Today," or FAST Act.

The President's proposal represents an extraordinary commitment to community colleges. $5 billion is double the federal funding proposed for community college modernization in the American Graduation Initiative (AGI). The funding would go only to community colleges for facilities modernization and would not be available for new construction. As proposed, the funding would become available during the current fiscal year.

The need for community college facilities modernization is acute. Aggregate community college needs are estimated at roughly $100 billion (including the construction of new facilities). Historically, community colleges have received only a small fraction of public academic facilities expenditures, both at state and federal levels. Community colleges are able to spend on education less than half the resources expended by public 4-year colleges and far less than private institutions. Facilities are integral to community colleges' education and training services, and modernization will enable community colleges to educate more students with higher quality and also help to foster more efficient energy usage.

State and local funding sources have been savaged by current economic conditions. There is no practical alternative to federal support for this essential investment. Investments in community college education and training ultimately repay high dividends, both to the individual and the broader economy.

This legislation is straightforward. Funds would be distributed to states on the basis of their relative community college enrollments, and they would have broad latitude to award grants as they see fit for renovation and modernization on a competitive or formula basis. There is no institutional matching requirement, in contrast to the AGI. Also, the funding would supplement, not supplant, other government funding.

Reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) reauthorization remains on the Congressional “to-do” list, where it has been since 2004. While 2011 saw more Congressional activity around this issue than there had been in recent years and there is likely more action to follow in early 2012, few expect final legislation to be passed this year. In the meantime, funding for WIA and other job training programs continues to be under fire.

After several years of no bipartisan or majority WIA reauthorization bills being introduced in either the House or Senate, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee distributed draft bipartisan legislation. The Senate bill seeks to increase program alignment by setting up a more unified framework for WIA programs. The bill also emphasizes coordination with economic development activities, career pathways, regional service delivery, and other changes to the current system. However, Republican support for the bill beyond its authors eroded, because the bill did not consolidate any training programs and would end the requirement that state workforce investment boards be business-led and have a majority of business representatives. The Senate draft bill has yet to be introduced.

In late 2011, House Education and Workforce Committee Republicans introduced two new WIA reauthorization bills to augment the legislation already introduced by Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA), former chairman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce. As its name implies, the primary purpose of the more sweeping of the two new bills, the Streamlining Workforce Development Programs Act of 2011 (H.R. 3610), is to consolidate workforce training programs. Introduced by the Chair of the Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, Representatives Virginia Foxx (R-NC), H.R. 3610 would combine 33 current training programs into four basic funding streams: adult and dislocated workers, youth, special populations, and veterans. In addition to the consolidation of programs at the federal level, the bill also would allow governors to roll several other programs into a state unified workforce plan, including the Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) program.

The other new House Republican WIA bill (H.R. 3611), the Local Job Opportunities and Business Success Act of 2011, focuses primarily on modifying the makeup and activities of the local workforce investment boards to be more responsive to businesses. Introduced by Rep. Joseph Heck (R-NV), this bill would eliminate required seats on the boards for most of the categories now represented (including community colleges) while requiring that local boards consist of at least 2/3 business representatives.

The House Education and Workforce Committee plans to mark up a combination of the three Republican WIA reauthorization bills perhaps as early as late February.

Recommendations for WIA reauthorization:

Authorize and Expand the Career Pathways Innovation Fund: Improving community college training capacity and training more workers for high-demand, high-growth industries are the basic purposes of the Career Pathways Innovation Fund, which succeeds the Community-Based Job Training Grants. This program also should serve as a model for sector strategies that are incorporated elsewhere in WIA and other workforce development programs.

Ease the Reporting Burden for Eligible Training Providers: Public institutions of higher education whose programs are monitored for quality through accreditation, state licensure, and other state and federal programs should be deemed automatically eligible to provide services to WIA participants.

Increase the Alignment between Adult Basic Education, Workforce Training, and Postsecondary Education: The nation requires an unprecedented number of people to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Achieving these goals will require a multi-faceted effort on the parts of institutions, states, and the federal government. This effort will only succeed if we are effective in reaching out to populations that are currently underrepresented in postsecondary education. Congress has a significant opportunity to assist this effort by providing support to increase the connection between adult basic education (ABE) and postsecondary education. The ABE to postsecondary "pipeline" is vital to achieving the postsecondary participation rates that will be necessary to maintain the nation's economic standing. In addition, ABE must be seen as a vital element of occupational training and vice-versa.

Prevent the Diversion of Perkins Funds: HR 3610 would allow governors to roll several programs into a state unified workforce plan, including the Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. While in some states such a unified plan might greatly benefit community colleges, in others, Perkins funds could be diverted to other priorities. In any case, the super-waiver would subject Perkins funding to the whims of state politics to an unacceptable extent.

Help Community Colleges Better Serve Veterans

Community colleges have a long, proud, and continuing history of serving the needs of veterans. Last fall, AACC and ACCT endorsed the VOW (Veterans Opportunity to Work) to Hire Heroes Act. The legislation was passed by Congress and signed into law in November. It assists those who have served our country in the armed forces to obtain assistance and training to help them pursue employment. The bill assists current service members separating from military service transition their skills into civilian employment opportunities, and it assists unemployed veterans by providing additional training opportunities and tax incentives.

The VOW Act authorizes a Veterans Retraining Assistance Program in order to provide training assistance to unemployed veterans of past eras. Qualified participants may receive up to 12 months of assistance at the full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill–Active Duty program. Training must be completed at a VA-approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school.

Serving the needs of veterans poses challenges that require adequate federal response. Ample funding for the Centers of Excellence for Veterans Student Success and Veterans Upward Bound under the federal TRIO programs are priorities for community colleges.

Pass the DREAM Act

Community colleges continue to press for enactment of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The DREAM Act is perhaps the single most politically popular of the many, and usually contentious, immigration issues. Despite longtime residence in the U.S., many undocumented individuals face tremendous difficulties enrolling in or paying for college and finding employment. The DREAM Act would alleviate this situation by granting qualified undocumented students conditional legal resident status. These students would be able to achieve permanent legal status by completing two years of higher education or military service within six years. From there, they would be on a path to citizenship. Only those students who were brought into the country before they were 16 years old and who have resided in the country for at least five years at the time of the DREAM Act's enactment would be eligible.

The DREAM Act also repeals a provision of federal law that essentially bars states from granting in-state tuition to undocumented students. Current federal law states that any residency-based benefit extended to undocumented students must also be provided to any U.S. citizen. Ten states have circumvented this provision by extending in-state tuition to undocumented students based on factors other than residency (i.e., graduation from a high school within the state).

During the 111th Congress, the House considered and passed the DREAM Act, H.R. 5281 by a 216-198 vote. However, while a majority of the Senate supported the DREAM Act, it failed to achieve the 60 votes necessary to overcome a Republican filibuster and proceed to or consider the legislation on two separate occasions. When the House-passed measure was brought up in the Senate, it fell short by a 55-41 vote.

For the 112th Congress, the bill has been reintroduced in the House by Rep. Howard Berman as H.R. 1842 and currently has 67 cosponsors. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) has reintroduced the measure in the Senate as S. 952. Additionally, several comprehensive immigration reform proposals contain the DREAM Act in both chambers of Congress. It is unclear if the DREAM Act will be considered at all in the House or Senate, and, if it is considered, if it would be a standalone measure or as part of a more comprehensive measure. AACC and ACCT will continue to advocate for the DREAM Act in the 112th Congress.

Improve the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), dubbed "No Child Left Behind" by the Bush Administration, has been due for reauthorization for a number of years. Since the statute is large, complex, and controversial, reauthorization has been a challenging task for Congress. Over the past year, the House and Senate have offered various bills that address reauthorization. The House has sought to introduce a piecemeal reauthorization plan of several bills. While the first two bills dealing with consolidation and charter schools gained bipartisan support, subsequent proposals addressing flexibility in funding, accountability, and teacher preparedness have only garnered House Republican support. In the fall, the Senate was able to move a bipartisan reauthorization package out of committee. While the bill may be considered on the Senate floor in the months ahead, it is unlikely to gain support or consideration from the House. As the 2012 election nears, reauthorization of ESEA will become increasingly difficult.

President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have repeatedly called for the reauthorization of ESEA for more than a year, and have instituted a series of waivers in lieu of reauthorization. The waivers are designed to allow states the flexibility to implement reforms, including: using funds to address failing schools; overhauling professional development and teacher evaluations; and replacing adequate yearly progress with a comprehensive accountability system. In order to receive these waivers, a state must meet several criteria and must demonstrate that it is implementing college- and career-ready standards for all students. Thus far, 40 states have indicated their intent to apply for the waivers.

With the reauthorization of ESEA, it is time for community colleges to become active partners with K-12 education systems in preparing students for postsecondary education and beyond. Congress should require alignment of curriculum between the K-12 system and higher education to ensure that students are better prepared to make the transition from high school to college and are less likely to need remedial education. Community colleges also are looking to partner with the federal government to offer more dual enrollment programs and early college high schools and to play an enhanced role in teacher preparation and professional development. AACC and ACCT will continue to advocate for a reform package that links the K-12 and higher education communities.