

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Strengthen the Bedrock of Student Financial Aid: Pell Grants

Appropriate Necessary Dollars for the Pell Grant To:

- Accommodate program growth due to the simplified FAFSA, workforce Pell, and increasing enrollments;
- Keep pace, at minimum with inflation (increase maximum grant by \$200), to promote affordability and limit borrowing for low-income students;
- Maintain student Pell eligibility, as expanded by the Simplified FAFSA Act and H.R. 1; and
- Sustain the long-term fiscal health of the program.

Pell Grants remain the foundation of student access and success in higher education

End the Taxation of Pell Grants

Make Pell Grants tax-free for all low-income students. Because of their low tuition, community college students must pay taxes on Pell Grant funds used for living expenses. By law, Pell Grants must be used for specified educational expenses; taxing them exacerbates affordability challenges for the lowest-income students.

Modify the American Opportunity Tax Credit

The \$2,500 American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) should be altered so that Pell Grant awards are not counted against a student's eligibility. With this change, hundreds of thousands of low-income community college students would receive the credit annually. Community college students are generally the only college students whose Pell Grants render them ineligible for AOTC, as the program's design does not reflect the low tuitions they pay.

Support Programs & Policies that Boost Comm. Colleges as Economic Engines

Strengthen Under-Resourced Institutions

Protect and strengthen total and individual funding for Higher Education Act institutional aid programs in Title III and Title V. Ensure the individual program funds are allocated consistent with FY26 (Jan. 20) levels as determined by Congress. In FY27 appropriations, protect and strengthen FY26 levels, and provide at least FY24 levels for the Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP).

Institutional aid allows under-resourced institutions to close achievement gaps. Eligible institutions must generally enroll student bodies where at least half of all students are Pell-eligible and there are relatively low per-student expenditures. As a result, these critical institutional aid programs support the basic goals of the Pell Grant program—creating equal opportunity for all postsecondary students.

Ensure America's Economic Prosperity

Maintain America's economic prominence by ensuring that there is an adequate supply of trained workers. As such, retain the bipartisan Congressional priority to pass comprehensive immigration reform, addressing undocumented individuals who entered the U.S. as minors and providing opportunities for workers with temporary status.

Buoy Rural Community Colleges

Provide federal funding streams to community colleges to support rural economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector. As outlined in the Community College Agriculture Advancement Act, provide grants to community colleges for agricultural and natural resources programs that support the growing need for a highly skilled agricultural workforce.

Bolster the Role of Community Colleges in Workforce Development

Strengthen the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA legislation should increase emphasis on the role of community colleges in the national workforce and include authorization of the Strengthening Community College Training Grant (SCCTG) program, which has supported community colleges in 35 states since its inception.

Bolster Job Training and Career and Technical Education

Support community college training programs that lead to in-demand jobs by expanding the Department of Labor's Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG) program, now in its 7th year. The program is remarkably successful in catalyzing economic activity and regularly receives far more quality applications than can be funded.

Support Adult Basic Education (ABE)

Continue support for ABE so that adults can gain skills for jobs or be able to participate in further education and training. Proposed cuts to this program will create even more challenges for businesses seeking qualified workers, and reduce overall access to higher education.

Fortify Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS)

Reinforce this targeted, two-generation program that helps provide high quality childcare designed to meet the circumstances of parenting students.

Strengthen Accountability and Transparency

Utilize Accountability and Transparency Policies that Reflect Needs of Community Colleges

Enact the bipartisan, bicameral College Transparency Act (CTA) to create a federal student-level data network that generates accurate, meaningful data on postsecondary outcomes, including post-completion earnings. The Transparency Act would greatly enhance the accuracy and fairness of the new Direct Loan accountability measures and Workforce Pell program.

Join the House Community College Caucus

Contact caucus co-chairs Representatives Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Joe Courtney (D-CT) to join this key method of supporting the community college mission.

Key Facts about Community Colleges

