Community colleges are the primary portal to higher education and employment for those who might not otherwise have access. Affordable access to higher education is key to continued economic prosperity and to extending its benefits to all sectors of our society. Each year, community colleges educate almost half of America’s undergraduate students, and provide training for millions of others seeking to upgrade their skills for the new economy. In order to assist community colleges in this vital role, Congress must pursue an agenda that makes higher education and job training top priorities, both in the investment of federal resources and in other policies that affect these key institutions. The American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees support the following legislative priorities for the 107th Congress:

Pursue legislative strategies that ease economic barriers to accessing community colleges

- Provide regular increases to the Federal Pell Grant Program and enhance other student financial assistance programs to ensure increased access to postsecondary education and training for financially needy students.

- Ensure maximum access to Pell Grants by community college students by modifying institutional penalties tied to student loan default rates. These rates are not a reliable proxy for educational quality at community colleges, which have relatively few students taking out loans.

- Make permanent Section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code, which allows individuals to receive up to $5,250 in tax-free, employer-provided educational assistance; and increase veterans’ benefits provided under the Montgomery GI Bill.

- Eliminate provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act that discourage states from allowing 24 months of vocational and postsecondary education for TANF recipients while ensuring that states provide adequate support services to make this possible.

- Increase funding for the Strengthening Institutions Program, Title III-Part A, of the Higher Education Act, which provides infrastructure support for community colleges that serve large numbers of disadvantaged and traditionally under-served individuals.

- Revise student financial aid eligibility rules to allow full use of financial aid for all instructional delivery formats, including distance education.

Forge policies to advance the educational, economic and workforce development, and social goals of community colleges
• Increase funding for workforce training programs, especially the Basic State Grants and Tech Prep Program contained in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, which emphasize continuous program improvement and partnerships with business and industry.

• Ensure that federal policies support Associate Degree nurses seeking to advance professionally in federal healthcare settings who have demonstrated competence and commitment to patient care and clinical applications.

• Increase funding for the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program at the National Science Foundation. The ATE program provides grant funding for scientific and related education programs at associate degree-granting institutions, allowing community colleges to work in partnership with business and industry.

**Secure and enhance public funding for community colleges, enabling them to serve the needs of individuals and communities**

• Increase funding for critical early intervention programs that encourage college participation and persistence, including TRIO and GEAR UP.

• Increase funding for undergraduate international education programs that foster global knowledge and mutual understanding, including Title VI of the Higher Education Act and Fulbright-Hays 102(b)(6) programs. Fulbright-Hays 102(b)(6) programs should continue to be administered by the Department of Education.

• Expand community college funding opportunities at agencies with international education and foreign assistance missions (e.g., Agency for International Development, Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.)

• Maintain a vigorous National Endowment of the Humanities program, with a greater emphasis on community college humanities activities.

• Support increased funding for the Corporation for National Service. The Corporation provides support for Learn and Serve America, higher education grants that help community colleges integrate service learning into their curricula.

• Identify and support initiatives at the federal level that ease the financial burdens on community colleges that provide an open door to individuals under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504, and other provisions designed to ensure equal access and accommodations to postsecondary education.
Support legislative and regulatory policies that enhance community colleges’ use of emerging communications, administrative, and educational technologies

- Extend the educational exemption provisions in the Copyright Act to allow the same use of copyrighted works in digital distance education that is now permitted in the traditional classroom.

- Ensure that funding is available to allow community colleges to integrate new technologies and expand distance learning programs.

- Support community colleges in their efforts to narrow the "digital divide" by identifying and implementing an appropriate federal role in the deployment of broadband data communications services in all areas of the country. Increase resources for community technology centers.

Promote community colleges’ abilities to be flexible, competitive, and innovative

- Help community colleges focus on their educational missions by repealing the statutory institutional reporting requirements for the Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning tax credits.

- Review and pursue legislative action, where appropriate, to reduce growing institutional reporting and other related disclosure requirements imposed by the Higher Education Act.

- Support limited changes to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) that will allow institutions to conduct evaluations of program effectiveness and comply with state and federal accountability statutes, while ensuring individual privacy rights.

- Alter the extensive and counterproductive provisions in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) so that institutions will not be discouraged from making a wide array of occupational training programs available to individuals with Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).