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 109th Congress.
GOAL: Pursue Legislative Strategies That Ease Economic Barriers to Accessing Community Colleges

Higher Education Act Reauthorization

✦ Ensure the continued vitality of the Pell Grant program, emphasizing providing equal benefits for all higher education students.

✦ Strongly oppose giving for-profit colleges access to non-student federal aid funds.

✦ Update the Act’s provisions concerning distance education and eliminate the “50% rule,” but create other safeguards to ensure against fraud.

✦ Give colleges the authority to reduce loan maximums where appropriate.

✦ Preserve the vital Strengthening Institutions Program.

Hope Scholarship Tax Credit and Other Tax Issues

✦ Support legislation (introduced in the 108th Congress in the House) that would expand Hope Scholarship eligibility to include fees, books, supplies and equipment.

✦ Oppose tax incentives that are overly tilted toward students and graduates who are less financially needy of federal support than other individuals.

DREAM/Student Adjustment Act

✦ Support passage of legislation eliminating federal restrictions on community colleges choosing to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students.

✦ Support making students eligible for federal student financial assistance and exempt them from the SEVIS reporting system.

GOAL: Forge Partnerships to Advance the Educational, Economic and Workforce Development, and Social Goals of Community Colleges

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization

✦ Revise the subsequent eligibility requirements for training providers to link them closely with other federal accountability requirements and to ease the burden of data collection on institutions.

✦ Establish an infrastructure funding mechanism that has minimal or no impact on funding for mandatory partners.

✦ Remove statutory barriers to greater expenditures for training at the local level, including the “sequence of services” that emphasizes quick job placement and informational services.

✦ Provide WIA funding outside of the voucher-based framework to support training program development, including greater opportunities to establish training contracts that fully fund program implementation.
**Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act Reauthorization**

- Improve the language of the Perkins Act to better reflect the mission of community colleges, emphasize linkages between community colleges and community partners, and utilize modern terminology while maintaining the current funding structure.
- Institute a new competitive grant program that would fund innovative approaches to linkages between community colleges and community partners, especially secondary schools.
- Maintain a separately authorized Tech Prep program, and modify it to require a renewable contract between consortium members.
- Establish separate postsecondary performance indicators that account for all of the successful outcomes for community college students and allow institutions to report on the most relevant measures.

**Allied Health & Nursing Legislation**

- Ensure that the amendments to or reauthorization of nurse education programs in Title VIII and allied health education in Title VII of the Public Health Service Act include community colleges in all relevant programs.
- Protect scope of practice and prevent/remove career advancement barriers for graduates from two-year institutions, including those employed by federal agencies such as the Veterans Health Administration.

**Homeland Security**

- Support legislation that recognizes the critical role community colleges have in educating and training first responders.
- Support funding for, and remove any legislative barriers to, community college participation in federal homeland security research and training initiatives.
- Ensure passage of legislation that expands opportunities for community colleges to address cyber-security needs.
- Identify federal agency programs that address the broad range of homeland security issues and enhance community college opportunities to partner with these agencies (e.g., Department of Energy, Department of Defense), with colleges and universities, and with the private sector to provide training.

**Welfare**

- Secure modifications to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provisions of the Welfare Reform legislation to:
  - Extend from 12 to 24 the number of months welfare recipients may participate in vocational education and have such participation counted as “work” under the statute.
  - Expand the definition of vocational education to specifically include community college programs leading to a recognized credential.
  - Support substantially greater child care funding for welfare recipients; this funding greatly benefits community colleges students.
**GOAL:** Secure and Enhance Public Funding for Community Colleges, Enabling Them to Serve the Needs of Individuals and Communities

**Higher Education Programs**

- Provide annual increases in the maximum federal Pell Grant and eliminate funding shortfalls to ensure that needy students are afforded maximum access to community colleges.

- Maintain support for the other major federal student aid programs (Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnerships) that preserve and enhance community college student attendance.

- Increase support for Title III-Part A, “Strengthening Institutions,” which assists community colleges with scarce resources and a mission of serving large numbers of disadvantaged and historically underserved students.

**National Science Foundation**

**Advanced Technological Education Program**

- Enhance funding for the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program at the National Science Foundation. ATE serves a critical need by providing funds to establish and improve community college programs that produce skilled technicians in a number of fields.

**Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Talent Expansion Program (STEP)**

- Provide greater funding for STEP program, which increases the quality of undergraduate math and science programs and the quantity of students that enroll in them.

**Cyber-Security**

- Fully fund existing programs, including those authorized by the Cyber-security and Research Development Act, and support the creation of new initiatives that support the role of community colleges in preparing the cyber-security workforce.

**International Education Programs**

**Higher Education Act Title VI Fulbright Hays Programs**

- Increase funding for undergraduate international education programs, which are vital to national security and economic productivity.

**Student Exchange and Visitor Information System**

- Ensure a secure student visa system without placing undue burdens and delays upon international students who wish to study at community colleges.
Community College Facts:

- Community colleges are the largest sector of higher education, enrolling almost half of all U. S. undergraduates - more than 11 million students annually.

- Average tuition costs are $2,076 annually.

- Average student age nationally - 29 years.

- Almost 50% of new nurses and the majority of other new healthcare workers are educated at community colleges.

- 80% of the nation’s first responders are credentialed by community colleges.

- Average expected lifetime earnings for a graduate with an associate degree is more than $1 million, about $250,000 more than an individual with a high school diploma.

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that between 1998 and 2008, jobs requiring an associate degree will increase by 31.2%, the largest percentage increase among all educational levels.