Introduction

Each year more than 1,100 community colleges serve as the vehicle for higher education, training, and workforce development to approximately 13 million students. With the ever-changing global economy, affordable access to higher education, training, and completion of credentials is the key to narrowing the skills gap that many employers are facing. Higher education means more and better jobs that will help bring the nation prosperity.

Community colleges have an essential role in returning the United States to world leadership in higher education attainment. Community colleges educate nearly half of America’s undergraduate students, and they are the primary access point to higher education for millions of historically underrepresented populations, first-generation college students, and those currently in the workforce who lack the higher education needed in the 21st-century economy.

A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that higher education is the key to a robust economy and other social benefits, yet the economic downturn has led most states to reduce their investments in community colleges. Congress must recognize that increasing investments in higher education, students, and institutions will have long-term benefits that far exceed short-term costs, even in an environment of deficit reduction. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) remain committed to strengthening student success. Federal support for these efforts remains critical in maintaining access and affordability for students, while enabling community colleges to better serve their communities.

Community College Federal Legislative Priorities

AACC and ACCT support the following legislative priorities for the 113th Congress.

Appropriations

- Robust Pell Grant funding is an absolute necessity for more than 3 million community college students.
- Uphold a strong commitment to Pell Grant funding that is sufficient to maintain the current appropriated maximum and preserve current eligibility criteria. Support major federal student aid programs, including Supplemental Educational Opportunity grants and Federal Work-Study, which enhance community college student enrollment.
- Increase funding for vital institutional programs, including the Strengthening Institutions (Title III-A of the Higher Education Act) program, Hispanic-serving institutions, TRIO, GEAR UP, predominantly Black institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, and others that enable community colleges to serve diverse and disadvantaged populations.
- Increase the federal investment in workforce development, including career and technical education (CTE) in the Carl D. Perkins Act and job training and adult basic education in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Budget Policy

- Support policies that enhance our country’s future through investments in programs that benefit community colleges and their students.

Higher Education Act Reauthorization

- Restore eligibility for ability-to-benefit community college students and access to the year-round Pell Grant program.
- Ensure continued eligibility and access to federal student aid for the neediest students, and ensure that the hardest to serve are not denied a chance to succeed in college.
- Preserve the inclusion of cost-of-living and related educational expenses for all Pell Grant recipients.
• Streamline federal reporting and disclosure requirements, while eliminating those that are unnecessary or burdensome.

• Provide resources to modernize and expand community college infrastructure and facilities.

• Provide additional resources to enable community colleges to continue to increase the number of graduates and graduation rates.

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization

• Refocus the workforce training and adult basic education programs under WIA on the attainment of postsecondary education credentials that are valued by employers. Increase the alignment between these programs by creating multiple pathways into postsecondary education and training, with community colleges providing significant leadership as true partners in the system.

• Provide more innovative local and regional approaches for delivering workforce training, including contracts with training providers and sector-based initiatives, in addition to the current voucher-based framework.

• Ease the burden of data collection on institutions and increase community college involvement in the federal workforce development system by making public institutions of higher education automatically eligible as training providers.

• Maintain Perkins CTE and adult basic education funding as separate funding streams at the federal and state levels.

Perkins Career and Technical Education Act Reauthorization

• Focus Perkins funding on CTE programs that are well aligned with industry needs, highly coordinated between the secondary and postsecondary levels, and prepare students for occupations in high-wage, high-demand fields.

• Reform performance indicators to be aligned with accountability measures in other federal workforce and education programs.

Veterans

• Support funding for existing programs as well as the creation of new programs to help institutions better serve the particular needs of students who are veterans.

• Enact legislation that protects veterans from unscrupulous educational providers by providing them with the information they need to make sound choices, without imposing burdensome requirements on institutions.

DREAM Act

• Pass legislation that would grant legal residency status to undocumented students who are long-time U.S. residents and eliminate federal restrictions on states that choose to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students.

• Make DREAM Act students eligible for federal student financial assistance.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization

• Support the creation of a competitive state grant program to facilitate the creation and expansion of dual enrollment and early college high school initiatives.

• Make community colleges active participants in Title II, Part A–Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund grants.

STEM Competitiveness

• Include community colleges in efforts to bolster America’s competitiveness in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

• Increase 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, including in the critical field of advanced manufacturing.

• Enhance funding for the STEM TalentExpansion Program, which increases the quality of undergraduate math and science programs and the quantity of students who enroll in them.

International Education Programs

• Increase funding for the HEA Title VI and Fulbright–Hays undergraduate international education programs, which are vital to national security and economic productivity.

• Support existing programs and legislation that increase opportunities for community college students to study abroad and encourage international students to enroll at community colleges.
Data System/Accountability

- Ensure that community colleges are given fair access to state wage records and other employment-related data systems so that they can better track and manage institutional performance and comply with external accountability requirements.
- Improve and align the reporting and outcomes standards for measurements of community college performance, including those found in HEA, WIA, and the Carl D. Perkins Act.

Welfare Reform

- Support modifications to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program that expand the vocational education time limit from 12 months to at least 24 months in order to enable TANF recipients to complete training programs and gain the necessary skills to secure employment.

Sustainability

- Support community college initiatives to train workers for the green economy and further the nation’s sustainability efforts.

Allied Health & Nursing Legislation

- Support legislation to provide resources to nursing and allied health students and programs at 2-year institutions, including an amendment to the Public Health Service Act, Title VIII (nursing education programs), to secure equitable funding for community colleges and make them eligible to receive grants for the purpose of expanding nursing enrollments.
- Support the current scope of practice and expand educational and career advancement for professionals credentialed through 2-year institutions, with a particular emphasis on attaining the Master of Science in Nursing degree.

Rural Economic Development

- Support programs that recognize the critical role community colleges play in fostering rural economic development.
- Provide adequate federal resources for such essential programs as rural education, rural health care, renewable energy, and rural workforce development.
- Ensure community colleges and the areas they serve have adequate access to broadband Internet service.

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