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February 12, 2016

This has been a busy week with hundreds of community college presidents and trustees in DC for the 2016 Community College National Legislative Summit (NLS). Participants had an opportunity to hear from dozens of political insiders including Eugene Robinson and Steve Schmidt, members of Congress, and Acting Secretary of Education John King. AACC and ACCT government relations staff [addressed](#) community college legislative priorities. Also this week, President Obama released his FY 2017 budget, once again calling for funding for America's College Promise.

President's FY 2017 Budget Unveiled

On Tuesday, the Obama administration's FY 2017 [budget was released](#), with several new higher education initiatives as well as a few that were introduced in prior year budgets, including America's College Promise. Many community college priority programs would be level funded, but the president's budget blueprint does include proposals to provide an additional \$300 On-Track Pell Bonus for students who take at least 15 credits per semester and the year-round Pell Grant, referred to in the budget as Pell for Accelerated Completion. The budget plan also calls for a Second Chance Pell award to help individuals incarcerated in federal and state prisons to make successful transitions. Another new initiative would provide up to \$500 million annually in tax credits to businesses that hire graduates of community college programs that they help in some way, such as with donated equipment or personnel.

Obama Nominates King as Next Secretary of Education

Yesterday, President Obama formally nominated John B. King, Jr. to be the next secretary of education. King has served as the acting secretary since Arne Duncan stepped down.

Draft Cohort Default Rates

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is expected to release the draft cohort default rates and the underlying data to colleges and universities later this month. It is important that institutions review the accuracy of the data and the default calculations. Be sure to check the [Federal Student Aid website](#) for relevant announcements and keep handy the [Cohort Default Rate Guide](#) that explains the various challenges to the cohort default rate data that are allowable. Institutions also should be aware that ED has announced its intentions to increase coordination with accreditors in two areas: (1) improving information sharing particularly regarding institutions facing negative actions and (2) clarifying the flexibility that accreditors may have to conduct risk-based reviews, including differentiated reviews, of the institutions they accredit.

College Scorecard

When the College Scorecard was first released in September 2015, only predominantly degree-granting institutions were represented, resulting in the omission of hundreds of community and technical colleges that confer more certificates than degrees. In some states, this meant that there were no community colleges listed on the Scorecard while in other states, only a limited number. AACC and others roundly [criticized](#) these omissions. Now, all degree granting institutions, regardless of the certificate/degree ratio, are included in the [Scorecard](#). A technical review panel was convened to provide ED with recommendations on how to refine and improve the Scorecard. The [report of this panel](#), which focused on consumer information and includes suggestions for improving both the Scorecard consumer tool and the quality of data, is available for comment. Interested parties are asked to send their comments about the discussed potential changes to the Scorecard by February 26, 2016, to [Janice Kelly-Reid](#), project director at RTI International.

A Success Story for High-Achieving Community College Students

A [recent study](#) analyzed the completion and transfer rates of high-achieving community college students, defined by the authors as members of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Honor Society. Based on information from the National Student Clearinghouse, students who were accepted into the honor society during fall 2008 and spring 2009 had an overall 6-year completion rate of 85%, compared to 40% for all community college students. The 6-year transfer and bachelor degree attainment rates of this cohort of PTK honor society members were 71% and 68%, respectively, as opposed to a 33% and 42% for all community college students.

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