COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
NOVEMBER 2015

FY 2016 BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
The recently enacted Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2015 provides additional funds for House and Senate appropriators, who now must resolve differences between their bills. While House FY16 Labor, HHS and Education appropriations legislation maintains or increases funding for many key programs, the Senate bill cuts a number of them. Both bills, however, would tap the temporary Pell Grant surplus to fund other programs.

AACC Position: Congress should reject the cuts made to the Pell Grant program in the Senate and House LHHS appropriations bills. At minimum, Congress should fully restore recent cuts made to the adult basic education program. AACC also supports maintaining or increasing funding for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, TRIO, GEAR UP, Strengthening Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Colleges, Tribally Controlled Colleges and the NSF’s ATE Program, as is generally done in the House committee-passed legislation. Finally, the legislation should bar implementation of the gainful employment regulations, which are onerous and counterproductive for community colleges.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION (HEA)
Congress is currently in the process of extending and modifying the HEA, which will have enormous implications for community colleges. Top AACC priorities follow.

Reform Graduation Rate Requirements
Many community college students who ultimately graduate take longer to do so than students in other sectors, and often do so from a different college than the one in which they initially enrolled. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, the 6-year graduation rate of full-time community college students (from any institution) is 57%. Yet, the official U.S. Department of Education graduation rate is just 21%.

AACC Position: Transfers-out must be included in all completion rates, and the rates for community college students should be measured at 100%, 150%, and 300% of the “normal” program length. The latter will capture most community college students who complete.

Reinstate the Year-Round Pell Grant
In 2008, Congress created a year-round Pell Grant to increase persistence and graduation rates and to enable students to complete their degrees more quickly. However, after just one year Congress eliminated the year-round Pell Grant for budgetary reasons, scuttling nascent student and institutional plans to take full advantage of the new assistance.

AACC Position: Reinstate the year-round Pell Grant to reflect today’s student population and to enhance persistence and on-time completion.
Reject Proposals for Institutional “Risk Sharing”
The concept of institutional student loan risk sharing, or “skin in the game,” has gained traction, particularly in the Senate. The essence of risk sharing is to assess institutions a share of the costs associated with non-repayment of student loans. It is justified on the grounds that it will incentivize colleges to ensure that students complete programs with manageable levels of student debt, and enhance colleges’ management of the loan programs. Despite being low-cost institutions with a relatively small percentage of borrowers, community colleges could be subject to substantial financial penalties under risk sharing.

AACC Position: As public institutions, community colleges already have substantial “skin in the game” in the form of taxpayer dollars that support their activities. Colleges also have limited control over student loan repayment. Congress should not include any risk sharing scheme in the HEA reauthorization.

TUITION-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Community colleges support the core principles of President Obama’s America’s College Promise proposal because it could ultimately make college as accessible as high school, which, given today’s economy, is an essential national goal. Legislation to authorize the president’s plan—the America’s College Promise Act (H.R. 2962, S. 1716)—has been introduced in Congress.

AACC Position: Enact the America’s College Promise Act to provide free tuition to community college students in certain programs. Support broader efforts to advance the tuition-free community college movement.

PERKINS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACT
The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which provides a vital source of funding for community college CTE programs, is due for reauthorization. Congress is not likely to fundamentally restructure the Act, but rather build on some of the improvements in the prior reauthorization that focused Perkins funds on high-quality programs. In 2012, the Obama administration issued a blueprint that called for improved accountability, greater innovation, and a strengthened focus on high-quality programs via competitive grants.

AACC Position: The Perkins Act should be focused on programs that show a tight connection with the needs of business and industry, as evidenced in robust local plans for the use of funds. Accountability measures should be streamlined and aligned as much as possible with other federal programs, particularly WIOA. Perkins funds should be able to be used to support community college programs designed for adult learners as well as those that are connected to high school programs.

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