



## **Community College Priorities for American Jobs and Families Plans Legislation**

The Biden Administration's American Jobs Plan (AJP) and American Families Plan (AFP) propose far-reaching investments and reforms. Among other things, the proposals aim to improve the nation's physical infrastructure, and increase postsecondary education access and success. A number of the proposals would directly and positively impact community colleges and their students.

Outlined below are the top priorities of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) for legislation implementing the Administration's proposals, along with related policies. Many of these ideas continue to garner bipartisan support. AACC and ACCT can provide more detail on each of these issues.

### **Tuition-Free Community College**

Eliminating community college tuition and fees would revolutionize U.S. postsecondary education, making it universally available by dramatically reducing students' costs. The resulting boost in educational opportunity would lead to a substantial increase in family-sustaining wages and economic mobility. AACC and ACCT strongly endorse the basic principle of waiving community college tuition and fees for most students.

The case for a national policy of zero community college tuition is clear. Ongoing economic and technological developments require greater educational attainment for all citizens; some postsecondary education is almost essential for individual financial security. Increased college attainment is not just a private good, however, as it benefits the broader community economically and socially. With their low tuitions and broad accessibility, community colleges are the logical place to achieve these goals. There is significant and growing evidence that Promise programs are responsible for increased community college enrollments, despite ongoing enrollment declines at most institutions.

Any federal legislation should include: "first dollar" funding, allowing student aid to meet more of a student's cost of attendance; a requirement that states expand their support of community colleges while maintaining overall higher education investments; and an emphasis on student success. The AFP and the America's College Promise Act (ACP) provide a clear framework for achieving all these goals.

## **Community College Workforce Development Program**

The American Jobs Plan proposes \$100 billion for workforce development, including \$48 billion to expand the capacity of existing workforce development systems. The plan specifically supports community college partnerships that increase their ability to deliver relevant job training. Consistent with the President's plan, community colleges support the creation of a major community college job training grant program closely aligned with business needs. The program should be modeled after the successful Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program. TAACCCT provided \$1.9 billion in grants over four years to community colleges, resulting in 300,000 postsecondary credentials and 2,700 new or redesigned postsecondary programs.

Community colleges offer thousands of programs attuned to the needs of business and industry, from short-term non-credit courses to applied baccalaureate degrees. Community colleges also prepare workers for industry certifications, often embedding these credentials in their curricula. These ongoing activities are limited only by funding availability. The importance of a more robust federal role in this area is particularly critical in this time of economic challenge and transition that the nation is now experiencing.

## **Community College Infrastructure**

Community colleges welcome the AJP's \$12 billion community college infrastructure investment. The increasing sophistication of technical education, which has a growing virtual component, requires continuous, large-scale capital investments. However, academic facilities across the array of community colleges need modernization. Unfortunately, state and local support falls far short of need. This results in an increasing backlog of unaddressed infrastructure projects and mounting number of deferred maintenance needs, with an inevitable impact on education quality.

Across all community colleges, national total deferred maintenance, needed renovations and upgrades total more than \$60 billion. This does not include new construction that colleges hope to undertake in the coming months and years. Therefore, community colleges support \$50 billion for community college facilities, recognizing that this sum is less than the total need.

Projects funded through this proposal would include advanced manufacturing sites, libraries, nanotechnology laboratories, nursing facilities, and smart classroom structures. Investment would advance local economic activity as well as improve community college instruction.

Any federal effort should ensure a broad diffusion of funds, both regionally and among types of institutions, including smaller colleges, who often face challenges successfully competing for funds. Emphasis should be given to facilities projects with a strong local economic impact.

### **Pell Grant Eligibility for High-Quality Short-Term Programs**

Community colleges offer many high-quality short-term programs in fields such as nursing and medical assistance, information technology, and commercial truck driving, where opportunities for employment are plentiful. States such as Virginia and Washington have recognized the value of quality short-term training programs by providing strong financial support.

To enable more people to access these programs, community colleges support the extension of Pell grant eligibility to shorter term programs of 150 clock hours or more, as in the bipartisan JOBS Act (S.864, H.R. 2037). Community colleges wholeheartedly support the JOBS Act and consider it ever-more urgent as the nation moves towards a post-pandemic recovery. The JOBS Act or a similar provision should be included in AJP/AFP legislation.

### **Doubling the Pell Grant Maximum Award**

Community colleges urge Congress to build on President's Biden's proposed increases for the Pell Grant program—together they would increase the maximum award by \$1,800—by doubling the Pell Grant maximum award. Pell Grants are the most important form of financial aid for community college students, helping nearly 2.2 million of them attend and succeed in higher education each year. While community colleges offer the lowest tuitions of the major higher education sectors, the average annual cost of attendance for a community college student is over \$18,000, making a doubling of the grant tremendously beneficial to them. Community college students continue to have the lowest incomes of any sector of higher education, and they have been most severely impacted by the pandemic. The time has come for Congress to make a historic investment in this essential program.

### **Broadband Access and Affordability**

Finally, community colleges strongly support the Jobs Plan's \$100 billion investment in high-speed broadband. The pandemic has highlighted the cost to the nation of broadband's current, sub-optimal state. Community college educators and students have witnessed these shortcomings since the dawn of the digital age, but are now experiencing this deficiency even more acutely. Now is the moment to realize the transformative step envisioned in the President's plan. While broadband investment is particularly important to rural colleges, the need for improved broadband availability is not limited to their areas.

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