

How the Build Back Better Agenda Benefits California Community Colleges

The Build Back Better Agenda is a historic plan that that would ensure a more sustainable, resilient, equitable, and prosperous future for America. It would make strategic investments to ensure America’s long-term competitiveness and success by cutting taxes for working families, and expanding access to high-quality and affordable healthcare, childcare, housing, and education. Budget reconciliation, the vehicle by which Congress can adopt President’s bold vision to expand opportunity for all Americans, provides a path forward for a strong American post-COVID recovery.

A key component of President Biden’s Build Back Better Agenda is the **America’s College Promise (ACP)**, which represents the largest expansion of college access and affordability since the enactment of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1965. By eliminating community college tuition and fees for a student’s first two years, the ACP would revolutionize U.S. postsecondary education, dramatically reducing students’ total costs to attend college. The resulting boost in educational opportunity would lead to greater degree attainment and economic mobility, and a substantial increase in family-sustaining wages.



One in every four community college students in the nation attends a California Community College

America’s College Promise establishes a federal-state partnership that provides matching grants to incentivize states to set their community college tuition and fees to \$0. Grants will be based on the median community college tuition nationwide.

Builds Upon California’s Tuition Free Community College Investments

California Community Colleges offers free tuition to more students than any other higher education system in the U.S. Nearly 1 in 2 of all of the students our colleges serve don't pay any tuition and fees through our Community College Promise Grant and Promise Programs. Nonetheless, the cost of college today goes beyond tuition; it includes textbooks and supplies, such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare. The equitable grant formula of the ACP recognizes the robust tuition free community college investments that states like California have already made, and would enable **California to receive up to \$2 billion in federal funds over and above the cost of eliminating tuition throughout the system.** These funds could be used to cover students’ total cost of attendance, which prioritizes equity by helping students stay enrolled and complete their studies.

AMERICA’S COLLEGE PROMISE AS UNIVERSAL BENEFIT

The strength of the America’s College Promise is its foundational principle of broad based eligibility. The ACP establishes a firm commitment that community college should be accessible for all, regardless of immigration status, income, or GPA. Designed as a universal benefit, the ACP is fully consistent with existing K-12 education in America today, which does not establish income limits as a condition of enrollment. This inclusive approach expands access to higher education while avoiding burdensome verification processes that often act as a barrier to student access. The ACP would send a clear message to all Americans that college is available to everyone, and that community colleges are the engines of economic and social mobility.



Why Support America's College Promise?



Affordability

- Upon opting-in to the program, states must eliminate community college tuition and fees, reducing financial barriers upfront for students who want to enroll.
- California could utilize the excess funds to address non-tuition related costs such as food, housing, transportation, and childcare, which are directly aligned with the Vision for Success goals.



Student Supports

- As a condition for receiving ACP grants, states must implement a plan to improve transfer pathways to four-year institutions, ensuring that community college students have access to the courses and supports they need to transfer successfully.
- Excess funds may be used to implement evidence-based strategies that improve rates of student retention and college completion.



Supporting Adult Learners

- Allows those with some prior college experience to return to school and complete their education. Those who work can attend school part-time and still receive benefits.
- Establishes on-ramps for those adult learners displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic to return to school to up-skill and successfully return to the workforce to obtain a high-paying job.



Provides Alternative to For-Profit Colleges

- By eliminating tuition and fees and helping students reduce their total cost of attendance, the ACP incentivizes students to avoid enrollment at costly for-profit institutions, which commonly lead to low-income students and students of color accumulating high student loan debt.



Other Student Supports Included in the Build Back Better Agenda

- Provides an increase of \$500 per year to the maximum Pell Grant award, starting in FY 2022-23 through FY 2029-30.
- Would make DACA recipients eligible for the Pell Grant.
- Provides student retention and completion grants and support to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions.



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