

Equity in Access



• **Pell Grant - Issue:** Current Pell Grant award amounts have not kept up with inflation and increased college costs over time. Doubling the current Pell grant award to \$13,000 and expanding eligibility to students enrolled in certificated programs of less than 16 units is needed. These short-term programs offered at RCCD colleges offer individuals a path to obtaining an education, joining the workforce, and getting out of poverty.

Legislative Actions: Support the US Department of Education and federal legislative proposals on the Higher Education Act that reduce barriers, increase award amount for total cost of education, and expand eligibility and support for apprenticeship programs as well as short-term certificates less than 16 units.

• **Cal Grant Reform - Issue:** RCCD applauds the efforts of our legislative champions Assemblymembers Jose Medina and Kevin McCarty, and Senator Connie Leyva for initiating Cal Grant Reform that created the Cal Grant Equity Framework. The Framework includes consolidating Cal Grants into one Cal Grant for community colleges, reducing the number of questions on the application, and providing colleges with more flexibility to adjust aid to reflect a student's unique situation more accurately. The California Student Aid Commission has adopted this framework and began implementing these changes in the 2022-23 academic year.

Legislative Actions: RCCD is committed to the Cal Grant Equity Framework and will stay vigilant of any challenges or barriers that may

arise during this implementation process as it is expected to continue through the 2024-25 academic year.

• **Foster Youth - Issue:** Riverside County is home to the third largest population of foster youth in the state. Foster youth tend to face a disproportionate number of barriers to accessing and persisting toward a degree. The Foster Youth Support Network (FYSN) program at RCCD supports early intervention and transition support for foster youth; however, this program is projected to exhaust its funding by 2024.

Legislative Actions: Advocate for continuous federal and state funding that invest in the Foster Youth Support Network. Support the expansion of transitional and rapid rehousing opportunities for these youth.



• **Veterans - Issue:** Each year approximately 200,000 service members transition from military to civilian life with 55% reporting that their military skills and experience are often dismissed by civilian educators and employers. Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) can bridge this critical gap for all Veterans and experiential learners statewide at little to no additional cost to taxpayers. In 2022, the Military Articulation Pathways (MAP) was developed to maximize college credit awarded for military training and professional experience to a cloud-based platform.

Legislative Actions: Support the State Chancellor's Office in its adoption of the MAP Initiative to improve equal access, completion transfer, and career attainment for Veterans and adult learners through credit for prior learning that will be the foundation for statewide and nationwide scaling of this underutilized pathway for success. The goal is to give all Veterans and working adults all the credit they deserve through their experience.

• **Justice Involved and Formerly Incarcerated - Issue:** California community colleges have worked to restore justice-involved individuals into their communities through rehabilitative programming. In October 2021, the Governor signed

AB 417 which formally establishes the Rising Scholars Network program to provide support services for justice-involved students. Since the implementation of the Rising Scholar Network, several barriers to support this student population have been identified.

Legislative Actions: Seek federal and state funds for facilitating transcript-sharing and instructional technology for teaching incarcerated students. Establish mentorship and apprenticeship programs with local businesses. Establish a process for issuing state identification for incarcerated students. Seek partnerships with counties and cities for program support and addressing basic needs.

• **Undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) - Issue:** The District serves about 2,400 students through its Dreamer and AB 540 programs per year, however, gaps in funding remain. Additionally, students need assistance identifying legal resources, applying for financial assistance and scholarships, and accessing mental health services. The District agrees that this is important to support marginalized students, however, without dedicated funding, the District is limited in what it can provide.

Legislative Actions: Support federal legislation that codifies DACA to establish a pathway to citizenship, expand DACA student eligibility for Pell Grants and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and protect student visas. Seek state support to continue and increase funding for Dreamer centers and resource staff liaisons at community colleges. Request expansion of Cal-FRESH eligibility to include DACA students. Develop bridge programming to support undocumented students from high school to transfer/graduation. Support the establishment of a learning community for undocumented students, equipped with a dedicated academic counselor.

• **LGBTQIA2+ - Issue:** According to the California Community College Chancellor's Office, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer LGBTQIA2+ students are experiencing a disproportionate impact in the following areas: retention, transfer to a four-year university, and completion of a degree or certificate. LGBTQIA2+ individuals encounter familial, social, economic, and educational instability, which inhibits their ability to succeed academically and holistically.

Legislative Actions: Seek legislative support to create and expand LGBTQIA2+ campus resource centers that provide wrap-around services including mental health and basic needs support. Establish partnerships with local community organizations that are LGBTQIA2+ which can affirm and assist with dedicated support services and resources.



• **Mental and Psychological Services**

- Issue: According to a survey conducted by the Healthy Minds Network, 72% of students indicated a need for mental health support to help them achieve academic success. Mental health is correlated with higher satisfaction in college. Students with mental health problems, such as depression, are two times more likely than their peers to leave their institution based on the Healthy Minds Network. Thus, increasing on-site mental health experts, counseling services, and preventive programs can reduce risk and increase student retention.

Legislative Actions: Propose legislation that requires an additional percentage of Mental Health Services Act funds go to community colleges to address student health and wellness concerns, including mental health and psychological services.

• **Students with Disabilities**

- Issue: Throughout the California Community College system, students with disabilities make up an average of 5% of the total population, with some districts having higher percentages; 8.45% of the Riverside Community College District (RCCD) student population is registered with the Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) programs. RCCD's Disability Resource Center works with students to ensure they have access to their programs of study through accommodations, services and campus resources. Unfortunately, the number of students with other disabilities, such as autism, continues to grow and the District is not well equipped to provide support for all students with disabilities.

Legislative Actions: Support additional funding to DSPS programs to allow the creation of a position that can provide intrusive and adaptable support through coaching. RCCD requests

the following increase in annual funding - \$500,784 to provide three coaches, one for each college. Additionally, RCCD requests \$20,000 for each college, a total cost of \$60,000, to cover supplies, outreach and engagement opportunities for students, along with professional development opportunities for each coach.

• **Adult Learners** - **Issue:** AB1705 is having a negative impact on completion rates for adult learners and has removed previously available remedies, particularly noncredit coursework, which could aid adult students who are not coming through the K-12 pipeline, and thus may not have encountered college-level math for years or even decades.

Legislative Actions: Advocate for a return of noncredit developmental education to support adult learners. Adult learners ages 25-55 need better access to higher education to strengthen the workforce.