

Equity in Access



Financial Aid Reform - Higher Education Act/FAFSA

ISSUE

The success of California Community Colleges (CCC) is dependent on a strong partnership with the federal government. Keeping college affordable for individuals and streamlining the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) verification process is key to student success. We support actions to increase the Cal Grant funding for students attending any of Riverside's four colleges and universities: the Riverside Community College District (RCCD); California Baptist University; La Sierra University; and the University of California, Riverside. In particular, RCCD notes that state grant funding for

students within the CCC system is not equitable to the funding students receive for enrollment in the University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and private college counterparts. CCC students are the largest population of students receiving the lowest Cal Grant award amount. To provide CCC students with the resources needed for success, the Cal Grant program must increase the award amount to keep up with the cost of living. This will result in a more equitable system for California higher education students while reducing confusion and workload for students and institutions.

REQUESTS

RCCD suggests changes to the FAFSA and the Federal Financial Aid (FFA) system to:

- Restore Title IV student aid eligibility for college students who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent but have demonstrated their ability to benefit from postsecondary education through successful coursework without limitation on when the coursework occurred.
- Change the definition of independent on the FAFSA application by lowering the independent age or allowing for overrides to include self-support.



- Prevent poor performing colleges from participating in the federal student aid program.
- Consider methods of ensuring robust oversight that allow public colleges to focus more on educational outcomes and less on administrative tasks, such as Student Success Scorecard and the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative indicators.

BACKGROUND

The Cal Grant program has provided tuition and fee coverage for UC/CSU eligible students with an additional access award for Cal Grant B students. As tuition and fees have increased, so has the Cal Grant award amount for these colleges. CCC students represent the largest population of Cal Grant recipients, yet award amounts have remained relatively static and not kept up with the increase in the cost of attendance. Although 67% of CCC students receive a tuition waiver, it has been shown that CCC's are more expensive for students when compared to four-year institutions due to the lower level of financial aid available to cover costs beyond tuition and fees.

In 2022-23, the colleges of RCCD distributed Pell Grants to more than 13,041 students, as shown in the following table.

2022-23 RCCD Pell Grant Awards

13,041

Students who received Pell Grants per college:

MVC	NC	RCC
2,503	2,021	8,517

- Change the US Department of Education verification regulations for individuals and financial aid administrators to simplify the financial aid process.
 - Include the housing status question back into the FAFSA which was removed through FAFSA simplification to allow for accurate Cost of Attendance assignment and packaging of aid without delay or additional steps for the student.
 - Remove incarceration as an eligibility restriction for receiving a Pell Grant award and simplify Financial Aid administrative requirements for this population and associated programs.
 - Increase the annual Pell Grant award to accommodate inflation and rising college costs and extend Pell Grant eligibility to short-term training programs (less than 16-unit certificates or 500 hours) offered by institutions of higher education.
 - Call on Congress to change federal law, allowing eligibility for undocumented and DACA students for federal financial aid and emergency funding.
- In addition, RCCD requests members of Congress to:
- Ensure community colleges are incentivized to focus on improving student outcomes.