

Equity in Access



Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

ISSUE

The success of California Community Colleges is dependent on a partnership with the federal government. Keeping college affordable for individuals and streamlining the Free Application for Federal Student Aid verification process is key to student success. The District supports actions to increase California Grant funding for students attending any California community college while also addressing the burdensome obstacles that affect students and college staff with the current application when it comes to processing and making changes on the application.

The District particularly wants to highlight that grant funding for students attending an institution within the Community College system is not equitable to the funding students receive for enrollment in the University of California, California State University, and private colleges. Community College students are the largest population of students in the state yet receive the lowest grant award. To provide students with the resources needed for success, the California Grant program should increase the community college financial award to keep up with the cost of living.

BACKGROUND

The California Grant program provides tuition and fee assistance for the University of California and California State University eligible students with an additional financial award for California Grant B students. As tuition and fees have increased, so has the grant award amount for these college students. Although community college students represent the largest population of California Grant recipients, award amounts have remained relatively static and not kept up with the increased cost of attending college.

In 2023-24, the colleges of Riverside Community College District distributed Pell Grants to 13,041 students, as shown in the following table:

**2023-24 RCCD
Pell Grant Awards**

14,525

**Students who received
Pell Grants per college:**

MVC	NC	RCC
2,983	2,150	9,392

REQUESTS

Riverside Community College District suggests changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and the Federal Student Aid 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 Free Application for Federal Student Aid application by lowering the independent age or allowing for overrides to include self-support;
- 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 Free Application for Federal Student Aid 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 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students for federal

- financial aid and emergency funding;
- Launch the 2025-26 Free Application for Federal Student Aid application on time, October 1, 2024, with 100 percent access to students and parents completing the application — including consent and signature requirements;
- Introduce legislation that prevents poor performing colleges from participating in the federal student aid program; and
- Consider methods of ensuring robust oversight that allow public colleges to focus on educational outcomes and less on administrative tasks, such as Student Success Scorecard and the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative indicators.