

# 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:**

<b>MVC</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>RCC</b>
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.

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## Foster Youth Support Services

### ISSUE

Foster youth face a disproportionate number of barriers to accessing and persisting toward a degree. Foster youth encounter familial, social, economic and educational instability which inhibits their ability to transition successfully from the foster care system to adulthood. Such disruptions delay the youth's academic progress, leading to them falling significantly behind their peers. Riverside Community College District is committed to successfully transitioning these students from foster care to independence through education.

### BACKGROUND

Riverside County is home to the third largest population of foster youth in the state, with approximately 4,500 foster youth enrolled in K-12 schools. To expand access and success for foster youth, the District implemented the Foster Youth Support Network in 2018, which provides regional interagency coordination of services as well as direct, continuous support and resources to foster youth in local high schools and the community. College personnel work with these prospective and newly enrolled students to increase their college readiness, preparing them for a seamless transition into

higher education. To that end, Riverside City College received funding that established a targeted dual enrollment program for foster youth in the College's feeder high schools. A portion of these funds supports a resource specialist who is dedicated to onboarding foster youth into dual enrollment courses, providing technical assistance on college systems, and supporting students as they maneuver through their coursework. Over two years, Riverside City College supported 51 foster youth with access to dual enrollment - 19 successfully enrolled. Those 19 students completed 23 courses, earning both college and

high school credit simultaneously. Over the past year, Norco College was awarded a dual enrollment grant implemented over the summer supporting seven students to date.

NextUp is a community college program through the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services that offers eligible current and former foster youth support and services, including financial assistance with books and supplies, transportation, tutoring, food, and emergency housing. Norco College serves 49 foster youth - 20 of those who are NextUp specific students - and receives \$300,000 annually. Despite institutionalized support for foster youth on campus via NextUp, the transitional support provided by the Foster Youth Support Network will be exhausted within a year if another funding source is not identified.

## REQUESTS

- Support continuous and increased funding for the Foster Youth Support Network program;
- Support legislation that will expand dual enrollment opportunities for foster youth in California high schools;
- Support transitional and rapid rehousing opportunities for foster youth, including college-focused rapid rehousing; and
- Funding support for non-NextUp foster youth who are ineligible for NextUp grants, meal vouchers, and/or direct aid. Colleges currently rely on a limited number of one-time private donor grants to support students.



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## Education for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Students

### ISSUE

Over the past seven years, the California Community Colleges system has worked to meet voter mandates to restore justice-involved individuals into their communities through rehabilitative programming. Since the passage of Senate Bill 1391, thousands of justice-involved students have matriculated to face-to-face associate degree for transfer programs within state prisons. In October 2021, the Rising Scholars Network was founded at up to fifty community colleges, providing support services for justice-involved students. Although this categorical funded program is successful, it exposed institutional support gaps

such as lack of access to tutoring, counseling and educational equipment.

### BACKGROUND

Riverside County is home to approximately six percent of the state's paroled population. The Riverside Community College District is committed to serving the justice-involved population. Each campus has a club for justice-involved students — Transitioning Minds at Riverside City and Moreno Valley College, and Liberated Scholars at Norco College.

Norco College has partnered with the California Rehabilitation Center to offer the associate degree for

transfer program to incarcerated individuals. The California Rehabilitation Center is a Level II, medium-security correctional facility with a bed capacity of 3,000. Currently, Norco College is able to serve just over 500 students per term and has awarded 193 associate degrees and associate degrees for transfer to justice-involved students. Although each Rising Scholars Network is awarded the same amount of state funding, the Rising Scholars Network at Norco College supports incarcerated students and also formerly incarcerated students. In essence, Norco College serves two different populations.



## REQUESTS

To better serve incarcerated students, community college leadership will push to remove limited access to technology and support programs inside institutions. After three years, the District and its leadership have developed an understanding in the programs needed to support current and former justice-involved students.

The Riverside Community College District requests the following actions to address the urgent needs of the Rising Scholars Network and justice-involved individuals:

- Author legislation to create a transcript data-sharing program for incarcerated students;
- Support funding for instructional technology in prison;
- Reintroduce legislation that creates a from corrections to career pilot program to be administered by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the Student Aid Commission;
- Support continuous funding and expansion of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation technology infrastructure plan for each prison;
- Support funding to hire personnel who will work collaboratively with the Riverside County Probation Department at the Youth Treatment Educational Center to create a program for youth;
- Author legislation to create a community college and juvenile hall partnership, working collaboratively with the Riverside County Probation Department at the Youth Treatment Educational Center;
- Establish a process for issuing state identification for incarcerated students; and
- Funding for counseling and tutorial services at the prison.

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## Undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

### ISSUE

Approximately 75,000 undocumented students, including those who are protected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, are enrolled in the California Community Colleges system. Assembly Bill 540 allows students who have attended a high school in California for three years and have earned a high school diploma or equivalent to receive in-state tuition.

The Riverside Community College District, which serves roughly 2,400 students through its Dreamer

and Assembly Bill 540 programs, receives annual allocations from the state in support of undocumented students, yet a management information reporting system for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is not in place. Therefore, it limits districts when it comes to potential funding growth, based on the number of students served. A concern of the Riverside Community College District is the unfunded mandate from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to establish a Dreamer Center at each college.

### BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Riverside Community College District initiated a study at the local, regional and state levels to gain an understanding of the challenges undocumented students face in earning certificates, associate degrees or transferring to a four-year institution. The Dreamers Project Report served as the basis for legislation approved by the California State Legislature and signed by Governor Gavin Newsom on October 12, 2019, to promote undocumented student success.

On October 15, 2019, the Riverside Community College District Board of Trustees approved a resolution supporting Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Each of the three colleges identified a Dreamer Resource Liaison, established a Dreamers Taskforce, and partnered with community agencies to provide legal support and services. However, the creation of a Dream Resource Center at each of the colleges has remained elusive.



## REQUESTS

Therefore, to eliminate barriers to academic success and improvement in retention and completion rates for undocumented and Dreamer students, the Riverside Community College District requests the following support from state leaders:

- Support federal legislation that codifies Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals; establish a pathway to citizenship;
- Expand student eligibility for Pell Grants and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program;

- Protect student visas;
- Continued solicitation of state support to increase funding for Dreamer Centers and resource staff liaisons at community colleges;
- Request expansion of Cal-FRESH eligibility to include Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals students;
- Develop bridge programming to support undocumented students from high school to transfer/graduation; and

- Support the establishment of learning communities for undocumented students, equipped with a dedicated academic counselor.

The District agrees that supporting Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals students is critical, but without dedicated funding, the colleges are ill equipped to address the needs of AB 540 students, Dreamers and other mixed status students.



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## LGBTQIA2+ Student Programs

### ISSUE

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other identities individuals encounter familial, social, economic and educational instability, which inhibit their ability to succeed academically and holistically. According to student success data provided by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other identity (LGBTQIA2+) students are

experiencing disproportionate rates of retention, completion of college-level math and English in the first year, completion of a degree or certificate, and transfer to a four-year university.

LGBTQIA2+ students have challenges in being expressed accurately in equity data decisions due to difficulty in ascertaining the total LGBTQIA2+ population and the community expanding across multiple intersections. LGBTQIA2+ students experience higher rates of

mental illness and food and housing insecurity; feel campuses are less welcoming and safe; and report a lower sense of belonging than their peers (Hope Center, 2019; JED Foundation, 2016; Undergraduate Student Experience in the Research University Survey, 2016). National data show an upward trend of people identifying as LGBTQIA2+, and about 70 percent of community college LGBTQIA2+ students are students of color who face additional barriers.



- Develop legislation that creates and funds LGBTQIA2+ resource centers on each campus for students to access resources and network with each other;
- Support the creation of dedicated sponsorships targeted toward LGBTQIA2+ students in order to provide opportunities similar to their peers;
- Establish a policy to support LGBTQIA2+ students' need for Free Applications for Federal Student Aid dependency override wherein LGBTQIA2+ students have parental abandonment or neglect that may not result in environments that have additional considerations attached to them;
- Support and fund the creation of LGBTQIA2+ learning community programs;
- Support and fund the professional development opportunities associated with the LGBTQIA2+ community; and
- Support funding to provide LGBTQIA2+ specific mental health services and basic needs.

## BACKGROUND

The State Legislature previously passed bills in support of the LGBTQIA2+ population, which enhanced efforts to support the needs of the LGBTQIA2+ population at the District colleges.

- Assembly Bill 620 (Block): California community colleges must collect and transmit aggregate data regarding sexual orientation and gender;
- AB 1018 (Reyes): California community colleges must include LGBTQIA2+ students in their Student Equity Plan;
- AB 132 (Ting): \$10 million is appropriated in one-time funding to the California community college; and
- AB 2315 (Arambula): Students' and employees' affirmed name and gender must be included in records where legal names are not legally required.

## REQUESTS

Riverside Community College District requests the following actions to expand and enhance LGBTQIA2+ student services to reduce barriers and increase retention and completion:

- Support funding to hire at least one dedicated permanent, full-time, qualified professional employee at each college to oversee LGBTQIA2+ students' needs and improve educational outcomes;
- Improve accurate data gathering regarding students' sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, so that colleges are positioned to access data to further develop informed services;
- Develop legislation to increase the number of all-gender restrooms and locker rooms, and require new builds have at least one gender-inclusive restroom per floor;

