



America's College Promise: A Progress Report on Free Community College

Executive Office of the President
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Executive Summary

Nearly a century ago, a movement that made high school widely available helped lead to rapid growth in the educational attainment of Americans, driving decades of economic growth and prosperity. America thrived in the 20th century in large part because we had the most educated workforce in the world. But other nations have matched or exceeded the secret to our success. Now, more than ever, Americans need more knowledge and skills to meet the demands of a growing global economy without having to take on decades of debt before they even embark on their careers.

Today, the President will return to Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan, where he launched the American Graduation Initiative in 2009. Over just the past four years, nearly 700 community colleges have received almost \$2 billion in federal funding to design education and training programs, working closely with employers and industries that prepare workers for jobs in-demand in their regional economies, such as health care, information technology and energy. These programs have shown early success – through the end of last year, more than 1,900 new or modified training programs have been launched. In addition, 85 percent of the more than 176,000 individuals who had enrolled in these programs either completed a program or continued the program into a second year.

At Macomb Community College, President Obama will make announcements about the new steps the Administration is taking to build on his America's College Promise proposal to make at least two years of community college for responsible students as universal as high school and will announce independent efforts to expand the set of solutions to achieve free community college.

Macomb's success in expanding opportunity to more students mirrors what's happening across the nation:

- **States and communities across the country are making community college tuition-free.** In just the last six months, five states and communities have created new programs to provide free community college, including statewide programs in Oregon and Minnesota and local efforts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dayton, Ohio, and Palatine Illinois. In Congress, Sen. Baldwin (WI) and Rep. Scott (VA) have proposed the

America's College Promise Act of 2015, and another 11 states have introduced legislation.

- **Community colleges and students are ready for action.** A quarter of community college presidents believe it is likely that their institutions will offer a tuition-free (or nearly free) program within the next two years, which would almost double the number of tuition-free options available to students, according to a new survey from the American Association of Community Colleges.¹ Tennessee's newly launched statewide program for free community college had nearly 60,000 students apply this year, and the state expects that ultimately 15,000 students will enroll as part of the program.
- **There are many routes to making community college free for students ready to do the work.** Already, 25 percent of community colleges operate in states where a significant number of students can attend tuition-free or near-tuition-free, and a third of community colleges offer additional tuition-free (or nearly free) programs apart from any other state aid.² The President's plan was inspired by groundbreaking work in Tennessee and Chicago, but dozens of states, cities and colleges are leading the way to establish programs across the country. Some programs have been around since the 1990s; others are just getting off the ground. For many of these programs, which cover the cost of tuition after all scholarships, the President's historic investments in Pell Grants have helped to make their tuition-free promise a reality.

Well-established programs and new ones alike are part of a growing movement of students, parents, college and business leaders, philanthropies, and local and state officials who recognize that, in order to meet the challenge of a growing global economy, we need to think on a larger scale when it comes to encouraging states to invest in higher education, supporting colleges to improve the quality of their programs, and ensuring students are challenging themselves academically to secure the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their careers.

America's College Promise

By 2020, an estimated 35 percent of job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree and another 30 percent will require at least some college or an associate's degree.³ Nearly 40 percent of college students are enrolled at one of America's more than 1000 community colleges, which offer students affordable tuition, open admission policies, and convenient locations. These schools are particularly important for students who are raising children, working, need remedial classes, or can only take classes part-time. For many students, community colleges offer academic programs and an affordable starting point to a four-year college degree. They are also uniquely positioned to partner with employers to create tailored

¹ American Association of Community Colleges survey of community college presidents ("AACC survey"). Data include approximately 250 responding community colleges without a current tuition-free or near tuition-free program.

² AACC survey. Data include approximately 250 responding community colleges.

³ Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl. "Recovery, Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020." Georgetown Public Policy Institute Center on Education and the Workforce (2014). Available at: https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR_Web_.pdf.

training programs to meet economic needs within their communities such as nursing, health information technology, and advanced manufacturing.

That's why the President proposed the America's College Promise plan to make two years of community college free for responsible students, letting them earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost. Inspired by programs in Tennessee and Chicago, America's College Promise would create a new partnership with states, helping 9 million students willing to work hard, and would require everyone to do their part: community colleges must strengthen their programs and increase the number of students who graduate, states must invest more in higher education and training, and students must take responsibility for their educations, earn good grades, and stay on track to graduate.

New Programs Share the President's Vision to Make Community College Free

Since the President announced his plan to make two years of community college free for responsible students, states, cities and colleges have answered the call. Federal and state lawmakers have introduced and passed bills. And communities have taken action.

- **In just the last six months, five states and communities have created new programs to provide free community college**, including statewide programs in Oregon and Minnesota and local efforts in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. Another 11 states have proposed legislation. In Congress, Sen. Baldwin (WI) and Rep. Scott (VA) have introduced the America's College Promise Act of 2015.
- **Community colleges and students are ready for action.** A quarter of community college Presidents believe it is likely that their institutions will offer a tuition-free (or nearly free) program within the next two years, which would almost double the number of tuition-free programs available to students.⁴

Students are ready, too. Just this year, Tennessee launched a new program for free community college, Tennessee Promise. In the initial year, 58,000 students applied, and 15,000 are expected to enroll. Students eligible for the scholarship logged 200,000 hours of community service since January. In part as a result of the new program, Tennessee had the highest year-over-year gain of any state in the percentage of students who applied for federal financial aid, according to state officials.

- **In March, 50 Mayors signed a letter supporting the proposal.** Led by Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayor's Jobs, Education and the Workforce Standing Committee, West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon, the group wrote: "The President's proposal for America's College Promise is inspired by city and state programs that are proving to be beacons of success . . . [and] is wholly in keeping with our adopted policy in that it pushes colleges to increase completion rates, align programs to workforce needs,

⁴ AACC survey. Data include approximately 250 responding community colleges without a current tuition-free or near tuition-free program.

and encourage students to do the kinds of things that are associated with successful certificate and degree completion.”⁵

Five new programs have been announced since the President announced his proposal in January:

- **Oregon:** In July, Oregon Governor Kate Brown signed “Oregon Promise” into law, legislation championed by state senator Mark Hass. The scholarship will provide \$10 million annually for tuition waivers to as many as 6,000 Oregon students with at least a 2.5 GPA.
- **Minnesota:** This May, Minnesota announced a pilot program to cover tuition and fees for recent graduates who enroll in job-skills programs at community colleges in the state – saving those students as much as \$5,300. The state expects as many as 1,300 students will benefit from the \$8.5 million pilot.
- **Community College of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania):** In April 2015, the Community College of Philadelphia announced that it would offer free community college to local graduating seniors from low-income families. The school estimates that more than 400 students will benefit in its first year, doubling within the next three years.
- **Harper College (Illinois):** In 2015, Harper College in Palatine, IL announced a program giving local students the opportunity to earn up to two years of free tuition at the school. This fall, the first class of high school freshmen will enroll in the program. If they meet certain attendance, service, and academic standards by the time they graduate from high school, Harper College will cover their tuition.
- **Sinclair Community College (Ohio):** Sinclair Community College in Dayton, OH, will launch its new Sinclair Scholars program this fall. As many as 550 recent high school graduates who meet its eligibility requirements and are Pell Grant eligible will be able to attend for up to two years, tuition-free.

In addition to the communities that have taken action this year, the America’s College Promise Act of 2015 is pending in Congress, and another 11 state legislatures and governors have introduced proposals:

- **America’s College Promise Act of 2015:** Introduced in Congress this summer by Sen. Baldwin and Rep. Scott, the America’s College Promise Act of 2015 reflects the President’s vision to make two years of college as universal as high school, helping students earn the first half of a bachelor’s degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost. It also makes critical investments in some of our nation’s most important institutions by providing grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions.

⁵ <http://usmayors.org/AmericasCollegePromise/2015ACPSupportLetter.pdf>

- **Arizona:** An Arizona bill mirrors the President's plan and would provide the 25 percent of state funding required if federal legislation to partner with states to provide free community college becomes law.
- **Indiana:** The Hoosier Promise scholarship, modeled on Tennessee's program, would provide full tuition scholarships for up to 2.5 years toward an associate's degree for qualifying students.
- **Maryland:** A Maryland bill would exempt qualified full-time certificate and associate's degree students from tuition at the state's public community colleges.
- **Massachusetts:** A recently introduced bill in Massachusetts would provide tuition free community college to Massachusetts residents. The bill will be considered this coming fall.
- **Mississippi:** A \$3 million dollar scholarship program in Mississippi would fund high school students in career tech programs to pursue skills certifications and academic degrees at Mississippi's two-year-colleges.
- **Missouri:** The Missouri Promise Scholarship Act would make funding available to cover tuition and fees at two-year colleges after other scholarships and aid, and would provide equivalent funds for students attending four-year public institutions.
- **New York:** A bill in New York would reimburse New Yorkers who attend community college full time, maintain at least a 2.5 grade-point average and graduate within three years of enrollment.
- **North Carolina:** House Bill 129 would provide scholarships to attend community college to high school graduates with a minimum of a 3.5 GPA.
- **North Dakota:** A bill introduced in the North Dakota House and Senate would establish Promise grants in the state to provide financial assistance to cover tuition and fees at the state's two-, three-, and four-year programs to residents who maintain at least 3.0 GPA and satisfy other requirements.
- **Oklahoma:** Oklahoma House Bill 1733 would create a grant covering 65 percent of the tuition (after other aid) at Oklahoma community colleges for recent high school graduates starting in the 2017-18 academic year, and increasing to a tuition-free program by 2023
- **Texas:** A Texas House bill would establish the Texas Promise Scholarship Program to provide tuition and fees to eligible students, including those with a minimum 2.5 GPA, to attend community colleges in the state.

Promise Programs: Many Paths to Free Community College

The new programs announced this year, and the legislative proposals across the country are important next steps to make free community college as universal as high school. They build on the work already being done – 25 percent of community colleges already operate in states where a significant number of students can attend tuition-free or near-tuition-free, and a third of community colleges offer additional tuition-free (or nearly tuition-free) programs apart from any other state aid.⁶

The President’s plan was inspired by groundbreaking work in Tennessee and Chicago, but dozens of states, cities and colleges are leading the way to establish programs across the country. Some programs have been around since the 1990s; others are just getting off the ground. For many of these programs, which cover the cost of tuition after all scholarships, the President’s historic investments in Pell Grants have helped to make their tuition-free promise a reality.

Many communities are pursuing different avenues to making at least some college as free and universal as high school.⁷

Free Community College Movement



1. Free Community College Programs

- **Tennessee Promise:** Tennessee College Promise, which draws from state lottery funds to cover tuition and fees at community college for students with a minimum 2.0 GPA, serves as a model for Promise programs. In January 2015, the President announced America’s College Promise at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, where he was joined by Governor Bill Haslam. In the first year of Tennessee’s program,

⁶ AACC survey. Data include approximately 250 responding community colleges.

⁷ See <http://www.upjohn.org/sites/default/files/promise/Lumina/Promisescholarshipprograms.pdf> (describing the Rosen Foundation Scholarship, founded in 1993, which provides last dollar support to students in Orlando’s Tangelo Park subdivision).

58,000 students applied, and 15,000 are expected to enroll. Students eligible for the scholarship logged 200,000 hours of community service since January. And Tennessee had the highest increase of any state in the percentage of students who applied for federal financial aid in part as a result of the high level of interest in the new program, according to state officials.

- **Long Beach College Promise:** Long Beach City College (LBCC), California State University-Long Beach (CSULB), Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) and the City of Long Beach have collaborated to provide a free semester of tuition to all local high school graduates, with guaranteed transfer admission to CSULB for those interested in completing a bachelor's degree program. To date, the program has provided a free semester for more than 7,000 local students. This month the Long Beach College Promise will announce that it will extend the free tuition scholarship to one full academic year at LBCC. The success of the program has become a model for other California schools. In 2013, Cuesta College announced that it would eliminate the first semester of tuition for incoming San Luis Obispo County students.
- **Delaware SEED Scholarship:** For the past 10 years, Delaware Technical and Community College has provided free tuition (after other financial aid) for local students who maintain at least a 2.5 GPA. Through nearly \$5 million in annual funding from the state, 7,400 students have benefited from the program. Building on the SEED scholarship's success, in 2010 the state created a new scholarship to cover tuition at Delaware State University.
- **New Jersey STARS:** The New Jersey STARS scholarship provides five semesters of tuition at the state's 19 community colleges for New Jersey students in the top 15 percent of their high school classes. Since it began in 2004, approximately 2500 new students have enrolled each year through a \$7 million commitment from the state. A follow-on program provides additional tuition assistance to students who continue on to a four-year college.

2. Free Community College and Four-Year Programs

- **Kalamazoo Promise:** A group of anonymous donors created the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship, which provides up to four years of tuition and fees at public colleges in Michigan for students who have attended Kalamazoo public schools – including as much as 100 percent of tuition for local students who attended starting in kindergarten. The scholarship includes programs at state-supported community colleges, in addition to Michigan's four-year public schools. Through a \$12 million annual investment, 5,000 students have benefited since the scholarship's inception eight years ago.
- **Pittsburgh Promise:** Through a \$15 million investment, this scholarship has provided more than 5,600 local students who attended Pittsburgh public schools since at least 9th grade with up to \$30,000 to attend any accredited program in Pennsylvania - community college, four-year colleges, and technical schools.

- **New Haven College Promise**: Funded through a collaboration between Yale University and the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, the scholarship awards up to full tuition to any Connecticut in-state public college or university for local students who maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA and complete a community service requirement.

3. Programs Addressing Student Debt

Providing responsible students with tuition-free community college is only a part of the story. For commuting students, the cost of books and supplies, transportation and other expenses can cost thousands of dollars beyond tuition and fees – requiring student loans even for students who receive enough aid to cover tuition.⁸ Some scholarships are starting to help these students graduate debt-free.

- **CUNY ASAP**: The City University of New York (CUNY) has long been an innovator in providing affordable, high-quality education. From programs for high school students to those enrolled in community college, CUNY has been among those colleges leading the way.

CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) uses an evidence-based model to ensure success for students at seven of CUNY’s colleges.⁹ Funded by a combination of city, state and charitable giving since 2007, ASAP provides not only tuition, but also financial assistance to defray the cost of textbooks and public transportation. With free public transportation and significantly reduced costs for textbooks, ASAP students spend significantly less out-of-pocket, reducing the need to take out student loans to cover many non-tuition expenses required to attend school. ASAP also provides students with mentors and career development opportunities to help ensure that students who start a degree program complete it and graduate with a good job.

ASAP’s annual budget of around \$17 million has helped more than 8,000 students attend its community colleges at no cost, with the expectation that as many as 13,000 students will have graduated by 2017. According to one study, through free tuition, assistance for out-of-pocket expenses like transportation and books, and mentorship programs, ASAP has almost doubled graduation rates for students participating in the program.¹⁰

- **Chicago Star**: Announced in 2015, Chicago’s Star Scholarship ensures Chicago public school students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher can earn their associate degree at City

⁸ See College Board, Trends in College Pricing 2014 (estimating that two-year commuter students spend \$1,328 on books and supplies, \$1,735 on transportation, and \$2,210 on other expenses in addition to tuition, fees, room and board).

⁹ LaGuardia Community College, Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, Kingsborough Community College, Medgar Evers Community College, Queensborough Community College, and Hostos Community College

¹⁰ *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs for Developmental Education Students*. http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/doubling_graduation_rates_fr.pdf

Colleges of Chicago with no out-of-pocket costs by providing scholarships in the form of tuition, fee and book waivers to qualifying high school graduates.

4. Dual-Enrollment Programs for High School Students to Receive College Credit

Nearly half of all 2- and 4-year colleges enroll high school students for college credit – or “dual enrollment.”¹¹ At community colleges, half offer formal programs for high school students for little or no tuition (whether dual-enrollment or not).¹²

These programs help students accelerate their education, start their careers, and provide a path into the middle class.¹³ At some schools, dual enrollment programs have allowed students to earn not just a high school degree, but an associate’s degree as well.

- **P-TECH**: Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) is a cutting-edge early-college high school formed and funded through a partnership between IBM and CUNY, NYC College of Technology and the New York City Department of Education. The school offers college-level courses in math and science, and offers students a high school diploma and Associate’s Degree in a STEM field. Opening its doors for the first time in 2011, P-TECH requires all participants to do their part. Students must complete the requirements of the New York State Regents, and each partner provides its expertise to make sure students make it to graduation prepared to start their careers. After the third year of study, qualified students have the opportunity to intern at IBM (or elsewhere) so long as they have completed at least one college course.

As the President said when he visited the school in October 2013, “P-Tech is proof of what can be accomplished, but we’ve got to have the courage to do it.”

Already, 40 new schools have opened following the P-TECH model.¹⁴ By 2016, there may be as many as 60. With the Department of Labor, the Administration has committed \$100 million in the Youth CareerConnect grant program to foster this kind of innovation and to encourage America’s school districts, institutions of higher education, the workforce investment system, and their partners to scale up these and similar models.

- **Ivy Tech Community College**: Ivy Tech Community College in Elkhart County, Indiana, offers a free dual-credit program for students at over 400 Indiana high schools. The program enrolls 52,000 students a year, saving students who go on to college a

¹¹ Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

¹² AACC survey. Data include 250 responding community colleges.

¹³ See Julie A. Edmunds et al., “Expanding the Start of the College Pipeline: Ninth-Grade Findings from an Experimental Study of the Impact of the Early College High School Model,” *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 5, no. 2 (2012): 136–59; American Institutes for Research & SRI. (2013). *Early college, early success: Early College High School Initiative impact study*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

¹⁴ www.ptech.org

total of \$40 million. This year, the school announced a new online application to expand its reach even further.¹⁵

- **Bard College**: Bard College in New York, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education, created the Bard High School Early College, which offers two tuition-free college models to high school students. Students enroll either full- or part-time, and can either receive a high school diploma and Bard Associate's degree concurrently, or transfer up to one year of credit to Bard College.
- **Catawba Valley Community College**: This year, CVCC in North Carolina created a dual-enrollment program to offer a year of college credit for free to high school students, saving them as much as \$4,000 in tuition if they transfer those credits to a North Carolina public university. In its first year, approximately 150 students are expected to participate.

Community College: Return on Investment for Students and Communities

Just as the high school movement at the beginning of the 20th century paved the way for economic expansion, today's community college movement and the increased educational attainment it promises will do the same.

- **Return on Investment**: According to one recent study, community college graduates make an average of \$10,000 more a year than those with just a high school diploma. Those who continue on to graduate from a four-year program earn an average of \$27,000 more annually than those with only a high school degree.¹⁶

While these outcomes have direct benefit to students and community college graduates, the return on their investment benefits the nation as a whole. According to the same study, "the accumulated contribution of former [community college] students who were employed in the U.S. workforce in 2012 amounted to \$806.4 billion in added income to the national economy."¹⁷ Accounting for graduates' increased income, lower unemployment and other benefits, every dollar invested in community college by federal, state and local governments means more than \$25 in return.¹⁸

- **Who Community Colleges Serve**: The country's more than 1,000 community colleges are places that welcome everyone through their doors – 40 percent are first-generation college goers; 30 percent have dependents, and 38 percent receive Pell grants.¹⁹ Many

¹⁵ *Ivy Tech's dual credit program exceeds 52,000 students, saves Hoosier parents \$40 million.*
<http://news.ivytech.edu/2015/06/26/ivy-techs-dual-credit-program-exceeds-52000-students-saves-hoosier-parents-40-million/>.

¹⁶ *Where Value Meets Value: The Economic Impact of Community Colleges*, Economic Modeling Specialists Intl. (February 2014).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

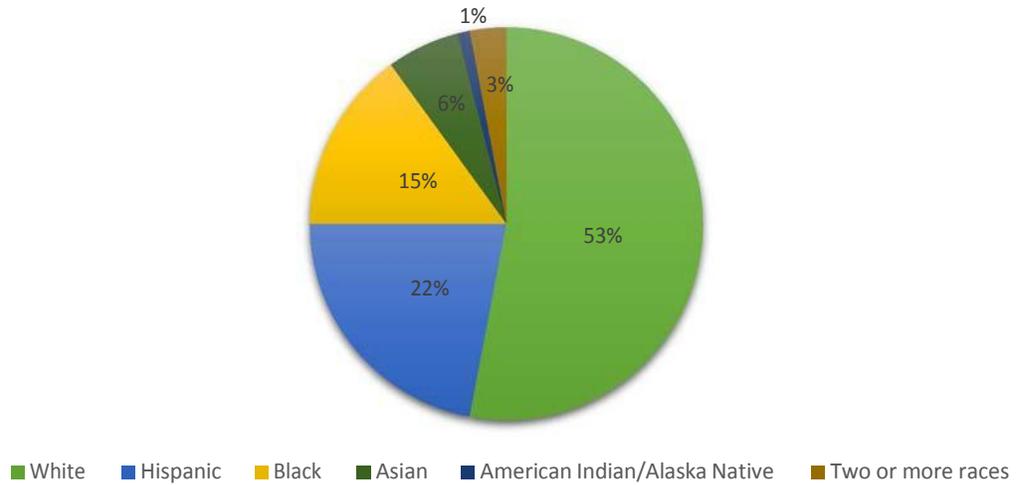
¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

students are recent immigrants, working adults, or students who could not afford or were not quite ready for a four-year institution.

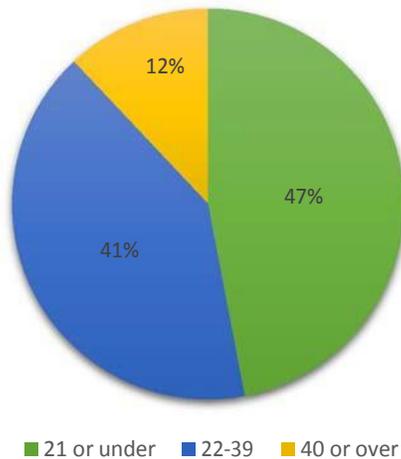
- Over 40 percent of these students are minorities, and 57 percent are women.²⁰

Almost Half of Community College Students are Minorities



- More than half of students are over 21.²¹

28: The Age of the Average Community College Student

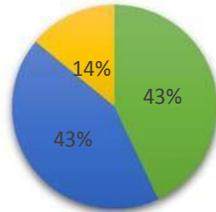


²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

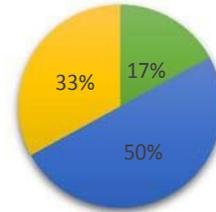
- *The majority of community college students attend part-time, working to support themselves, their families, and to pay for school.*

4.1 million Part-Time Students



- Employed Full Time
- Employed Part Time
- Employed under 20 hours/week

2.5 Million Full-Time Students



- Employed Full Time
- Employed Part Time
- Employed under 20 hours/week

The President’s proposal - \$60 billion over ten years – would directly benefit these students, and the US would see tremendous return on that investment. In the process, community colleges can continue to reform and transform themselves into state of the art institutions that support their students to succeed – along with providing education and training relevant to the needs of their communities and contributing to strengthening their local and state economies.

America’s College Promise and the campaign throughout the country to deliver two years of free community college to hard working students are part of the President’s continuing record of success to make college more affordable. The President has doubled investments in college scholarships like Pell Grants and the American Opportunity Tax Credit; made student loans more affordable by cutting interest rates and allowing borrowers to cap student loan payments at 10 percent of income; and is promoting innovation and competition to bring down costs and improve college quality.