

AB 19 (Santiago) – California Community College Promise

On October 13th, the Governor signed historic legislation that will authorize community colleges to offer a year of tuition-free college to all first-time, full-time (12 units or more) students. While the signature is historic, the next step is to ensure that the program is funded. The measure does not take effect unless funding is provided for its implementation through a budget appropriation. The Board of Governors has included a request for funding for the promise framework in their System Budget Request.

What the Bill Does

The measure creates a new program that would provide funding to colleges so that they can promote access and completion. The measure specifically states that colleges that wish to participate must do all of the following:

- Partner with one or more local educational agencies (LEA) to establish an Early Commitment to College Program to provide K-12 students and families assistance that includes, but is not limited to, learning about college opportunities, visiting campuses, taking and completing college preparatory courses, and applying for college financial aid.
- Partnering with one or more LEAs to support and improve high school student preparation for college and reduce postsecondary remediation.
- Utilizing evidence-based assessment and placement practices at the community college that include multiple measures of student performance, which shall include, among other measures, overall grade point averages, including grades in high school courses, and using evidence-based practices for improving outcomes for underprepared students.
- Participating in the California Community College Guided Pathways Grant Program.
- Maximize access to need-based financial aid by leveraging the BOG fee waiver (now called the College Promise Grant), and ensuring that students complete the FASFA, Cal Grant or Dream Act application. A college must also participate in the federal loan program.

A community college that has been certified by the State Chancellor as complying with all the requirements stated above shall have access to funding provided through the budget act for the purpose of funding the California College Promise.

The bill states the Legislative intent that sufficient funding be allocated to each community college district to waive fees for all first-time, full-time students. Funding allocated above this level shall be allocated to districts based on a formula that includes FTES and the number of Pell-eligible students.

Districts can specifically use the funds to eliminate all or part of enrollment fees for first-time, full-time students. However, funds may also be used to advance the overall goals of the College Promise Program which may include:

- Increasing the number and percentage of high school students who are prepared for and attend college directly from high school and increasing the percentage of high school graduates who are placed directly into transfer-level math and English courses.
- Increasing the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or CTE certificate and increasing the percentage of students who report being employed in their field.
- Increasing the percentage of students who successfully transfer to a CSU or UC and increasing the number of students that graduate from college with a BA.
- Reducing and eliminating regional achievement gaps and achievement gaps from students that are underrepresented.

Implementation of the Measure

The measure will not go into effect until funding is provided. The Governor is very likely to fund the bill in the next budget cycle, or he would not have signed it. Barring a major recession, we anticipate that the administration's January 2018 budget proposal will include funding for the College Promise Program.

It is estimated that it will cost approximately \$35 million to implement a measure that would allow local colleges to waive fees for all first-time, full-time students. The Board of Governors requested \$25 million for a college promise framework in their system budget request. In order to fully fund the program, the Governor and Legislature will need to fund at a level greater than that requested by the Board of Governors.

In May 2018, the administration will release their updated budget proposal with up-to-date revenue projections. It is at this time that we should have a very good idea of what the level of funding for the program will be. The Legislature will pass their budget by June 15, 2018 and the Governor will sign it before July 1st of 2018. It will be a tight timeline, but districts should be able to implement the program for fall of 2018.

Interaction with Current Fee Waiver Program

The State Chancellor's Office recently rebranded the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver as the California Promise Grant. This is simply a name change for the program and the actual mechanics of how this fee waiver works will remain the same. Students that qualify for a traditional fee waiver, will continue to qualify for that fee waiver regardless of how many units they take.

Additionally, under AB 19, students must complete a FASFA. If that student qualifies for a traditional fee waiver due to their income level, then they would receive that waiver and would not need to be covered under the funding provided through AB 19. Students that otherwise do not qualify for a fee waiver would be eligible to have their fees waived by the college, if they are a first-time student taking 12 units or more.