

California College Promise Questions and Answers

Updated January 2021

GENERAL COLLEGE PROMISE QUESTIONS

1. Is the second year of the College Promise fee waiver for any full-time student?

Answer: No, second year fees can only be paid for students who were first-time students the year before.

2. Must students who are in their second year have been attending our college in the prior year to have their fees waived using College Promise funds?

Answer: No, any second year student who was a first-time student the year before may have the fees waived using California College Promise funds. The student may have attended any other California community college or have attended multiple community colleges.

3. The news media continues to describe the College Promise as “free college” for first-time, full-time community college students. Is this label accurate?

Answer: The actual provisions of the program allow for a high degree of flexibility and Promise programs vary. The law allows colleges to decide what is best for their students, whether that is to cover fees for first-time, full-time students in their first and second years or make use of program funding in other ways that meet the goals of the legislation.

Each college may implement the California College Promise in different ways. In addition, these funds may be used to tie-in or to expand existing local promise programs. Here are just some other *possible* uses:

- Enrollment fee waivers for first-time, full-time students
- Direct aid (grants) to students to help students meet the cost of attendance and reduce unmet need
- Tuition reimbursement
- Grants to assist students to address their basic needs
- Support at local education agencies (LEA) to promote college preparedness and attendance
- Staffing and academic/student support services to provide interventions and encourage outcomes
- Other uses that support the goals of the legislation

4. Does it matter if we provide a fee waiver or award the funds as a grant or scholarship?

Answer: Districts should consider treating College Promise disbursements as direct assistance instead of fee waivers. Treating a disbursement as direct assistance will not result in a change in your general apportionment but treating it as a fee waiver will.

5. Does the California College Promise replace the California College Promise Grant or CCPG, (formerly known as the BOG fee waiver)?

Answer: The California College Promise does not replace the CCPG. Districts providing fee waivers to first time, full- time students would use the California College Promise funds only for students who do not qualify for a CCPG.

PROGRAM AND PARTICIPATION

6. Is a college required to participate in the California College Promise?

Answer: Participation in the California College Promise is voluntary. A district is not required to establish a College Promise program nor is a district with an existing College Promise program required to change that program. However, if a district seeks to receive funding provided by the State to support the California College Promise, the district would need to comply with the requirements as established by the law in CEC Section 76396.1 described below and participate in the federal loan program.

- 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 mathematics and English courses at a community college.
- Increasing the percentage of students who earn associate degrees or career technical education certificates that prepare them for in-demand jobs and increasing the percentage of students who report being employed in their field of study.
- Increasing the percentage of students who successfully transfer from a community college to the California State University or the University of California and increasing the percentage of students who graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree.
- Reducing and eliminating regional achievement gaps and achievement gaps for students from groups that are underrepresented at the California Community Colleges, including, but not limited to, underrepresented students, low-income

students, students who are current or former foster youth, students with disabilities, formerly incarcerated students, undocumented students, students meeting the requirements of Assembly Bill 540 of the 2001–2002 Regular Session of the Legislature, and students who are veterans.

7. What should a district do if it already has a locally funded College Promise that includes a tuition waiver that is duplicative of the tuition waiver allowed in this program?

Answer: A district is not required to expend any monies received from this program on providing fee waivers to students. Pursuant to Legislative intent, a district should use funding to advance the goals outlined in the program.

8. Must a student enroll in 12 units or more for every term they attend to receive a fee waiver?

Answer: If a community college chooses to use its Promise funds to provide fee waivers, it shall create policies that are aligned with the first-time, full-time eligibility requirements. However, colleges may create flexibility within their policies to accommodate all enrolled students. For example, if a student fails to enroll in or complete 12 units in one term, the student could still be eligible for a fee waiver in the subsequent term as long as they enroll in 12 or more units in that subsequent term, with or without a formal appeal process.

9. What is full-time equivalent for DSPS students?

Answer: A student enrolled in fewer than 12 units may be deemed “full time” at the discretion of the institution if the student has been certified as “full time” by a staff person in the disabled student services program at the institution who is qualified to make such a designation.

10. What are districts required to do to receive funding?

Answer: The Chancellor’s Office will be responsible for insuring that districts complete their certifications in order to qualify for appropriated funding:

- Partner with one or more Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to establish an Early Commitment to College Program;
- Partner with LEAs to improve college readiness and reduce remediation;
- Use evidence-based multiple measures for assessment and placement;
- Participate in the CCC Guided Pathways program;
- If a college provides fee waivers for first-time, full-time students, ensure that

students complete the FAFSA or California Dream Act application.

- Participate in the federal student loan program. Districts not currently in the loan program must apply to reenter the loan program prior to July 1 of any award year.

11. For those colleges that award fee waivers for first-time, full-time college students, what definition will be used for first-time college student?

Answer: The program will use the definition used for IPEDS reporting that defines first-time college student as:

“A student who has no prior postsecondary experience (except as noted below) attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. This includes students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. It also includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or postsecondary formal award earned before graduation from high school).”

The IPEDS definition for postsecondary education is also used:

“The provision of a formal instructional program whose curriculum is designed primarily for students who are beyond the compulsory age for high school. This includes programs whose purpose is academic, vocational, and continuing professional education, and excludes avocational and adult basic education programs.”

12. Is there an age limit for the start of a student’s first year?

Answer: A student could be considered a first-time college student at any age. However, they must meet the IPED first-time college student definition.

13. If a student completely withdraws or drops down to less than the college’s full-time attendance, do they need to repay the grant/fee waiver? Can they regain eligibility in the program?

Answer: Each institution should establish its own return of funds policies. Colleges may create flexibility within their policies to accommodate all enrolled students. For example, if a student fails to enroll in or complete 12 units in one term, the student could still be eligible for a fee waiver in the subsequent term as long as they enroll in 12 or more units in that subsequent term, with or without a formal appeal process.

- 14. What if a student is enrolled in a program of study such as a certificate program that does not allow for 12 units per term, such as nursing? Can they receive a fee waiver?**

Answer: See question 8.

- 15. For colleges providing a fee waiver for the summer, do they have to be enrolled full-time?**

Answer: Yes, students must be enrolled full-time to receive a fee waiver.

- 16. Does a student have to be a California resident to receive funds?**

Answer: Yes, participation is limited to California residents and students eligible for the non-resident tuition exemption.

For students receiving a grant or waiver from tuition fees, non-residents are not eligible. CEC Section 76396.3(b) states:

"A fee waiver provided pursuant to this subdivision shall not be available to a student who is charged a tuition fee pursuant to Section 76140."

Section 76140 addresses non-resident fees for students.

- 17. Does attending adult education classes affect the first-time definition?**

Answer: Adult education enrollment does not affect a student's classification as a first-time college student. See the IPEDs definition of postsecondary education definition provided in question 11.

- 18. Does prior attendance in ESL classes affect first-time status?**

Answer: First-time status is affected only if the student was awarded credit for the ESL coursework or if other credit coursework was completed at the same time as the ESL coursework.

PROGRAM FUNDING

19. How are funds allocated to districts?

Answer: Allocation calculations are based on individual college reported MIS data.

$$\text{College Allocation} = (\text{A) Amount needed to waive fees for 2 years} + (\text{B) Fair Share Pell Recipients 90\% of remaining after factor (A)}) + (\text{C) Fair Share FTEs 10\% of remaining after factor (A)})$$

20. Is this one-time or continuing funding?

Answer: The California College Promise is an ongoing program subject to annual funding in the state budget.

21. If we have unspent funds at the end of the award year, should they be returned?

Answer: Colleges should take steps to assess the needs of their current students and spend their Promise Program funds to meet program goals.

22. Are the California College Promise funds restricted?

Answer: Yes, College Promise funds are restricted and should be recorded in the Restricted General Fund – Object Code 8620 (General Categorical Program). Expenses for eligible services as described in the law can also be recorded in the same restricted fund. Fee waivers for first-time, full time students may also be recorded under object code 7500 or processed through Fund Type 74.

23. Are College Promise funds that are used for fee waivers refundable to students?

Answer: No, College Promise funds are not refundable to students and each district should ensure that its accounting system has audit checks in place to identify these transactions.

USE OF THE FAFSA OR DREAM ACT APPLICATION

24. Are students required to complete the FAFSA or Dream Act Application (CADAA) for all of its students?

Answer: The FAFSA or Dream Act Application (CADAA) application is required if the student is receiving funding from College Promise funds for a fee waiver or for other direct assistance.

25. Is there a deadline to file the FAFSA or CADAA?

Answer: The California College Promise does not have a stated deadline. Colleges could choose to set a final deadline for College Promise fee waiver applications based on their Promise policy. The student's FAFSA or California Dream Act Application must be completed prior to receiving benefits in the program. Of course, other financial aid programs do have deadlines for FAFSA or CADAA submission.

26. Question 8 describes the participation requirements for the California College Promise. One requirement is to “Partner with one or more Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to establish an Early Commitment to College Program. Is this still required?

Answer: The "Early Commitment to College" program was repealed as of January 1, 2019 in accordance with prior EC section 54716. However, the first goal of the legislation (Question 6) is “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 mathematics and English courses at a community college.”

Clearly, the intent of the law is for districts to have significant involvement with local high schools towards meeting the goals of the legislation.

QUESTIONS ON A STUDENT SECOND YEAR IN THE PROGRAM

27. For students continuing as full-time for their second year, must they have been paid the year before in the program or only have been first-time, full-time at that college or another college?

Answer: A student can be considered for a second year of College Promise eligibility only if they were a first-time student the prior year.

28. Can a student have attended more than one college in the prior year to establish eligibility for their second year?

Answer: A student who was a first-time college student the year before and attended more than one college can receive a College Promise fee waiver for the second year.