



May 15, 2018

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
State Capitol, Room 3086
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Consolidating California Community College Student Financial Aid to Better Enable Affordable, Full-Time Attendance

Dear Chair Portantino:

As organizations committed to strengthening college affordability and student success in California, we are writing to urge the California State Legislature to consider adopting the alternative [proposal put forth by The Institute for College Access & Success](#) (TICAS) for consolidating the Full-Time Student Success Grant and the Community College Completion Grant.

Under the TICAS proposal, many more needy students would receive more of the aid they need to successfully transfer or earn a degree or credential, and the award amounts would be distributed in a more equitable way.

The Governor’s 2018-19 budget proposal consolidates the Full-Time Student Success Grant (FTSSG) and Community College Completion Grant (CCCG) into one combined program to supplement students’ Cal Grant awards, and recommends total funding of \$131.8M – a \$40.7M increase. Efforts to streamline these programs and provide additional funds are welcome, but the alternative proposed by TICAS better supports the goals of enabling affordable, full-time attendance for CCC students and better addresses concerns with current programs.

The benefits of the TICAS proposal include:

- **Helping more students enroll full time.** Unlike the Governor’s proposal, under which nearly one-third of recipients would see no increase to their award, the TICAS proposal provides additional resources to *all* full-time Cal Grant recipients, including students enrolled in 12 credits per term. Research consistently shows that students who enroll full time (routinely defined as 12 or more credits per term) graduate at higher rates than part-time students, but the vast majority of CCC

students take a part-time credit load. Many of these students are within reach of full-time enrollment: 18% of CCC students are enrolled in 6.0-8.9 credits per term, and 15% are enrolled in 9.0-11.9 credits per term (totaling 466,784 students in Fall 2017). While taking 15 credits may not be possible for these students due to life and work commitments, taking an additional class may be feasible and would increase their likelihood of persisting. The TICAS proposal would provide students taking 12 credits with \$400 more per term than they currently receive, better enabling more students to reach that threshold. Recipients taking at least 15 credits per term would also receive a modest increase in their awards.

- ***Providing more equitable award amounts to eligible students.*** When combined with students' Cal Grant awards, the current structure of these two programs provides very different per-credit financial aid amounts to students taking 12 and 15 credits per term (\$111 and \$139 per credit, respectively). The Governor's proposal would drive these figures even further apart (\$111 and \$189 per credit, respectively). Providing much larger per-credit amounts to students taking at least 15 credits would keep many underrepresented students from receiving the largest benefits. For example, three-quarters of African-American and Latino full-time Cal Grant recipients take between 12-14 credits per term (75% and 76%, respectively), yet only one-third of the new financial aid dollars would go to students enrolled at such credit loads under the Governor's proposal. In contrast, under the TICAS proposal, the per-credit award amounts would be evened out (providing \$145 per credit for 12 credits per term and \$142 per credit for 15 credits per term). As such, the TICAS proposal would result in a more equitably distributed grant program that better assists the very students who need help the most.
- ***Removing barriers between low-income students and the financial aid they need to succeed.*** Currently, students must complete an educational plan to be eligible for a CCCG and to demonstrate timely progression towards this plan to remain eligible for the grant. However, these requirements are keeping students from receiving financial aid through no fault of their own: with insufficient institutional support, students have struggled to create educational plans, and financial aid offices have struggled to verify that they are in place. As of February 2018, CCCs reported to the Chancellor's Office that only about 14% of CCCG dollars had been paid out. It is important that students have educational plans and make progress towards them, but colleges are already required to provide educational plans to students under the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), and it is imperative that this requirement be maintained in ongoing conversations about the potential consolidation of categorical grants to the colleges. Financial aid recipients are also already required to demonstrate that progress is being made under federal and state Satisfactory Academic Progress standards. Placing additional requirements on students is both duplicative, and, as current CCCG spending demonstrates, serves as a barrier for low-income students. As of May, the Governor also proposes to remove this requirement on students.
- ***Acknowledging the realities of financial aid offices' resources and responsibilities, and allowing administrators to spend more time assisting students directly.*** Most CCC financial aid offices do not have the technology to award different aid amounts for students enrolled in 13 or 14 credits per term, as the Governor's proposal would require, increasing the burden on financial aid

offices rather than lessening it. Reviewing educational plans is also a manual process for CCC financial aid offices, and as discussed above the need to do this results in students not receiving the financial aid they need to succeed. Furthermore, these plans do not necessarily align with those required for colleges to receive SSSP funding, further adding to aid and counseling offices' already heavy workloads. The TICAS proposal would reduce burden on the already stretched-thin, underfunded CCC financial aid offices. In addition to adopting the TICAS proposal, we respectfully request that the Legislature adopt the Governor's proposal to invest more in the functions required of financial aid offices, by providing funding for long-overdue software updates that would streamline financial aid operations, allow for more direct student engagement, better protect students' information, and support AB 19 implementation.

We thank you for your commitment to increasing affordability for community college students, and urge the Legislature to adopt TICAS' financial aid consolidation proposal ([attached](#)) so that many more needy students receive more of the aid they need to take additional credits, move through college more efficiently, and successfully transfer or earn a degree or credential.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership.

Sincerely,

California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators Association
California Competes
California EDGE Coalition
The Campaign for College Opportunity
Community College League of California
The Institute for College Access & Success
Student Senate for California Community Colleges

Attachment: *Consolidating California Community College Student Financial Aid to Better Enable Affordable, Full-Time Attendance*

CC: Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
Senator Holly J. Mitchell, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
Senator Toni G. Atkins, Senate President pro Tempore
Anita Lee, Consultant, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education
Kimberly Rodriguez, Consultant, Senate President pro Tempore