

CALBRIGHT Resolution submitted by Gregg Robinson

Whereas our community college system is in serious trouble going into the fall with cuts in programs as much as 20% foreseen.

Whereas these cuts will mean laying off thousands of part-time teachers, and the elimination of hundreds of classes which are desperately needed by our students of color and those from low income backgrounds.

Whereas the CALBRIGHT online college system is both wasteful and duplicative of educational services already in place in community colleges across the state AND costs over 140 million dollars annually.

Therefore be it resolved that the San Diego County Democratic Party calls on Governor Newsom to concur with the Senate and Assembly recommendations to eliminate CALBRIGHT and redirect those resources to the larger community college system in order to continue serving the communities throughout the state that rely on the community colleges for their workforce training and academic preparations for transfer to four year colleges.

Be it further resolved that the Chair of the San Diego County Democratic Party will immediately send a letter/communication to Governor Newsom expressing this position.

BACKGROUND:

America Sabotaged the Solution to Its New Higher-Education Crisis

Many families are turning to community colleges amid the pandemic, but the schools aren't equipped to handle an influx of students.

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Sara Goldrick-Rab

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Right now, across the country, millions of high-school graduates and their families are facing an undeniable fact: The pandemic has thrown their plans for the future into complete disarray. Some of these families were hoping to send their kids to out-of-state institutions that are now barely operational. Others were hoping their kids would find jobs right out of high school, and those jobs are almost certainly gone now.

Many of these families—plus millions of students already midway through a college degree—are going to turn to an institution often overlooked in the national discourse about higher education: community college. And why shouldn't they?

Compared with many alternatives, community colleges are relatively affordable. They are located in nearly every county in the country, allowing students to live at home and help their families survive this tough economic time. Many offer flexible scheduling with both traditional academic programs and vocational training. That's why when the Great Recession hit, community colleges absorbed half of all growth in college enrollment. Despite the stereotypes of low graduation rates, many students succeed in completing credentials in community college, and transferring to four-year institutions.

But community colleges can only offer a high-quality and affordable education when the government does its part in providing a reliable stream of financial support—and it needs to do so now. Consider that in 2001, state and local appropriations contributed 61 percent of community colleges' average revenue, helping keep tuition low at an average \$2,240 a year. But over the next 15 years, state and local governments cut back their support, causing average tuition to swell by 65 percent. These days, community college is rarely free.

To make matters worse, despite the clear evidence that community-college students need relatively more support to succeed (many of them are the first in their family to attend college),

states invest more in institutional resources and financial aid for students attending four-year institutions. In turn, those students—who come to college with distinct advantages in terms of family wealth and fewer academic-support needs—reap the benefits. A [2016 American Institutes of Research analysis](#) found that students attending four-year public research universities benefit from 60 percent more spending compared with community-college students. In California, even though two-thirds of the state’s undergraduates attend community colleges, [they receive](#) just 7 percent of state-funded, need-based Cal Grants. In contrast, 6 percent of students attend private nonprofit colleges and another 6 percent attend the University of California campuses, but those institutions collectively receive 57 percent of all Cal Grant dollars. When community colleges are deprioritized in state investments, and [rarely the target of philanthropic support](#) too, it is very difficult for them to remain affordable.

These crucial institutions now face a national emergency and are needed more than ever to help preserve educational opportunity in a country that still promotes the American Dream. But community colleges aren’t equipped to deal with the sudden influx of students. As the [neglected stepchildren](#) of higher education, they have long been overlooked, asked to do more with less every day, yet heavily relied on during times of crisis.

Their stepchild status was illustrated most recently in the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act. Even though community colleges educate about 40 percent of students nationwide, and [more than half](#) of all low-income students, they were allocated [just 27 percent of CARES Act funds](#). That amounts to a nearly \$2 billion shortfall. Partly to blame is the archaic formula that reduces some students to less-than-whole-human beings by aggregating part-time students into full-time equivalents (FTE). Part-time students cost more to educate: Their degrees [take longer to complete](#), and they require advising and support regardless of how many classes they enroll in. Yet financial aid is provided to institutions based on their number of FTE, which severely underestimates the number of students that community colleges support. According to a [Center for American Progress analysis](#), community-college enrollment numbers are reduced by almost half when the count relies on FTE. Formulas such as these drove [more stimulus funding to Harvard](#) (on a per-student basis) than to the community college across town.

Political will also undermines support for community colleges. In the case of the CARES Act funds, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos allocated disproportionate support to a cohort of [20 small, private, mostly religious colleges](#) that serve fewer than 3,000 students combined. She even sent [\\$472,850 in taxpayer support](#) to the Bergin University of Canine Studies, which [enrolls only 60 students](#), including 24 undergraduates.

About 50 percent of the CARES dollars for higher education are direct emergency grants to help students facing financial crises pay for food, housing, child care, and more. Living expenses constitute the majority of the cost of attending community college. While tuition and fees averaged \$3,730 for the [2019–20 school year](#), the average cost of attendance was closer to \$17,000 when food, books and supplies, transportation, housing, and other expenses were factored in. Even accounting for financial aid, 18 percent of students attending community colleges face a price higher than their family’s total income. This is why in our [2019 #RealCollege survey](#) (conducted before the pandemic) my team at the [Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#) found that nearly one in two community-college students experienced

food or housing insecurity, and about 17 percent experienced homelessness in the past year. Without having their basic needs met, students can't be expected to do well in school and complete degrees.

At the California Community Colleges, one of the world's largest systems of higher education, an estimated 70 percent of its nearly 2.2 million students were facing basic-needs insecurity before the pandemic. According to the legislation's criteria, an estimated one in two CCC students should have received direct CARES support to help with those challenges. But DeVos decided otherwise, creating new rules mandating that if students are ineligible for federal financial assistance (determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA), then they are also ineligible for CARES support. According to a federal lawsuit filed by Eloy Oakley, the CCC chancellor, this eliminated support for an estimated 800,000 CCC students, including 26,000 students with disabilities, 12,000 veterans, and 80,000 students training to be first responders.

Oakley was right to sue—Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson has just joined him—and more lawsuits may be required to ensure that adequate public funding is distributed equitably to students around the country. Many community-college students cannot file a FAFSA for the same reasons they chose a community college in the first place—they are more likely to have attended under-resourced K–12 schools with few college supports, or are undocumented, justice impacted, or estranged from their parents. DeVos's new guidance worked to the advantage of colleges and universities that, as the economist Raj Chetty and his colleagues at Opportunity Insights have found, turn away more students than they admit, carefully crafting their classes to achieve high graduation rates without promoting social mobility. These institutions already enjoy larger endowments and serve relatively small numbers of undergraduates; further public investments in them will hardly propel a national recovery. Yet the Trump administration continues to leave community colleges out of the conversation. On May 14, Vice President Mike Pence and DeVos held a call with leaders from 14 schools to discuss reopening in the fall. Not one community-college president was included.

Community-college students are not being equitably represented in other ways too. Though many are among the 30 million people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic, the CARES Act bars students claimed as dependents on their parent's or guardian's tax return from receiving a stimulus check, even if they earned income and themselves filed a tax return. Without work, these students aren't able to maintain their eligibility for public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. But the federal government hasn't allocated enough additional aid to help students access basic necessities. For example, just last month, the Food and Nutrition Services declined requests from 29 states and the District of Columbia to waive certain SNAP eligibility requirements that would have allowed more students to access food assistance. As financial obstacles continue to mount for students, we should expect more community-college students to be forced to drop out, many in debt and without degrees.

Given these harrowing statistics, it's imperative that the federal government enact another round of all-inclusive emergency funding specifically for community colleges. But the government should not limit support to the short term. Because community colleges still rely on state and

local governments to provide about half of their funding, their budgets are particularly susceptible to fluctuations. Enrollment is also historically countercyclical. During the last recession, enrollment spiked at community colleges. But as the economy improved, enrollment steadily declined, and so did government support. We have no reason to expect that anything different will happen as a result of the current pandemic and resulting economic crisis.

That's why an infusion of federal funding is crucial. A similar effort worked its way through the Obama administration in 2009; the American Graduation Initiative would have invested about \$12 billion over 10 years in community colleges to help boost their completion rates and increase the number of students earning degrees. Unfortunately, Congress dropped the initiative, and it has yet to be revived. But without this funding, community colleges will not be able to meet student demand for many important programs, such as nursing, and they will not be able to offer the crucial counseling and holistic support that help students remain enrolled. Faculty will face higher course loads and crowded classrooms, while the adjunctification of the professoriat—demonstrably bad for student outcomes—will intensify.

Congress can help community colleges in other concrete ways to provide students with the support they need to succeed. The National School Lunch Program should be expanded to encompass community colleges, benefiting both students and the agricultural industry. The program was first introduced in 1946 in elementary and secondary schools after evidence that hunger inhibits learning began to take hold. Students who were hungry in 12th grade tend to still be hungry when they enroll in college; expanding this program will help address widespread food insecurity among college students.

Similarly, Congress should pass the Housing for Homeless Students Act. This bipartisan bill creates an exemption within the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program for full-time students who have experienced homelessness within the past seven years. The exemption incentivizes the development of more affordable student housing, and it should be expanded to apply to any full-time community-college student. Furthermore, federal work requirements tied to receiving public benefits should be waived for community-college students—or, at the very least, college should count as work.

Community colleges are explicitly designed to offer a second chance to millions of Americans, especially those facing challenges such as unemployment and economic hardship. These second-chance institutions are an undeniably crucial part of our nation's recovery from the pandemic. If community colleges are going to lift up and support the 7 million students they serve, the federal government must step up to ensure their survival.

We want to hear what you think about this article. Submit a letter to the editor or write to letters@theatlantic.com.

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Fully Online Community College in California No Longer Viable
Our Local Community College Students Need More, Not Less, Local Resource
Jim Mahler, President Community College Council California Federation of Teachers

Governor Brown's idea of a fully online state run community college back in January of 2018 may have sounded good at the time, however, it is now clear that the investment of more than \$140 million would be better spent further enhancing the online programs and student support that has existed in our 114 community colleges for many years.

To date, the new online college, now known as "Calbright," serves less than a handful of students statewide, has yet to hire any faculty, and is not accredited, which means students who take classes through Calbright cannot transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

We have had serious concerns about the mission of Calbright since its inception due to the significant investment in state resources to get it off the ground, and the fact that it is clearly duplicative of the online courses and program already existing in the 114 community colleges throughout the California. Currently, Calbright offers only three non-accredited programs of study, all of which are also offered through online platforms at 51 of our existing fully accredited community colleges in California.

We strongly believe that our existing community colleges can accomplish the same goals Calbright set out to achieve utilizing the infrastructure we already have in place within our comprehensive, fully accredited institutions. The transition of all of our courses to remote delivery in March as an emergency response to the public

health crisis is clear evidence that our local community colleges already have the expertise and systems in place to meet the intended mission of Calbright.

Another noteworthy example of this is right here in San Diego as part of the San Diego Community College District Continuing Education's (SDCE) newly launched iCom Academy (sdce.edu/icom). This will be California's first, completely free, fully online, and fully comprehensive, community college level program built to serve nontraditional students. This program will include certificates and degrees, as well as badging and micro-credentialing, which will be expanded in collaboration with industry partners. Students can learn at their own pace, but will have faculty and counseling support services available to them 24/7 to help guide them. Industry partnerships will also secure permanent jobs and paid internships for students. All of this can be done within our local existing community college district, and thus at a fraction of the cost of Calbright.

The dramatic COVID-19 related reduction in the State's budget revenues means that we can no longer afford redundant luxuries such as Calbright. College districts are already struggling financially to provide the enhanced sanitation, physical distancing and the online counseling and teaching tools necessary to continue to provide adequate services to our students for the duration of this pandemic.

The State Senate and Assembly have both wisely proposed the elimination of Calbright and the redirection of those resources to better serve our local communities. This proposal would redirect significant funding to our local community colleges and provide direct support to local students, desperately needed in these tough budget times.

We now call on Governor Newsom to do the right thing and concur with the Senate and Assembly recommendations to redirect Calbright's resources in order to continue serving the communities throughout the state that rely on the community colleges for their workforce training and academic preparations for transfer to four year colleges.

California Community Colleges will be essential to California's economic recovery, and so we urge the Governor to take the necessary steps to protect access for our students and our colleges' ability to serve them effectively.