

Campaign for Free College Tuition

FACT SHEET

November 2021



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July 2021 Polling Results

The Campaign for Free College Tuition (CFCT) in partnership with CollegeAPP, PSB Research and SurveyGizmo surveyed 1,002 Americans aged 18+ in July 2021. The sample has a Margin of Error of +/-2.9% and was weighted to US Census on age, gender, race, educational attainment and region of the country. Key findings of interest can be found below.

The survey finds **Americans in all demographic and political groups support making public colleges tuition-free.** We tested three different proposals for free college tuition and all of them received at least 73 percent overall support, which is statistically identical to our January/February 2021 poll.



While Democratic support for tuition free college was nearly universal — ranging from 92 to 94 percent depending on the programs construct — Republican support for the three program designs ranged from 55 percent for the means-tested four-year federal program that President Biden has proposed to 65 percent for the administration’s proposal to provide two years of free community college tuition to individuals looking to learn and improve their skills. Independent support for that particular federal program was 76 percent. Independents supported the other tuition-free programs at 69 percent.

The most popular idea was for “a federal program that provides two years of free community college tuition to individuals looking to learn and improve their skills.” It garnered 80 percent support overall, including 49 percent who supported the idea strongly. The same questions in our January/February poll received 81 percent overall support with 51 percent strongly supporting the idea. Democrats (94 percent support), Millennials aged 25 to 44 (91 percent support), Asians (88 percent support), and Americans with an annual family income of less than \$35,000 (88 percent support) were the demographic groups most supportive of this idea.

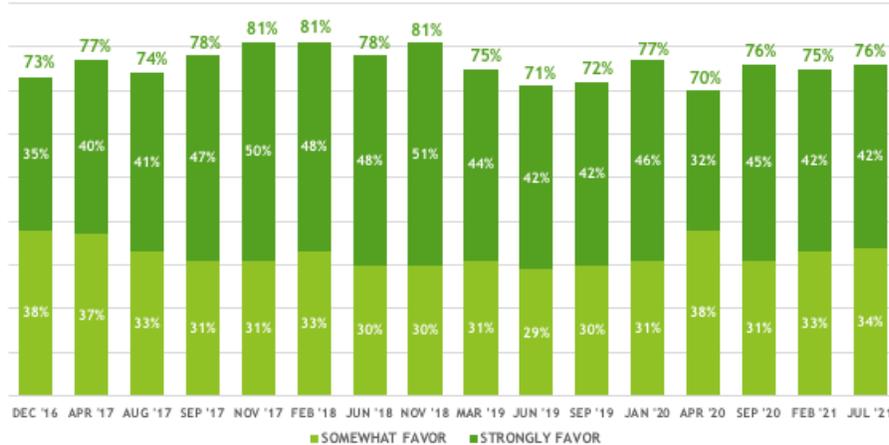
Question About Free College?

Please contact us at pressinquiries@freecollegenow.org.

The poll also found 76 percent overall support for “your state providing free tuition at public universities or colleges for anyone who is academically qualified.” In the sixteen times CFCT has polled this question since December 2016, overall support has ranged from 70 to 81 percent. The current results are statistically identical to our September 2020 poll showing 76 percent overall support and our January/February 2021 poll showing 75 percent overall support. In the current poll, African American respondents were the only demographic to prefer this statement (86 percent overall support) over the statement regarding a federal program that provides two years of free community college tuition to individuals looking to learn and improve their skills (82 percent overall support).

Respondents were asked their level of support for free college tuition. Specifically:

“Do you favor or oppose your state providing free tuition at public universities or colleges for anyone who is academically qualified?”



Overall support of a federal program that makes public four-year colleges and universities tuition-free for individuals with a family income below \$125,000 was 73 percent, again nearly identical to the 72 percent result in our January/February 2021 poll. The leading subgroups for this idea were Democrats (92 percent support), Plurals aged 18 to 25 (84 percent support), African Americans (83 percent support), and Hispanics (83 percent support).

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About Our Movement

About the Campaign for Free College Tuition

The Campaign for Free College Tuition (CFCT) is a bipartisan, inter-generational coalition which believes today's economy requires the country to make higher education affordable for everyone if we are going to have a workforce with the skills needed to compete in the global marketplace. Established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2014, CFCT has been at the forefront of the free college tuition movement since its inception. Additional information about CFCT can be found at www.freecollegenow.org

The Case for Making College Tuition Free

College Affordability is a Barrier

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, annual **published tuition at four-year public colleges has risen 36 percent between the 2008 and 2018 school years**. In 20 states, it's risen by more than 40 percent; in seven states, it's risen by more than 60 percent. The average state spent \$1,502 (16 percent) less per student in 2018 than in 2008.

Student Loan Debt Impacts Americans

According to the Institute for College Access & Success, **about two-thirds (65 percent) of college seniors who graduated from public and private nonprofit colleges in 2018 had student loan debt. These borrowers owed an average of \$29,000.**

Research suggests that college debt drives college graduates away from low-paying and public-sector jobs, delays retirement saving, and has a negative impact on small business development.

“Pursuing higher education can be transformational for individuals and communities across generations, but for too many students, financial barriers make a college degree beyond reach. New Mexico was the first state to provide tuition-free college to its citizens, and continues to expand tuition promise programs to benefit even more students,” Governor Lujan Grisham said. “I look forward to collaborating with fellow leaders to explore how we can make free college a reality for all students.”

— New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) in a June, 2021 press release announcing her appointment as Co-Chair of CFCT's Advisory Council.

“We don't want cost to be an obstacle anyone has to overcome as they pursue their own generational change for themselves and their families.”

—Former Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam (R) in announcing Tennessee Reconnect during his 2017 State of the State Address

“Tuition-free community college is one of the lowest-cost, highest-impact investments the State of Rhode Island has ever made.”

— Former Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo (D) in her 2019 State of the State Address. Raimondo resigned as Governor in March 2021 after being confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as the 40th and current United States Secretary of Commerce.

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America's Historic Commitment to Free Education

In every era, beginning with the Northwest Ordinance setting aside land for one room schoolhouses, to the institution of mandatory education through the establishment of free primary education in all states at the time of the Civil War, the country has made educational opportunity a lynchpin of American society. In the 20th Century, the expansion of educational opportunities continued as our growing Industrial Age economy required workers with a high school education for our factories and offices. Government funds in every state and community were set aside to provide a free, public high school education for young men and women to respond to these new demands. Later in the century, the GI Bill of Rights and then the Higher Education Act of 1965 were enacted to further encourage college enrollment, thereby establishing the educational foundation for our rapidly expanding middle class.

The New Economic Reality

Almost all (11.5 million of 11.6 million) of the new jobs added after the Great Recession and before the Covid-19 pandemic shut the economy down went to workers with at least some post-secondary education, while jobs for high school graduates barely grew at all.

Promise Programs Work

An examination of the first cohort of Tennessee Promise students shows a 56.2 percent success rate in terms of their college career. This compares to only a 38.9 percent success rate for their non-Promise peers.

The first cohort of Rhode Island's Promise increased first-time full-time enrollment straight from high school at the Community College of Rhode Island by 43 percent. These Promise scholars had a 62 percent retention rate between their first and second year of college.

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