



Campaign for Free College Tuition

MAKING PUBLIC COLLEGES TUITION FREE

A BRIEFING BOOK FOR STATE LEADERS

APRIL 2026

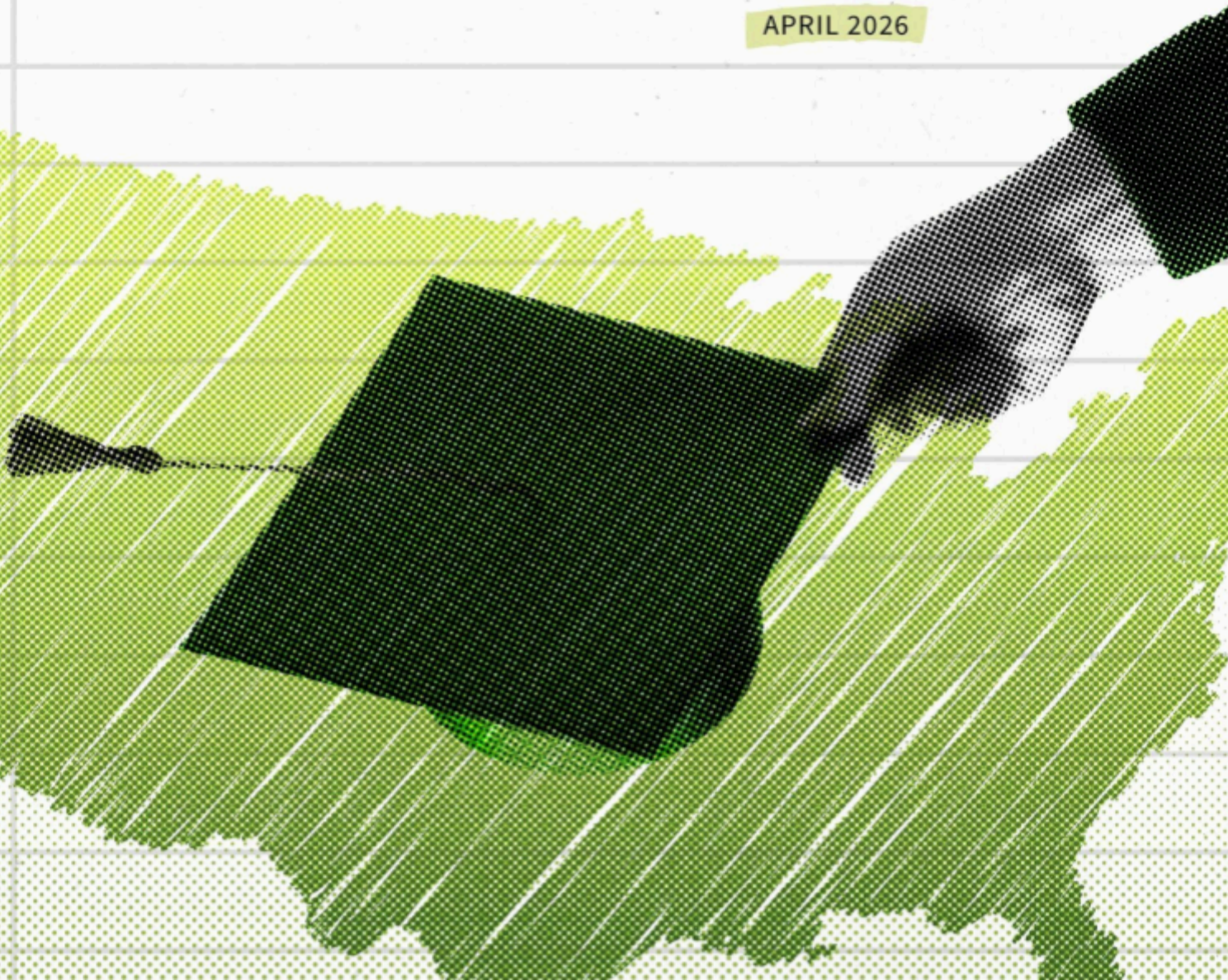


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CHAPTER I

The Case for Making College Tuition Free



Chapter I —

The Case for Making College Tuition Free

Free college tuition is a simple and effective solution to a difficult problem.

The new economic reality means higher education – whether it’s a technical credential, an associate degree, or a bachelor’s degree – is essential to earning a good job in good times and bad.

From January 2008 to January 2013, millions of people without college degrees lost jobs when the Great Recession hit and never regained them. Total employment in January 2013 was just 341,000 less than in January 2008, but the number of Americans without a high school diploma who were employed fell by more than 1.6 million. Over those same five years, the number of college-educated Americans with jobs increased more than 4.3 million.

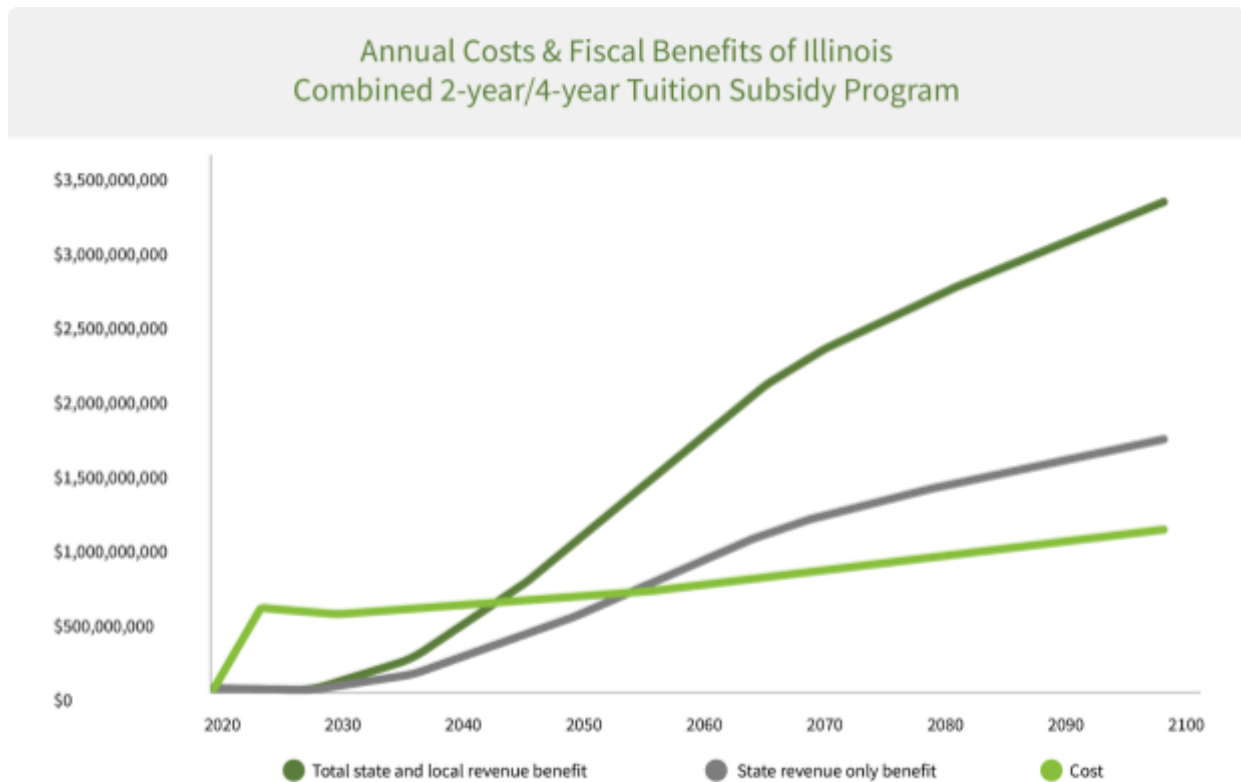
The pattern persisted after the Great Recession ended. Bureau of Labor Statistics data show Americans with college degrees accounted for all the net new jobs created over the last decade. In stark contrast, the number of Americans with high school diplomas or less who were employed has fallen by nearly three million since the Great Recession. As economist Rob Shapiro points out, from the first month of the last recession in January 2008 to December 2017, well into year nine of that economic expansion, the number of employed Americans with high school diplomas contracted by 2,095,000, and the number of people working without a high school diploma fell by 900,000. Through it all, the number of college-educated Americans with jobs jumped by 11,909,000. That’s 1,253,000 more than the total 10,656,000 net new jobs created across the economy, suggesting that college graduates are also now claiming new jobs that used to go to people without a B.A. degree.

How much people earn has also become increasingly dependent on how much higher education they have completed. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, in 2018, one year before the pandemic, the median annual earnings of full-time workers ages 25-37 was \$56,000 for those with a B.A. degree, but \$20,000 less for those who attended but did not complete college, and only \$31,000 for high school graduates. This gap in earnings between those with a B.A. degree and those without began to emerge in 1980 and has grown wider every year since.

The economic benefit of free college tuition is primarily higher earnings for workers with degrees, which means more tax revenue for the states. Fiscal returns or ROI occur when projected tax revenues exceed the costs of a free-college program. Of course, there are many other benefits to increasing educational attainment. Employers have access to a better-trained workforce, which spurs innovation and productivity. Higher educational attainment can also reduce crime and substance abuse, help

create more stable families, and lead to better outcomes for the children of college graduates. These ancillary impacts, however, are harder to quantify.

A study, done by the W.E. Upjohn Institute for the State of Illinois showed that a program of free college tuition would pay for itself over time. It found that for a combined two-year and four-year program, run from 2021 to 2030, the present value of total state and local revenue collections would be slightly under \$4.8 billion, which exceeded the present value of program costs of around \$4.0 billion. For the tuition subsidy program for just two-year degrees, running from 2021 to 2030, the present value of state and local revenue collections would be almost \$860 million, compared to the present value of program costs of almost \$440 million.

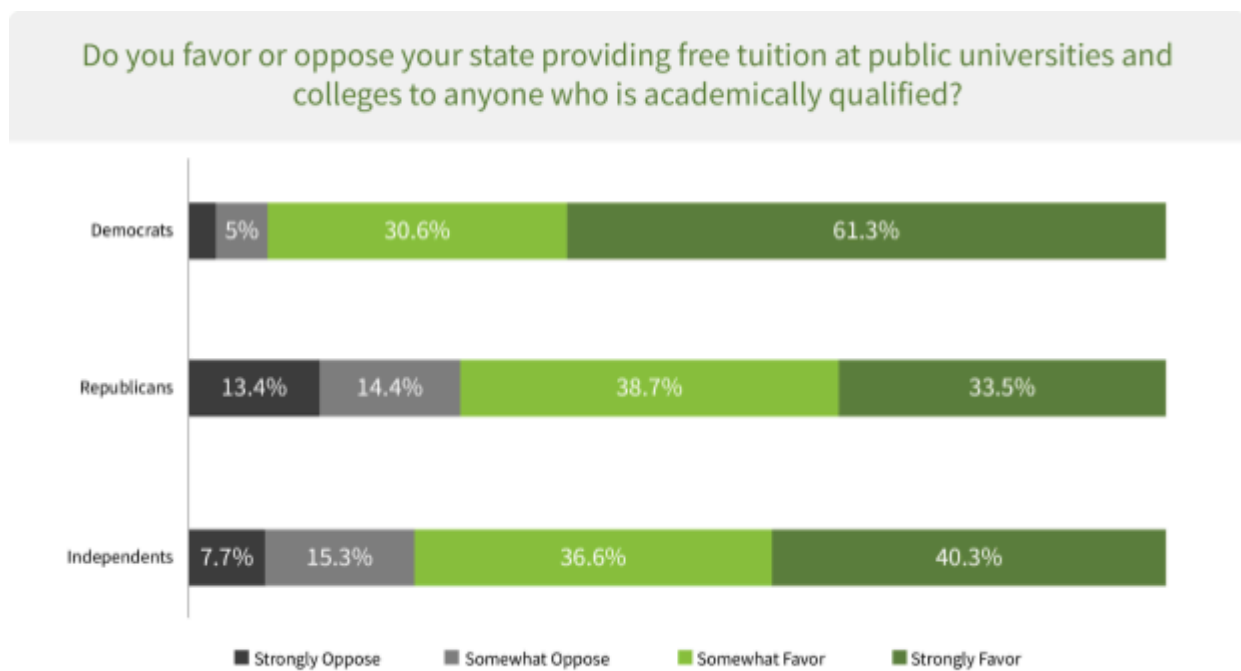


In sum, the study showed an investment by the state in either a two-year only, or a two-year and four-year combined tuition subsidy program, would yield benefits far beyond the costs of either program, although not immediately. Eventually, as shown on the chart above, annual fiscal benefits would exceed the tuition subsidy programs' costs. The study's research brief and full report can be found [here](#).

Free college tuition is sound public policy. It encourages states to invest in their higher education institutions, helps prepare their workforce for success in today's economy, reduces the number of students who have to go into debt to attend college and/or reduces the state's average student debt, and continues the country's historic commitment to an educated citizenry.

Between December 2016 and May 2025, the Campaign for Free College Tuition has conducted extensive public opinion research on states providing free college tuition to all those who are academically qualified. Our most recent polling was conducted in partnership with CollegeAPP, PSB Research and SurveyGizmo with roughly 1,000 respondents age 18+. The sample has a Margin of Error of +/-2.9% and is weighted to US Census data on age, gender, race, educational attainment and region of the country.

Support for this public policy has been remarkably stable over this time period despite the political turmoil the country has been experiencing at the national level. Overall support has ranged from 70% to 81% in the 17 surveys conducted. In our May 2025 survey 80% of US adults supported the concept of states providing free public education to people who are academically qualified.



About 72 percent of Republicans strongly or somewhat support the idea; so do 77 percent of independents. In an era of distinct and real policy differences by political party, free college might be *the* issue that bridges the partisan divide more than any other.

To garner support that strong, an issue must have support from all demographic groups – age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and, even by political affiliation. That continues to be the story for free college tuition. Going inside the overall numbers, the percentage of those who strongly support the concept hit its highwater mark of 50% in November 2017 and was still generating 45% support in May of 2025. The ethnic subgroups with the highest levels of “strong support” in our latest poll were African-Americans (56%) and Hispanics (55%). A majority of everyone under the age of 55 supported the idea of free college tuition in our May 2025 poll with the strongest support coming from those between the ages of 18 and 24 (58%) and those between the ages of 35 and 44 (54.5%).

We asked three questions in our May 2025 survey regarding the issue of what we should do about reskilling and up-skilling adults for the types of jobs that are being created for the future. Respondents were asked on a scale of 1 to 10 the degree to which they agree with the idea that Community Colleges in their state should be tuition free for:

1. individuals looking to learn a new skill or improve their existing skills; or
2. qualified individuals who want to attain a degree; or
3. for any adult who wants to learn new skills or get retraining.

The median level of agreement with the first statement was an 8 and a 7 for the other two. Clearly, the vast majority of Americans believe that public education and training should be tuition free for adults who want and need it.

This statement has remained true even as a growing number of Americans are questioning the value of a college education given its cost. In the same May 2025 survey, the median level of agreement with the statement “College is worth the money it costs to get a degree” was only a 6. And the idea that “it’s important for people to have a college degree in order to make a good living,” earned a median agreement score of just 5.8. Even so, the public continues to understand the relationship of a highly skilled workforce and the economy, with the statement, “my state needs more skilled workers to fill open jobs and help our economy,” gaining a very high median level of agreement of 8 with more than half of those surveyed strongly agreeing with the concept at the 8, 9 and or 10 level.

Earlier, in our September 2019 survey, we found strong support for making free college tuition programs available to everyone regardless of income. We found that the highest support (43%) was for state programs “available to all students regardless of family income.” The most support for this idea of universal free college tuition came from men under the age of 35 (58%) and individuals with incomes between \$75,000 and \$149,999 (49%). Programs that would limit eligibility based on family income were less popular. Just 30% of those surveyed supported programs “available only to students who otherwise couldn’t afford college,” while 27% supported programs “available to middle class and lower income families but not wealthier ones.”

The results send a simple message to legislators and other policymakers considering making their state’s public colleges tuition free: make college tuition free for those who are academically capable as universally available as you can to make sure the message is heard loud and clear in kitchen table conversations of families throughout your state.

In our May 2025 survey, we asked people to tell us how much of a priority they would place on spending money on free college tuition programs versus other possible policy priorities that use up sizable amounts of most state government budgets. Specifically, the survey asked the respondents to “imagine their state had a new amount of money to fund a list of programs and they could choose which ones to fund, which programs would-be their highest priority?”

K-12 programs were prioritized by 44.3% of those surveyed while making college tuition free for high school graduates came in second with 42.7% support. Improving roads and bridges finished third with 41.1% support, followed by expanding Medicaid (40.3%) and then, making college tuition free for adults and non-traditional students (40%). These were clearly the top five priorities for state spending with no other programs winning the support of more than a third of those surveyed. Spending money on parks and other natural resources (30.2%), public transportation (29.5%), preschool education (20%) and prison upkeep and expansion (12.1%) were all at the bottom of the list of state programs that respondents would prioritize for funding, even when doing so would not take money away from other state programs.

The Campaign for Free College Tuition has also conducted three polls that tested specific messaging around free college. In general, the surveys found that speaking about the benefits to people – young people, students, etc. – was more powerful than speaking about the overall value to society. But there is so much support for the idea that almost all messages, except statements without specifics, such as calling the program a “game changer,” were compelling.

- The most powerful way to talk about free college tuition in our public opinion research was, “Lack of money shouldn’t keep qualified students from going to college, and my state government should help.”
- “We need to make college free so young people don’t have a mountain of debt when they finish school” was the second most believable and persuasive statement among most demographic groups.
- One other message was almost as persuasive in all three polls with a wide swath of the adult population: “Free college tuition will strengthen our nation by providing people the tools they need to provide for their families.”

In our May 2025 survey, we asked how the respondent would react to learning that a candidate running for Governor supported the idea of making the state’s colleges tuition free. A solid majority (58.4%) said it would make them more likely to support such a candidate and only 18.2% said it would make them less likely to vote for that candidate. The overall results for state legislative candidates were similar at 56.4%.

The idea of supporting making college tuition free would be particularly helpful to gubernatorial candidates among young people, women, minorities and those with college degrees according to our May 2025 survey results. The positive impact of taking such a position was highest among those between the ages of 18-24 (69.2% of whom said it would make them more likely to support such a gubernatorial candidate), those between 25 and 34 (66.2%), 35-44 (64.6%), and even 45- to 54-year-olds (61.9%). Sixty percent of women, 78% of Blacks and 70% of Hispanics (69.5%) indicated supporting free college tuition would make them more likely to support a candidate running for Governor. Those with college degrees also said it would make them more likely to support a gubernatorial candidate (62.5% among those with a bachelor’s degree, 60.9% for those who have a

master's degree) but even 62.1% of those who didn't finish high school said it would help win their support as well.

In short, surveys say supporting the idea of making college tuition free is one of the most popular policy positions a candidate for state office can advocate.

The New Economic Reality

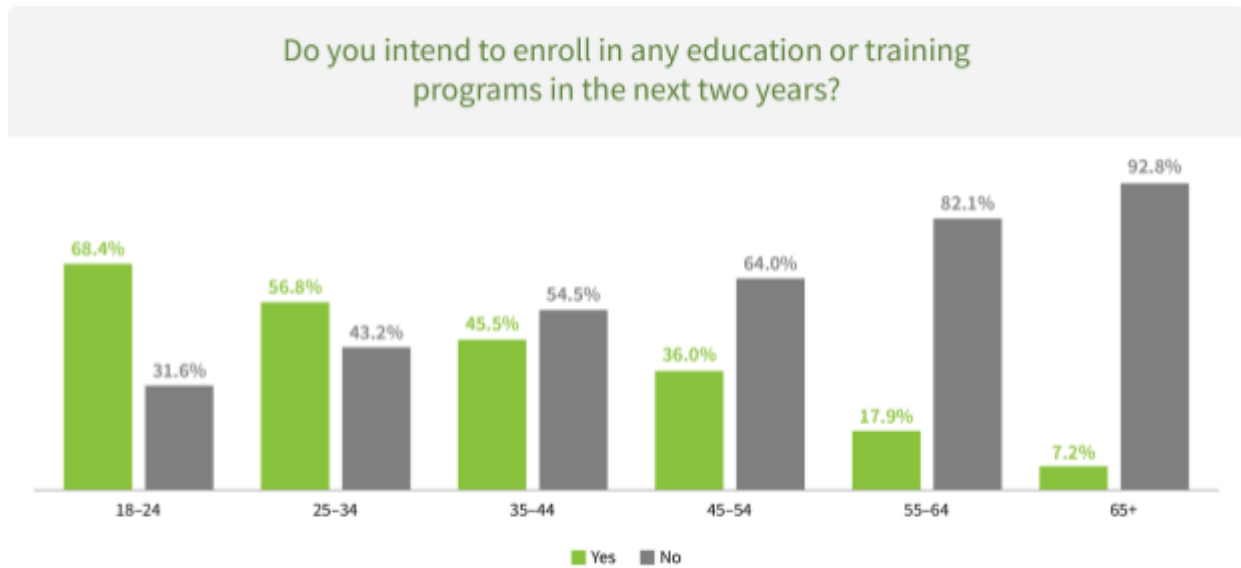
A 2002 [study](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that high school juniors who believe they can't afford to go to college are about 20 percentage points less likely to attend college than those who don't think their family's finances will make college unaffordable. The study found that the group most likely to enroll in college were those who believed they could afford college and had at least one parent who graduated from college. The group least likely to enroll not only believed they couldn't afford it but also had at least one parent whose education ended with high school. Just 55% of such students enrolled in college within three years of graduating from high school.

The study's findings are confirmed by the gains in enrollment that states with Promise programs have experienced, especially when they have been able to market such programs with a simple message—Tuition Is Free. It is critically important to a state's free tuition program's success that the message not only be simple but repeated throughout the student's K-12 educational experience so that each student knows early on that they can in fact afford to go to college.

Free tuition at public colleges and universities is not just an issue for high school graduates. Sarah Pingel, Emily Parker and Lauren Sisneros from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) [pointed out](#) that “there are simply not enough traditionally-aged high school and college students to create the educated workforce required for the 21st century economy. Compounding this issue, postsecondary policy at both the federal and state levels generally tips toward a myopic focus on serving 18- to 24-year-old students. This focus is not ill-placed, but alone, it excludes the needs of millions of Americans who have the potential to complete a credential and contribute meaningfully to state economies nationwide.” States considering starting or expanding their existing free college tuition programs must consider whether there is a need to create what are sometimes called “Reconnect” programs, like those enacted in Tennessee and Michigan among others, or simply “Adult Promise” programs, in order to meet the needs of those who are in the workforce and want to enhance their skills and to ensure the state's targets for an increasingly educated workforce are achieved.

A significant number of adults recognize the new reality that many workers will need new skills to do their jobs successfully. Data from the Strada Education Network's Education Consumer Survey indicates that an estimated 20.5 million working-age adults 25 to 64 years old say they intend to enroll in community or technical college in the next two years (data was compiled by CollegeAPP).

When CFCT asked the question— “do you intend to enroll in any education or training programs in the next two years?”—in our May 2025 survey, 35% of all adults said they intended to do so, either immediately or in the near future.



Even 18% of those over between the ages of 55 and 64 said they intended to access education or training in the next two years.

The numbers for every age group show that as the economy changes and Americans assess their challenges, needs and opportunities, they believe education and training is a key part of their individual strategy to get a better job. And, importantly, Americans of all ages believe those opportunities should be provided tuition free by their state government.

America’s Historic Commitment to Free Education

America has always used government resources to make primary and secondary education (K-12) free for those willing and able to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to succeed. Now it’s time to expand that concept to higher education to ensure we have a skilled workforce capable of competing in the 21st Century economy.

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 boys and girls to respond to these new demands. Later in the century, after WWII, 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.

It is only in this century that we have asked our young generations to self-finance the education they need, and our country needs, to be economically successful. This wrongheaded inter-generational and economically disastrous policy needs to end before America loses its global competitive edge for good.

CHAPTER II

States Taking the Lead in
Making Colleges Tuition Free:
Current State Programs

Chapter II —

States Taking the Lead in Making Colleges Tuition Free: Current State Programs

Arkansas Future Grant

Description

This state funded grant covers tuition and fees for qualifying certificate and Associate degree programs at Arkansas' public institutions for eligible students. It is awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis and provides up to five semesters of tuition and fees to students enrolled in a high demand field of study. It also contains reforms designed to enhance student accountability and success. All grant recipients are required to participate in both mentoring and community service programs (10 hours of community service per semester is required). Additionally, upon graduation, the student must reside and work in Arkansas for a minimum of three years. If a student does not complete his or her commitment, the grant will be converted to a loan for repayment to the State of Arkansas.

Website

<https://sams.adhe.edu/scholarship/details/ARFUTURE>

Enacting Legislation

<https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2017R%2FPublic%2FACT316.pdf>

Regulations

[https://adhe.edu/File/2025%20Policy%20Book%20\(10.25\).pdf#page=282](https://adhe.edu/File/2025%20Policy%20Book%20(10.25).pdf#page=282)

Funding Source

The program was initially funded by repurposing \$8.2 million in general revenue funds by canceling the Workforce Improvement Grant and the Higher Education Opportunities Grant. For the 2023-24 academic year, the program had 1,134 recipients and cost \$4.57 million. The program continues to be funded by state appropriated general revenue funds.

Eligibility

All applicants must:

- Have either graduated from an Arkansas public school, private school, home school or received a high school equivalency diploma approved by the Department of Career Education; or verify that he or she has resided within the state for the three (3) years immediately preceding application and has either: graduated from an out-of-state high school, private school, home school or received a high school equivalency diploma approved by another state;
- Be enrolled part-time or full-time at an approved institution of higher education in a program of study that leads to an associate degree or a certification in a STEM or regional high demand field; and
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

A student may continue to be eligible until the student has:

- Received an associate degree;
- Received funding from the ArFuture Grant for five (5) semesters;
- Failed to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) as determined by their institution of higher education; or
- Failed to complete mentoring or community service requirements.

California College Promise

Description

Governor Jerry Brown's signature of AB 19 in October 2017 laid the groundwork for the California College Promise. The legislature subsequently approved \$46 million to allow community college districts to choose whether they want to waive one-year of fees and tuition for first time, full-time students, or make use of program funding in other ways that meet the goals of the legislation to lower the financial burden of attending community college for those students. California's FY 2019-20 budget provided funds to extend the California College Promise to a second academic year. A higher education budget trailer bill – SB 77 (2019) – included the statutory changes necessary to expand the California College Promise for a second academic year.

The Promise builds on the California College Promise Grant, formerly the Board of Governors Fee Waiver, which provided over one million low-income students with tuition/fee free community college.

In addition to aiding students with tuition/fees at participating community colleges, the Promise aims to promote successful outcomes. To this end, participating community colleges must partner with one or more local educational agencies (LEAs) to establish an Early Commitment to College Program that will provide students, and their families, assistance in learning about postsecondary opportunities, completing college prep courses, and applying for college and financial aid.

Additionally, to be eligible for state support for free tuition for first-time full-time students, a community college must participate in the Guided Pathways Grant Program and in the Federal student loan program.

Enacting Legislation

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billPdf.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB19&version=20170AB1989C
[HP](#)

Funding Source

According to the CCC Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), from 2018-2023, \$375 million was allocated by the Legislature to colleges for purposes of administering the California College Program. On average, 75% of the allocated funds were spent on direct student aid.

For FY 2024- 25, the total appropriation was \$91.35 million.

Eligibility

AB 19 specifies the following criteria: completion of a FAFSA; specific enrollment requirements (i.e. first-time, full-time); and attendance at California community college district that partners with a school district or four-year public university.

The program was amended by AB 2 (2019) to allow disabled students enrolled in fewer than 12 units to be deemed “full-time” at the discretion of the institution, and by AB 1342 (2023) to allow students enrolled through a dual enrollment program in high school to be deemed as a first-time community college student.

Colorado Promise

Description

The Colorado Promise: Two Free Years of College Expanded is an income-qualified program that provides a tax reimbursement for out-of-pocket tuition and fees at public colleges and universities. Accordingly, it reimburses students with a household income of less than \$90,000 for tuition and fees paid after all scholarships, grants, and institutional aid have been applied.

Eligible students must enroll in a Colorado public college or university within two years of graduation, complete a FAFSA or CAFSA annually, complete a minimum of six credit hours in each term, earn a 2.5 or greater GPA each semester, and file a Colorado tax return the following year.

Website

<https://cdhe.colorado.gov/colorado-promise>

Enacting Legislation

<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb24-1340>

Funding Source

The program is expected to decrease General Fund revenue by \$36.7 million in FY 2025-26 and \$37.8 million in FY 2026-27, and by similar amounts thereafter. Small appropriations were awarded to the Department of Higher Education (\$101,800 in FY 2024-25) and the Department of Taxation (\$135,500 in FY 2025-26) for administrative support and to manage the tax credit claims.

Eligibility

Eligible students must:

- Qualify for in-state tuition;
- Complete high school after January 1, 2024;
- Complete a FAFSA or a Colorado Application for State Financial Aid every year;
- Have a family adjusted gross income (AGI) of \$90,000 or less;
- Enroll at a program at a public college or university. Students do not need to declare a major but must complete six credit hours per semester and be working towards a degree (bachelor's or associate) or a certificate.

Mary Ann Handley Award

Formerly the Pledge to Advance Connecticut (PACT)

Description

The enactment of Connecticut's biennial budget in June 2019 established a program that allows eligible first-time, full-time students to attend a community or technical college tuition-free. PACT provides a "middle dollar" scholarship to qualified residents who fill out FAFSA and take at least 12 credit hours each year. If the student's federal Pell Grant and/or state Roberta B. Willis Need-Merit Scholarship fully covers tuition, they will still get up to \$250 per semester grant to spend on other costs of attending college.

Funding for this program was initially slated to come from online lottery sales. The enacting legislation required Governor Ned Lamont (D) to consult with the Connecticut Lottery Corporation and other state officials and report to the legislature by February 5, 2020, on the feasibility of allowing online lottery sales through a website, online service, or mobile application.

PACT was however launched in the Fall of 2020 utilizing \$3 million in Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System reserves to pay for the first semester of the new program. The state's FY 2022 and FY 2023 budget enacted in June 2021 provided up to \$14 million to PACT in FY 2022 and up to \$15 million in FY 2023.

The program was expanded and officially renamed the "Mary Ann Handley Award" in late 2024 to honor the late state Senator Mary Ann Handley, a known advocate for accessible higher education in Connecticut.

Revised eligibility criteria in 2023 and 2024 removed requirements that students maintain continuous enrollment and a rigid 48-month completion timeframe. The updated program also no longer requires that students graduate from a high school in Connecticut to enroll.

Website

<https://ctstate.edu/free-tuition>

Enacting Legislation

<https://search.cga.state.ct.us/dl2019/pa/doc/2019PA-00117-R00HB-07424-PA.docx>

2023 Amendments:

<https://portal.ct.gov/das/-/media/das-beta/pdf/contractor-prequalification/2023pa-00204-r00hb-06941-pa.pdf>

2024 Amendments:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2024/act/Pa/pdf/2024PA-00081-R00HB-05523-PA.PDF>

Funding Source

When initially enacted, the legislature's Office of Fiscal Analysis anticipated that the program would cost up to \$8.1 million – including \$2 million in implementation and marketing – in FY 2021. The Office of Fiscal Analysis however noted that the higher enrollment resulting from free community college will generate between \$2.1 million and \$7.7 million in additional tuition and fees.

The state's 2023 budget bill eliminated the diversion of iLottery revenues to the debt free community college program. The program however received \$52 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the fiscal years 2023 through 2025.

Eligibility

To be eligible for Connecticut's program, applicants must:

- Be eligible for in-state tuition;
- Have graduated from high school;
- Enroll part- or full-time (6+ credits per semester) in a community college program leading to a certificate or degree;
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Accept all available financial aid that is not in the form of a federal, state, or private student loan;
- Must maintain satisfactory academic progress in college; and
- Be continuously enrolled at a community college with exceptions for an administratively approved medical or personal leave of up to six months or active-duty military service.

The state's Board of Regents for Higher Education is authorized to adopt additional rules, procedures and forms necessary to implement the debt-free community college program.

Delaware Student Excellence Equals Degree (SEED) Scholarship

Description

The Student Excellence Equals Degree (SEED) Scholarship was established in 2005 to provide last dollar tuition scholarships to qualified, in-state high school graduates attending Delaware Technical and Community College or the University of Delaware's Associate in Arts program. A similar program – the Inspire Scholarship – is available for students attending Delaware State University. Between 2007 and 2016, approximately 16,000 Delawareans received SEED scholarships.

In 2021, the program was expanded to include Delaware residents aged 25 or older wishing to pursue an academic credential or associate degree. Senate Bill 12, which was signed into law in October 2021, made several other related changes to their SEED scholarship program which are detailed in the Eligibility section below.

Made both credit or non-credit programs leading to the award of a recognized academic credential at Delaware Technical and Community College (DTCC) eligible for the scholarship.

Increased the number of continuous semesters for eligible participation from 6 to 10.

Made other adjustments to eligibility including removal of enrollment requirement to begin in the fall semester immediately following graduation from high school, permitting certain allowances for

GPA's less than 2.5, allowing leaves of absence for up to one year, and changing student certification criteria to allow participation of individuals convicted of a non-violent felony.

Websites

<https://delawarestudentsuccess.org/seed-and-inspire/>

<https://www.dtcc.edu/admissions-financial-aid/financial-aid-scholarships/types-aid/seed/>

Enacting Legislation

As Originally Enacted:

<https://legis.delaware.gov/SessionLaws/Chapter?id=18353>

2021 Expansion:

<https://legis.delaware.gov/SessionLaws/Chapter/GetPdfDocument?fileAttachmentId=448392>

Funding Source

The state's FY2024 operating budget contained approximately \$13.9 million for SEED and \$5.5 million for Inspire, with an additional \$5 million combined increase allocated to these programs in the FY2025 budget.

Eligibility

The expanded scholarship:

- Removes the age restriction for applicants, though people 25 years of age and over must meet a five-year Delaware residency requirement.
- Includes all credit and non-credit programs leading to the award of a recognized academic credential or associate degree (this includes short-term certificate programs in areas such as diesel technology, allied health, or information technology (IT).)
- Expands eligibility to 10 semesters, so scholarship recipients will have additional time to complete an academic degree program (this is critical for those who are going to school while working full-time and supporting their families).
- Allows students to go part-time after their first semester.
- Allows students to take a year off without losing their SEED scholarship. Additional gaps in enrollment can be approved based on military or volunteer service, medical conditions, or personal/financial hardship, but gaps in enrollment do not extend the five-year funding period.
- Includes students who have a GED or "Delaware State Board of Education Endorsement Secondary Credentials." Delaware Tech has created a GPA equivalency for students with a GED so they could directly enter an associate degree program if they have the equivalent of the required 2.5 GPA. However, those who graduate high school with less than a 2.5 GPA

may obtain an associate degree through the SEED scholarship program if they are enrolled in a pathway program and successfully complete each step. Workforce training certificates do not require a minimum GPA but do require graduation from a Delaware high school/GED program.

- Is available to individuals with non-violent felonies (previously, individuals with felony convictions were not eligible for the scholarship).

The following scholarship requirements from the original SEED scholarship still apply:

- The equivalency standards for Delaware home-schooled students shall be a complete home-schooled academic transcript, or a combined score of 1350 on the new SAT or a composite ACT score of at least 19.
- Undocumented students must meet the same eligibility requirements as documented students. Additionally, they must submit a notarized Tuition Affidavit which certifies that the student is an undocumented person and that s/he has filed an application to legalize his/her immigration status or will file an application to legalize his/her application status as soon as s/he is eligible.
- Individuals who lived in foster care at any point between the ages of 16 and 18, whether placed within or outside Delaware, qualify for the SEED Scholarship provided they meet in-state tuition residency requirements.
- A student must be admitted to college.
- A student must complete and submit the FAFSA. If Pell Grant funds cover full tuition, the SEED Scholarship will NOT be awarded. If Pell Grant funds do NOT cover full tuition, the SEED Scholarship will be awarded to cover the difference up to the cost of tuition. A student must also complete all institutional forms and supporting documentation as requested by the campus. A student should apply for financial aid by the priority date of April 1 of each year.

Hawai'i Promise

Description

Hawai'i Promise is a last dollar scholarship program that makes the University of Hawai'i Community College (UHCC) tuition-free for students with financial need. The program covers all direct education costs – including tuition, fees, books, supplies and a standard transportation allowance – for eligible students.

Students are considered for the Hawai'i Promise when they submit their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and they do not need to apply for the program separately. Average family income

of Hawai'i Promise scholarship recipients in FY 2024 was \$43,143 (Adjusted Gross Income), well below the state's median household income of \$95,322.

Website

<https://hawaii.hawaii.edu/financialaid/hawaiipromise>

Enacting Legislation

https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hrscurrent/Vol05_Ch0261-0319/HRS0304A/HRS_0304A-0506.htm

Funding Source

The state budget provides annual funding for the program. In fiscal year 2024, \$5.5 million was awarded to 3,446 eligible students across the seven UH Community Colleges.

In order to receive the Hawai'i Promise, students must:

- Complete the FAFSA;
- Be a State of Hawai'i resident or qualify for exempt status that pays in-state tuition;
- Enroll in a UH System community college for at least 6 credits per semester;
- Be degree-seeking in a financial aid eligible program;
- Accept all federal and state grants, scholarships, and any other funding sources that do not require repayment;
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress, and;
- Not have already achieved an undergraduate degree.

Indiana Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant

Description

The Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant pays tuition and mandatory fees for eligible high-value certificate programs at Ivy Tech Community College, Vincennes University, Indiana Institute of Technology, or other approved providers. The grant is available for two years and covers up to the number of credits required by the qualifying program. The grant does not cover courses that do not directly apply to the student's certificate program. Program-specific fees and equipment are not covered.

Qualifying high-value certificate programs are selected based on employer demand, wages, job placements and program completion rate. They currently include programs in the following fields: advanced manufacturing, building and construction, health sciences, IT and business services, and transportation and logistics.

The Workforce Ready Grant program is implemented jointly by the Department of Workforce Development and the Commission for Higher Education who provide grants to non-credit bearing providers and credit bearing providers respectively.

Website

<https://www.in.gov/cbe/state-financial-aid/state-financial-aid-by-program/workforce-ready-grant/>

Indiana Code

See IC 21-12-8-9 through IC 21-12-8-13

<http://iga.in.gov/legislative/laws/2021/ic/titles/021/#21-12-8-9>

Funding Source

The state's current biennial budget appropriates approximately \$5.7 million annually for grants.

Eligibility

- Be an Indiana resident and U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Have a high school diploma (or equivalent) but less than a college degree
- Enroll in a qualifying program at an eligible training provider
- File a FAFSA
- Enroll full-time if a dependent student
- Enroll at least half time if an independent student
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress
- Meet any other minimum criteria established by the Commission

Indiana 21st Century Scholarship

Description

The 21st Century Scholarship is an “early promise” program that offers income-eligible Hoosier students up to four years of paid tuition at a state college or university. Students must apply in the 7th or 8th Grades, maintain a 2.5 HS GPA, and fulfill a twelve-requirement pledge.

Income limitations for the Scholarship are based on household size. The current maximum annual income for a family of four is \$49,025.

Website

<https://learnmoreindiana.org/scholars/enroll>

Indiana Code

<http://iga.in.gov/legislative/laws/2021/ic/titles/021#21-12-6>

Funding Source

The program's funding is included in the state's \$398.7 million annual appropriation to the Commission for Higher Education for student financial aid. The 21st Century Scholarship program cost \$173 million in FY 2019.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be an Indiana resident when applying and receiving the scholarship
- Be one of the following:
 - A U.S. citizen or U.S. national
 - A U.S. permanent resident
 - A non-citizen with one of the following designations:
 - Refugee
 - Asylum Granted
 - Indefinite Parole and/or Humanitarian Parole
 - Cuban-Haitian Entrant, Status Pending
- Be enrolled in the 7th or 8th grade at an Indiana public or private school accredited by the Indiana Department of Education.
- Meet the family income eligibility guidelines detailed below.

Household Size	Maximum Annual Income
2	\$32,227
3	\$40,626
4	\$49,025
5	57,424
6	\$65,823
7 or more	For each additional person, add \$8,399

Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship

Description

The Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship was a cornerstone of Governor Kim Reynold's 2018 "Future Ready Iowa" initiative, which aimed to ensure that 70% of Iowa's workforce has education or training beyond high school by 2025. The last-dollar program began awarding funds to certificate, diploma, and associate degree students attending community college or accredited private schools during the 2019-20 academic year.

The program requires eligible students to have a Student Aid Index (SAI) at or below \$20,000. Recipients must enroll at least part-time in an eligible program, which are selected at the state level based on Iowa's list of high-demand, high-need occupations.

Website

<https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/financial-aid/scholarships-grants/last-dollar>

Iowa Code

<https://law.justia.com/codes/iowa/2023/title-vii/chapter-261/section-261-131/>

Funding Source

The Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship Program is funded by an annual General Fund appropriation in the Education Appropriations Act. The program's FY 2025 appropriation is approximately \$23.93 million.

Eligibility

Scholarship applicants must:

- File a FAFSA;
- Have recently completed an Iowa high school diploma, a homeschool program, or high school equivalency diploma, OR be age 20 and older;
- Enroll at least part-time in an eligible program of study;
- Apply for all other available state and federal grants and scholarships; and
- Have a Student Aid Index (SAI) at or below \$20,000.

Scholarship recipients must:

- Remain an Iowa resident
- Attend a college orientation session;

- Register for courses with the assistance of an advisor;
- Participate in available academic advising sessions;
- Participate in available career advising sessions if required by your program of study;
- Continuously receive a Last-Dollar Scholarship disbursement in each semester/term (summer semester/term is not required);
- Maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP);
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**) annually; and
- Remain continuously enrolled in at least 6 hours per semester/term (summer semester/term is not required).

All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship

Description

The All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship is a last dollar scholarship for students who attend an Iowa college/university within two years of completing a high school diploma. Priority is given to the following individuals:

- Students who age out of Iowa’s foster care system, age out of the State Training School, and students adopted from Iowa’s foster care system after age 16;
- Children of deceased public safety workers;
- Students who participated in certain federal TRIO programs while in high school (Upward Bound, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Center);
- Graduates from alternative high schools or alternative high school programs; and
- Students who participated in a Federal GEAR UP Grant program in Iowa

The amount of the AIOS adjusts each year. For the 2025-26 school year, the maximum award is \$5,334. Students who are first-time recipients of AIOS in the 2025-26 school year can receive the scholarship for up to eight full-time semesters, or sixteen part-time semesters, so long as they are continuously enrolled in college.

Website

<https://educate.iowa.gov/higher-ed/financial-aid/scholarships-grants/aios>

Iowa Code

<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/261.87.pdf>

Funding Source

In 2023-24, a total of 925 students were designated to receive the scholarship, and of those students 737 attended an eligible institution and received the award. A total of \$3,294,100 in scholarship funding was distributed, with an average award of \$4,470. The program FY2024 appropriation from the state's General Fund appropriation was \$3.23 million.

Eligibility

High school seniors are eligible for the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship if they meet the following criteria:

- Iowa resident;
- Attend an eligible Iowa college or university;
- Must have graduated from an eligible Iowa high school or completed a high school equivalency diploma within the last 2 years;
- Be a first-time college freshman;
- Must be continuously enrolled in college and continuously receiving a scholarship disbursement for renewal;
- Enroll for at least 3 semester hours (or the trimester or quarter equivalent) in a program leading to an undergraduate degree, diploma or certificate;
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Iowa Financial Aid Application by April 1; and
- Have an eligible Student Aid Index (SAI) on the 2025-26 FAFSA. The SAI range for scholarship eligibility for 2025-26 is (-1,500) - 10,669.

Renewals require continuous college enrollment and a scholarship disbursement in each semester/term, annual completion of the FAFSA, and having an eligible Student Aid Index (SAI) throughout the entire school year.

Kansas Promise

Description

The Kansas Promise Scholarship was enacted in 2021 to assist students attending Kansas community colleges, technical colleges, Washburn Institute of Technology and certain private postsecondary educational institutions. Eligible postsecondary programs must be in one of the following fields of study: Information technology and security; mental and physical healthcare; advanced manufacturing and building trades, or early childhood education and development. Additionally, each eligible postsecondary institution may designate one additional associate degree, CTE certificate, or standalone program that corresponds to a high wage, high demand or critical need occupation.

The last dollar scholarship requires recipients to sign an agreement to live and work in the State of Kansas for two consecutive years following the successful completion of their program of study.

Failure to do so requires repaying the scholarship with interest.

Website

https://www.kansasregents.gov/students/student_financial_aid/promise-act-scholarship

Enacting Legislation

http://www.kslegislature.org/li/b2021_22/measures/documents/hb2064_enrolled.pdf

Funding Source

The enacting legislation establishes the Kansas Promise Scholarship Program Fund to be administered by the state's Board of Regents. The legislature appropriated \$10 million for the program in FY 2022 and FY 2023. Beginning in FY 2024, subsequent appropriations could not exceed 150% of the preceding year's expenditures.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Kansas Promise, applicants must:

- Be a U.S. citizen and a Kansas resident, AND
- Have graduated from a Kansas high school within the preceding 12 months or have received a GED or other high school equivalency credential within the preceding 12 months; AND
- Have a family household income of \$100,000 or less for a family of one or two; \$150,000 or less for a family of three, or for household sizes above three, a household income that is equal to or less than \$150,000 plus \$4,800 for each additional family member; OR
- Have been a Kansas resident for the preceding three consecutive years; OR
- Be a dependent child of a military servicemember who is stationed in another state and who, within the preceding 12 months, graduated from an out-of-state high school or obtained a GED or other high school equivalency credential; OR
- Have been in the custody of the secretary of children and families at any time when enrolled in and attending any of the grades 9-12 AND NOT be eligible for assistance under the Kansas Foster Child Educational Assistance Act.

To apply and remain qualified for the Kansas Promise Scholarship, students must:

- Complete the Kansas Promise Scholarship application and submit their application to schools' financial aid office; AND

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); AND
- Enroll in an eligible program of study at an eligible postsecondary institution; AND
- Sign a Kansas Promise Scholarship Agreement that you agree to live and work in Kansas for a minimum of two consecutive years following successful completion of your program; AND
- Complete and submit the Kansas Promise Scholarship Renewal application (and the FAFSA) each school year to continue receiving the Kansas Promise Scholarship; AND
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress and complete the Promise program within 36 months of first being awarded a Kansas Promise Scholarship.

Kentucky Work Ready Scholarship

Description

The Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship is a last-dollar scholarship for Kentuckians who have not yet earned an associate degree. Applicants must be accepted or enrolled in a qualifying certificate and diploma program in one of Kentucky’s top five high-demand workforce sectors — currently Construction, Education, Healthcare, Manufacturing and Logistics, and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services. The Scholarship limits the maximum award to the in-state tuition and fees rate for full-time enrollment at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System.

The program was initially established in December 2016 through an executive order by Governor Matt Bevin (R). It was subsequently codified into law by Kentucky Senate Bill 98 during the 2019 legislative session.

Website

<https://workreadykentucky.com/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/19RS/sb98.html>

Funding Source

The program is funded from General Fund appropriations. According to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2024, the program served 4,360 students at a cost of \$12.62 million.

Eligibility

All applicants must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident;

- Be a Kentucky resident;
- Be a high school graduate or be enrolled in or have completed a General Educational Development (GED) Program;
- Have not earned an associate's or higher degree;
- Be enrolled, or accepted for enrollment, at an eligible postsecondary institution in an approved program of study that leads to an industry recognized certificate or diploma or Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in a high-demand workforce sector;
- Not be enrolled in an ineligible degree program, such as a bachelor or other associate; program, at the same or any other institution; and
- Not be in default on any obligation to KHEAA.

In college, recipients must maintain satisfactory academic progress as determined by the eligible postsecondary institution.

Eligibility expires when the first of the following conditions is met:

- Receipt of scholarship funding for the equivalent of four academic terms;
- Receipt of the scholarship for 60 credit hours of enrollment; or
- Receipt of a first associate degree.

Louisiana – M.J. Foster Promise Program

The M.J. Foster Promise Program is a state-funded financial aid program that covers tuition, mandatory fees, and required instructional materials for students pursuing associate degrees or short-term credentials in five high-demand industry sectors: healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, construction, and transportation and logistics. Students may enroll in a qualified program at a two-year public college or university, or an accredited proprietary school licensed by the Board of Regents.

A unique feature of the program is its “hybrid” last-dollar structure. For a student's first semester or initial payment, program awards are treated as first-dollar funding. For the student’s second semester and beyond, the program shifts to a last-dollar model. Awards are capped at \$3,200 per year, with a lifetime maximum benefit of \$6,400 per student.

The program’s legislation was championed and co-authored by prominent legislative leaders, including Senate President Page Cortez and House Speaker Clay Schexnayder. It is named in honor of the late former Louisiana Governor Murphy J. "Mike" Foster, who is widely considered the "founding

father" of the state's community and technical college system. The program began accepting applications for its first cohort in July 2022.

Website

<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/mjfooster/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1236005>

Funding Source

Funding for the MJ Foster Promise Program is provided through the M.J. Foster Promise Program Fund, a statutorily dedicated fund that primarily receives annual transfers from the State General Fund. While the program's baseline appropriation was initially capped at \$10.5 million annually, 2024 legislation increased the maximum potential annual appropriation to \$40 million to accommodate growing demand. A total of \$17.43 million was dispersed for the 2024-25 award year – which was possible due to \$7.3 million from the first implementation year being re-allocated back into the program.

Eligibility

To qualify for a M.J. Foster Promise Program award, a student must:

- Be at least 19 years of age. The minimum age requirement is scheduled to decrease annually until it reaches 17.
- Have earned a high school diploma or equivalent or co-enroll in a qualified program of study and in a program to earn a high school credential that is recognized by the state of Louisiana.
- Be a U.S. Citizen and a Louisiana Resident.
- Have not previously earned an undergraduate degree at the associate level or above.
- Submit a MJ Foster Program Award Application
- File a FAFSA.
- If a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces has been separated from service, has received an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions.
- Meet the admission requirements of the institution the student plans to attend; and
- Enroll and remain enrolled in an eligible program of study through the 14th class day at semester schools, or, for any qualifying summer sessions, students attending proprietary schools, and students enrolled in a program that is not provided on a traditional semester/term basis, through the end of the last day to drop and receive a full refund for the course of study in which enrolled.

- Agree to reside and work full time in Louisiana for a minimum of one year after the completion of the last program of study for which funding is received.
- Certify that they have a family income that does not exceed three hundred percent of the federal poverty guidelines; or certify that they are currently unemployed or have been underemployed for a period of at least six months prior to the date they would receive an award.
- Certify that they are not currently imprisoned or have been convicted of a violent crime.

Louisiana Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)

Description

Louisiana’s Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) is a comprehensive program of state scholarships. The program has four award components.

1. *TOPS Opportunity Award*

Eligibility requirements for HS graduates include a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and an ACT composite score of at least 20.

2. *TOPS Performance Award*

Eligibility requirements for HS graduates include a 3.0 HS GPA in core courses and an ACT composite score of at least 23.

3. *TOPS Honors Award*

Eligibility requirements for HS graduates include a 3.0 HS GPA in core courses and an ACT composite score of at least 27.

4. *TOPS Tech Award*

Eligibility requirements for class of 2022 HS graduates include a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and an ACT composite score of at least 17 or a silver level score on the ACT WorkKeys assessments.

All four TOPS programs require completion of HS core curriculum and continuous full-time enrollment at an eligible Louisiana postsecondary institution – including Louisiana public colleges and universities, members of the Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU), and certain Louisiana cosmetology and proprietary schools.

Payment of TOPS Awards is contingent upon appropriations by the Louisiana Legislature and vary by institution. A [chart](#) on the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) website details current award amounts. Other scholarships and financial aid can be used with TOPS up to the student’s full course of attendance. Based on federal guidelines this may include: tuition and fees, on campus room and board (or a housing and food allowance for off-campus students), and allowances

for books, supplies, transportation, child care, costs related to a disability, and miscellaneous expenses.

Website

<https://mylosfa.la.gov/students-parents/scholarships-grants/tops/>

Louisiana Revised Statutes

RS 17:5001 to 17:5069 - <https://legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?p=y&d=963507>

Funding Source

For FY 2025-26, TOPS is funded by both the State General Fund (approximately \$168 million) and statutory dedications (approximately \$117.6 million drawn primarily from the TOPS Fund).

Eligibility

To qualify for TOPS, a student must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Meet TOPS Louisiana residency requirements.
- Complete all required units on the TOPS or TOPS Tech core curricula.
- Meet minimum Core GPA requirements (by award level) upon high school graduation.
- Meet minimum ACT composite score requirements (by award level).

Maine Free College Scholarship

Description

Maine Governor Janet Mills (D) proposed making community college tuition-free for recent high school graduates in her 2022 State of the State Address. The state's 2022 Supplemental Budget, enacted by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Mills, subsequently dedicated \$20 million in one-time General Fund to establish a last dollar scholarship providing up to two years of tuition free community college.

In 2025, legislators on the Financial Affairs and Finance Committee voted to wind down the program, instead of endorsing Governor Mill's proposal to make it permanent. According to Maine Community College System President David Daigler, "the committee's vote reflects the state's challenging financial situation, which made it hard to get support even though Free College is a very popular, effective program that directly benefits Maine families, students, and employers." The legislature did however provide \$20 million to the Maine Community College System to continue paying the educational costs for current participants and for members of the Class of 2025.

To qualify for the Free College Scholarship, students must have a high school diploma or equivalent from 2023-25, enroll full-time in an associate degree program or one-year credential, live in Maine while enrolled, and accept all federal and state grants, scholarships and other funding sources.

Website

<https://www.mccs.me.edu/freecollege/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://legislature.maine.gov/ros/LawsOfMaine/breeze/Law/getDocById/?docId=86715>

Funding Source

The state budget. Maine Governor Janet Mills' 2022 supplemental budget initially allocated \$20 million allocation for tuition-free college.

Eligibility

Eligible students must:

- Graduate from high school or earn a HiSet/GED in 2023 to 2025. While there are no income or age limits for students who graduated during these years, students must enroll before the following timeframes:
 - 2023 grads – No later than Fall 2025, Spring 2026, or Summer 2026
 - 2024 grads – No later than Fall 2026, Spring 2027, or Summer 2027
 - 2025 grads – No later than Fall 2027, Spring 2028 or Summer 2028
- Complete a Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Accept all state and federal grants and scholarships;
- Enroll full time, earning 30 credits per year;
- Pursue an associate degree or academic credential; Participate in academic planning and advising to stay on track to completion;
- Live in Maine at the time of enrollment and while enrolled in the program.

Maryland Community College Promise

Description

In the final hour of the 2018 legislative session, Maryland legislators agreed to authorize and fund a \$15 million community college Promise program, which began awarding last-dollar scholarships in the Fall of 2019. It was a compromise between the Senate, which passed a bill to create a \$30 million program, and the House, which wanted to start with only \$10 million.

The enacting legislation limits the annual scholarship award to \$5,000 per recipient – which is enough to make most community colleges in the state tuition free for eligible students – or actual tuition, whichever is less. Recipients meeting specified eligibility criteria are eligible for up to three years of awards.

Subsequent legislative amendments removed requirements to work full-time in Maryland after graduation, provided for half-time or greater enrollment (6+ credits per semester), and provided for adult learners by removing the requirement to apply within two years of graduating high school. Bills enacted in 2025 (HB 473/SB 269) extended the length of time from three to up to six years that a part-time student can receive an award, ensuring that these students have enough time to complete a degree without losing funding.

If the state’s appropriation is insufficient, initial awards will be prioritized to students with the greatest financial need. Priority for awards in subsequent years will be given to prior year recipients who remain eligible for the program.

Website

https://mhec.maryland.gov/preparing/pages/financialaid/programdescriptions/prog_mdcommunitycollegepromisescholarship.aspx

Enacting Legislation

http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2018RS/Chapters_noln/CH_554_hb0016e.pdf

Funding Source

The program is funded from the State General Fund. For FY 2026, its enacted appropriation was \$13.5 million.

Eligibility

An applicant must:

- Submit either the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or, if undocumented, the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA);
- Be a high school graduate or GED recipient who is planning to enroll, or is currently enrolled, at a Maryland community college as a candidate in: a credit-bearing vocational certificate; a credit-bearing certificate; an associate degree program; a sequence of credit or non-credit courses that leads to licensure or certification, or; a registered apprenticeship program;
- Be eligible for in-state tuition, as determined by the community college;
- Have earned an unweighted high school cumulative GPA of at least a 2.3 (or its equivalent) if enrolling directly from high school. Applicants currently or previously enrolled at a community college must have earned either: a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.5 from the

community college; or a high school unweighted cumulative GPA of at least a 2.3 or its equivalent;

- Have an annual adjusted gross income not more than \$100,000 if the applicant is single or resides in a single-parent household; or \$150,000 if the applicant is married or resides in a two-parent household for the 2023 tax year;
- Have not earned a bachelor's degree or an associate degree; and
- Have not been awarded other educational grants or scholarships that cover their full cost of attendance at a community college.

For continued eligibility, maintain at least a 2.5 cumulative community college GPA if enrolled in a credit bearing program; make satisfactory academic progress toward a vocational certificate, or; participate in a registered apprenticeship program.

MassReconnect and MassEducate

Description

Tuition-free community college in Massachusetts was achieved in two distinct legislative phases: first targeting adult learners (MassReconnect), and then expanding to a universal model for all residents (MassEducate). Both MassReconnect and MassEducate are last dollar programs.

MassReconnect was a signature proposal of Governor Maura Healey's first budget in 2023. In addition to making community college tuition-free for adults 25 and older who do not already have a college degree, the program initially provided each community college with \$100,000 to support student and community program awareness, staffing, and program administration.

The Commonwealth's FY 2025 Appropriations Act, enacted in July 2024, established MassEducate. This expansion provides all Massachusetts residents, regardless of age or income who have yet to earn a bachelor's degree, the opportunity to earn a tuition-free associate degree or certificate at any Massachusetts community college. Both programs provide a books and supplies allowance for eligible students. Eligibility for this allowance is based on household income for MassEducate, while all MassReconnect students are eligible for up to \$1,000 per year for books and supplies.

State Senate President Karen Spilka was the primary legislative architect and vocal champion of universal tuition-free community college. Upon passage of the budget containing MassEducate, she stated her goal was to "shift conversations about college from 'I wish' to 'I will.'"

Website

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/free-community-college>

Funding Source

Both programs are primarily funded by revenue generated from the Fair Share Amendment (often called the "Millionaire's Tax"), a 4% surtax on annual income over \$1 million that voters approved in 2022. For FY 2025, the total state investment for free community college tuition and fees is \$117.5 million.

Eligibility

To be eligible for tuition-free community college in Massachusetts, students must:

- Complete and file a FAFSA. Eligible, non-U.S. citizens can apply for state financial aid at Massachusetts public higher education institutions through the MASFA (Massachusetts Application for State Financial Aid);
- Enroll as a full-time or part-time student in one of Massachusetts' 15 public community colleges with a high school diploma (or equivalent);
- Enroll in at least six credits per semester in an approved program of study leading to an associate degree or certificate;
- Have not earned a prior bachelor's degree (or the equivalent);
- Live in Massachusetts for at least one year with an intent to stay in the state;
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress according to the college's requirements; AND
- Not be in default on any federal or state educational loan.

Michigan Reconnect

Description

Michigan Reconnect is a last dollar scholarship program that pays for adults aged 25+ to attend an in-district community college tuition-free. Michigan Reconnect offers a case study of how the parties can work together to address the ongoing need for a skilled workforce.

In Governor Gretchen Whitmer's (D) first State of the State address in 2019, she made closing the state's "skills gap" a major theme and proposed Reconnect as one way to produce more skilled workers. Normally, a proposal coming from the governor of one party to the Legislature controlled by the other party carries scant prospects. But the governor did two things differently to avoid a "dead on arrival" verdict for her initiative: She convinced the Democratic leaders in the Legislature to let her staff look for Republicans to be the chief sponsors of the proposal in both houses; and she asked the business, labor and education groups that supported new opportunities for adults to acquire more skills to come out publicly for Reconnect — which they did at a press conference with the governor and Republican bill sponsors in the spring of 2019.

Then the Republicans in the Legislature took over. With Rep. Ben Frederick in the House and Sen. Ken Horn in the Senate as the primary bill sponsors, the Republicans took the governor’s proposal and revised it to reflect their priorities and political philosophy. In the Spring of 2020, the bill was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and signed into law.

The launch of Reconnect was however delayed nearly a year due to fiscal uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the interim, Governor Whitmer utilized \$24 million in Governor’s Emergency Education Relief funds from the CARES Act to establish “Futures for Frontliners.” This initiative offered tuition-free college or high school completion to state residents who provided essential front-line services during COVID-19 Stay Home, Stay Safe orders between April and June 2020. Over 12,000 Frontliners enrolled in community college.

Website

<https://www.michigan.gov/reconnect/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/archive/2021/April/mcl-Act-84-of-2020.pdf>

Funding Source

Michigan Reconnect is funded primarily by state General Fund/General Purpose (GF/GP) dollars appropriated in the annual state budget. The state’s FY 2025 budget provides \$52 million for the program.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Michigan Reconnect, applicants must:

- Be at least 25 years old;
- Have lived in Michigan for a year or more ;
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent;
- Have not yet completed a college degree (associate or bachelor's).

After completion of a Michigan Reconnect application, prospective students must:

- Apply to and be admitted to a Michigan public community college;
- File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

In order to continue receiving the Michigan Reconnect scholarship, participants must:

- Continue to be a Michigan resident;
- Earn at least 12 credits in required coursework each academic year;

- Meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) or maintain a minimum cumulative 2.0 GPA since becoming a Michigan Reconnect participant;
- Annually submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Michigan Community College Guarantee

Description

The state's FY 2024-25 state education budget expanded the Michigan Achievement Scholarship to include a "Community College Guarantee" for recent high school graduates. The last dollar program designed to cover the cost of in-district tuition and mandatory fees began enrolling students in the Fall of 2024. Pell eligible students however receive an additional \$1,000 annually to cover non-tuition costs of attendance.

Website

<https://www.michigan.gov/mistudentaid/programs/michigan-achievement-scholarship/community-college-guarantee>

Enacting Legislation

<https://legislature.mi.gov/documents/2023-2024/publicact/pdf/2024-PA-0120.pdf>

Funding Source

The state's FY 2025 budget transferred \$330 million of General Funds into a restricted Postsecondary Scholarship Fund that provides funding for Michigan Achievement Scholarships – including the Community College Guarantee.

Eligibility

Eligible Michigan high school graduates must:

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Be a Michigan resident since July 1 of the previous calendar year. The parent(s) of dependent students must also be a Michigan resident since July 1 of the previous calendar year;
- Be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or approved refugee;
- Graduate from a Michigan high school;
- Enroll full time at their local (in-district) community college;
- Enroll within 15 months of high school graduation.

Michigan Promise Zones

A few years after the Kalamazoo Promise awarded its first scholarships, Michigan’s legislature and then Governor Jennifer Granholm (D) enacted the Michigan Promise Zone Authority Act. The measure establishes “Promise Zones,” which are public-private partnerships committed to ensuring that every child in a community has a tuition-free path to at least an associate degree, in economically distressed communities/counties.

In November 2017, Governor Rick Snyder (R) signed legislation authorizing the state to certify up to 15 Promise Zones – a 50% increase from the previous 10.

Website

<https://promisezonesmi.com/>

Enacting Legislation

[http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(av2g1lqilnt33zyoghihcuv\)\)/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-549-of2008.pdf](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(av2g1lqilnt33zyoghihcuv))/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-549-of2008.pdf)

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2017-2018/publicact/pdf/2017-PA-0150.pdf>

Legislative Fiscal Analysis

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2007-2008/billanalysis/House/pdf/2007-HLA-5375-6.pdf>

Funding Source

After two years of operation through private funding, a Promise Zone can receive half the growth in the State Education Tax (SET) within their boundaries. This Tax Increment Financing calculates capture from a base year that is the year before the Promise Zone begins awarding scholarships.

Eligibility

The Promise Zone Authority Act gives each individual Promise Zone considerable authority to establish eligibility criteria so long as they provide high school graduates a tuition-free path to at least an associate degree from one or more post-secondary institutions.

The Lansing Promise, for example, requires students to:

- Live, attend and graduate within the Lansing School District boundaries, 9th through 12th grades, for a full Lansing Promise scholarship, which provides \$10,000 for an associate degree or credential at Lansing Community College or \$20,000 toward the completion of a bachelor’s degree at Michigan State University, The University of Olivet, or Davenport University. The program also provides \$10,000 towards a cosmetology, barbering, massage therapy or esthology license at the Douglas J Aveda Institute. Another scholarship – the Lansing Promise Guarantee Scholarship – provides up to \$10,000 to students who reside

and attend at least one full academic year and graduate from a school within the Lansing School District.

- Meet eligibility requirements to apply for federal student aid and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year.

Legislative Fiscal Analysis

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2007-2008/billanalysis/House/pdf/2007-HLA-5375-6.pdf>

Minnesota North Star Promise

Description

The North Star Promise is a last dollar scholar scholarship that covers tuition and fees at Minnesota’s public postsecondary institutions for resident students whose families make under \$80,000 per year. The program, administered by the state’s Office of Higher Education (OHE), was established by the 2023 higher education policy and finance act and began administering scholarships in the Fall of 2024.

Since the tuition and fees covered by a North Star Promise Scholarship do not comprise an institution’s full cost of attendance, students may receive a supplementary North Star Promise Plus award based on the availability of funds. In fall 2024 and spring 2025, a North Star Promise eligible student could be awarded a North Star Promise Plus award equal to 15% of their Pell Grant. Based on funding projections for the program, there is insufficient funds for a similar Pell Grant match for the 2025-26 academic year.

Website

<https://ohe.mn.gov/northstarpromise>

Funding Source

The original law provided two main appropriations: about \$496,000 in FY 2024 and \$202,000 in FY 2025 for administration, and an initial FY 2025 scholarship appropriation of approximately \$117.2 million to a special revenue fund, with an ongoing base appropriation of \$49.5 million per year thereafter.

Eligibility

Prospective students must:

- Be a Minnesota resident student;
- Have a family Adjusted Gross Income* (AGI) as reported on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Minnesota Dream Act Application below \$80,000;

- Complete the FAFSA or Minnesota Dream Act Application by the 30th day of the term. Students who apply after the 30th day of the term may still be eligible for future terms within the award year;
- Attend a Minnesota public higher education institution or Tribal College;
- Not be in default on a state or federal student loan;
- Be enrolled taking at least one credit;
- Meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards;
- Have not already earned a baccalaureate degree (including those earned in a foreign country);
- Be enrolled in a program or course of study that leads to an associate or bachelor's degree, diploma, or certificate.

Missouri A+ Scholarship Program

Description

The program provides last-dollar funds to eligible graduates of A+ designated high schools attending participating public community college or vocational/technical school, or certain private two-year vocational/technical schools. The tuition amount eligible for reimbursement is capped at the published standard per credit hour tuition rate charged by State Technical College of Missouri. For the 2025-2026 academic year, the maximum rate is \$225 per credit hour or \$6 per clock-hour.

Website

<https://dhewd.mo.gov/ppc/grants-scholarships/a-plus>

Enacting Legislation

<https://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=160.545&bid=47841&hl=>

Funding Source

The Program is primarily funded through state general revenue, which is transferred into a dedicated fund for disbursement. In the 2024 award year, A+ provided \$53.4 million of assistance to 13,393 students.

Eligibility

All applicants must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident;
- Have a written agreement between the student and their high school prior to graduation;

- Attend a designated A+ high school for two years prior to graduation;
- Graduate HS with an overall unweighted grade point average of 2.5 or higher;
- Have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12;
- Perform at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring, of which up to 25% may include job shadowing;
- Maintain a record of good citizenship and avoid the unlawful use of drugs and/or alcohol;
- Have achieved a score of proficient or advanced on the Algebra I end of course exam or a higher level DESE approved end-of-course exam in the field of mathematics. Students may also meet this requirement by achieving a minimum score on the ACT or Pre-ACT mathematics sub-test;
- Complete a FAFSA; and
- Enroll and attend full-time at a participating public community college or vocational/technical school, or private two-year vocational/technical school.

Post-secondary students must also maintain satisfactory academic progress – specifically, a 2.0 GPA at the end of the initial fall semester, and a 2.5 minimum GPA thereafter.

Missouri Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant

Description

The Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant was established in 2019 to address workforce needs by helping adults pursue a certificate, degree, or industry-recognized credential in an area designated as high need. Grant recipients must maintain Missouri residency and work in Missouri for three years after graduation to prevent the grant from becoming a loan that must be repaid with interest.

Missouri residents who are 25 years or older are eligible for the program if they have not earned a bachelor's degree and earn no more than \$80,000 if filing jointly or \$40,000 per year if filing as an individual. The Fast Track grant is considered a middle dollar program as it provides students, whose other aid covers full tuition and fee, with an award of up to \$500 to cover other education-related expenses.

The Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant can be utilized for eligible certificate, associate's degree and bachelor's degree programs at approved public and non-profit postsecondary institutions. High demand occupations were identified using long-term occupational projections developed by the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC).

In his 2022 State of the State Address, Missouri Governor Mike Parson (R) called for the Fast Track Program to be made permanent. He said, “over the last few years, it has become more important than

ever to provide adults with opportunities to learn new skills and develop their career potential. In just a short time, and despite the pandemic, our Fast Track program saw a 65 percent increase in participants in 2021. To our surprise, 80 percent of the recipients are women and 50 percent are first generation college students. Additionally, more than 50 percent are enrolled in health care programs, which has become a blessing considering the past 22 months.”

Changes to the program in 2022 increased the number of eligible training providers and expanded the program to include apprenticeships.

Website

https://dhewd.mo.gov/initiatives/fast_track.php

Enacting Legislation

https://www.senate.mo.gov/19info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=91

Funding Source

The state’s FY 2026 higher education appropriations act transfers \$6.7 million to the Fast-Track Workforce Incentive Grant Fund with \$5.7 coming from General Revenue and \$1 million coming from Lottery Proceeds.

Eligibility

The following Missouri residents are eligible:

- Individuals who are 25 years or older or individuals who have not been enrolled in any school within the last two years.
- Individuals who make no more than \$80,000 filing jointly, or no more than \$40,000 per year, filing any other tax status.
- Individuals who have not earned a bachelor's degree and are planning to enroll part time or full time.

Applicants must:

- Be a U.S. Citizen or permanent resident.
- Apply for and enroll in an approved program at an eligible postsecondary institution.
- Complete a Fast Track application.
- Complete a FAFSA for each year enrolled

Grant recipients are required to:

- Maintain at least half-time enrollment in an eligible program until graduation. Students may take a leave of absence of up to 12 months without triggering this requirement.
- Graduate from an approved institution.
- Report their employment and residency to the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development for three years post-graduation.

Nevada Promise Scholarship

Description

The Nevada Promise is a scholarship and mentoring program which aims to make a college education accessible and affordable. Established by the Nevada Legislature in 2017, the Nevada Promise provides last-dollar scholarships to eligible Nevada students attending any of the state's four community colleges: College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, Truckee Meadows Community College, or Western Nevada College.

The Nevada Promise Scholarship (NPS), as initially enacted, can provide for up to three years of registration fees (Nevada does not charge tuition to state residents), and other mandatory fees, to eligible students not covered by other aid, including the federal Pell Grant, the federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), the Silver State Opportunity Grant (SSOG), and the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship (GGMS).

All four Nevada community colleges agreed to participate in the Nevada Promise Scholarship program. Pursuant to the enacting legislation, they were required to establish a mentoring program for students who intend to participate in the Promise. Each college must do so without receiving additional state funds, or partner with non-profit organizations or other government entities to provide mentoring services.

In 2019 the Nevada State Legislature approved Senate Bill 350 (Chapter 218, Statutes of Nevada 2019), which transferred administration of the Nevada Promise Scholarship program from individual community colleges to the state's Board of Regents. This change helped establish state-wide consistency across institutions and provided the flexibility necessary to effectively implement the program. This bill also made several revisions to student eligibility requirements, including:

- Reducing – from 20 to 8 for initial eligibility – the number of community service hours required from participants and revising when such community service must be completed;
- Combining the requirements to attend separate training and orientation meetings into a single meeting requirement;
- Removing the requirement for students to submit yearly renewal applications;

- Waiving the 12-credit requirement during a student’s last semester prior to graduation;
- Extending program eligibility to students prohibited by federal law from completing the FAFSA.

Website

<http://system.nevada.edu/Nshe/index.cfm/initiatives/nevada-promise-scholarship>

Enacting Legislation

https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/SB/SB391_EN.pdf

<https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019/Bill/6633/Text>

Funding Source

The enacting legislation (SB 391) contained a \$3.5 million appropriation. According to the 2025 NPS Annual Report, nearly \$4 million was awarded to 1,500 students in the 2024-25 Academic Year.

The Board of Regents reported that in 2024-25, the Nevada Promise Scholarship biennial allocation was not sufficient to cover the remaining registration and mandatory fees for all eligible students. Therefore, \$65,980 of institutional financial aid dollars was used to ensure all eligible students received their full awards for the year.

Eligibility

A student must:

- Complete a Nevada promise Scholarship application;
- Be classified as a Nevada resident for tuition purposes by the institution where they plan to receive the Nevada Promise Scholarship;
- Have earned one of the following during his/her high school senior year:
 - High school diploma from a public or private high school located in Nevada;
 - High school diploma from a public high school in a county of another state that borders Nevada and accepts Nevada residents; or
 - General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or equivalent document before 20 years of age no later than June 15.
- Not have earned a prior associate or bachelor’s degree;
- Meet all applicable deadlines including completing the Nevada Promise Application no later than 11:59 p.m. on October 31, 2019 for the Fall 2020 award year;
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or if the student is prohibited by law from completing the FAFSA, complete an alternative form provided by the community college;

- Before enrolling in a community college, participate in one training meeting related to financial aid, the FAFSA, and college orientation;
- Meet at least once with a mentor (assigned by the college) before the first semester of enrollment and at least twice during each academic year while in the program;
- Complete at least 8 hours of eligible community service during their last year of high school and during each semester of college enrollment;
- Enroll in at least 12 credit hours that apply to the student’s chosen program of study, with an exception for lower enrollment provided for the last semester if fewer than 12 credits are required to graduate;
- Meet institutional Title IV Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements; and
- Have not already received the scholarship for three (3) academic years.

New Jersey Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG)

Description

New Jersey’s FY 2018-19 budget contained \$20 million to establish a pilot program awarding last dollar scholarships to students from families with less than \$45,000 in adjusted gross income to attend county (community) colleges. An additional \$5 million was allocated to the Secretary of Higher Education in order to provide planning grants to county colleges seeking to provide tuition-free college to eligible students. Pursuant to the authorizing legislation, the grants “shall include but not be limited to goals and strategies for capacity building, increasing student completion, reducing financial burdens on students, and estimates and plans by county colleges for adapting to increased enrollment.”

The FY 2019-20 budget increased the family income limit to \$65,000. Awards to students attending 13 county colleges began for the Spring 2019 semester. Governor Phil Murphy subsequently expanded the program to include all 19 county colleges in the state. In 2021, CCOG was made permanent with the passage of A4410.

Website

<https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/ccog.aspx>

Enacting Legislation

<https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2020/PL21/26 .PDF>

Funding Source

The Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) is funded through the annual state budget. The program received approximately \$32.5 million in FY 2026, which is a reduction from the \$40 million

received in FY 2025. The lower appropriation aligns with eligibility rules changes that eliminated funding for new students with family incomes between 65,000 and \$100,000.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Community College Opportunity Grant, students must:

- Be a New Jersey resident with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) between \$0 - \$65,000;
- Complete the FAFSA or NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application each year by the applicable State deadline;
- Have not yet earned a college degree;
- Enroll in at least six (6) credits per semester at a community college in New Jersey;
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress throughout participation in the program.

Garden State Guarantee

Description

The Garden State Guarantee is a last dollar program that covers tuition & mandatory fees for eligible New Jersey residents in their third and fourth years at a public four-year college or university. Governor Phil Murphy and then Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis unveiled the program in early 2020 that was subsequently approved by the legislature in 2021 as part of the state's FY2022 budget.

The Guarantee is complementary to the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG). "This means that students enrolled through the CCOG who transfer to a four-year, public institution could receive their entire four years of education completely free," Secretary Smith Ellis said at the program's announcement. Like CCOG, the Garden State Guarantee requires students to be New Jersey residents with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) between \$0 - \$65,000.

Website

<https://www.hesaa.org/Pages/gsg.aspx>

Enacting Legislation

<https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2020/A5913>

Note: The Guarantee was ultimately folded into the state budget process.

Funding Source

The Garden State Guarantee is funded through the annual state budget. The program received approximately \$94.4 million in FY 2025.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Garden State Guarantee, students must:

- Be a New Jersey resident with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) between \$0 - \$65,000;
- Be in their third (60 to 89 credits) or fourth year (90 to 128 credits) at an eligible New Jersey public college or university;
- Complete the FAFSA or NJ Alternative Financial Aid Application each year by the applicable State deadline;
- Be enrolled full-time (at least 12 credits per semester) towards a first Bachelor's degree;
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress throughout participation in the program.

New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship

Description

In February 2022, New Mexico's legislature passed the nation's most comprehensive and universal free college tuition program. The first-dollar Scholarship program allows both recent high school graduates and adults to attend public college tuition free. This means that lower income students will be able to use the federal Pell Grant to help pay for non-tuition expenses such as books, transportation, and housing. The program also allows adults with an associate degree to return to school tuition-free to complete a bachelor's degree.

In 2024, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed SB 159 into law. This measure established a Higher Education Trust Fund – initially funded by transferring \$959 million from the state's tax stabilization reserve fund (oil and gas tax revenue) – to create a dedicated revenue stream for this and other scholarships.

Website

<https://www.reachhighernm.com/returning-students/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://nmlegis.gov/Sessions/22%20Regular/final/SB0140.pdf>

Funding

In FY2025, the Higher Education Trust Fund fund provided approximately \$48 million toward state financial aid programs. The program also received approximately \$158 million from recurring appropriations.

Eligibility

A student must:

- Be an established New Mexico resident;

- Enroll in a New Mexico public college or university;
- Be pursuing an associate or bachelor's degree, or a credit-bearing career training certificate in a high demand field;
- Demonstrate continuous progress -- at least six credit hours per semester -- towards a degree or certificate;
- Maintain a 2.5 college cumulative GPA starting their first semester receiving the Opportunity Scholarship;
- If pursuing an associate degree, have not completed a first associate degree or 90 credit hours, whichever comes first;
- If you are pursuing a bachelor's degree, have not completed a first bachelor's degree or 160 credit hours completed, whichever comes first.

New York Excelsior Scholarship

Description

The last dollar Excelsior Scholarship covers any remaining gap in tuition expenses, after other federal and state grants and scholarships are applied. In instances where tuition expenses exceed the total financial aid a recipient is awarded, a tuition credit will be applied to the remaining balance.

Under this program, initially established by the FY 2018 budget, full-time students with an income or family income of up to \$125,000 per year qualify to attend college tuition-free at all CUNY and SUNY two- and four-year colleges in New York State. The income calculation is based on federal adjusted gross income, as reported on federal income tax forms, for the student and their family.

The Excelsior Scholarship is designed to encourage on-time degree completion. Students must average 30 credits per year (including Summer and January semesters) to receive the funding.

However, there is some built-in flexibility for students facing certain hardships. After graduation, Excelsior Scholarship recipients are required to reside in New York State for the same number of years in which they received the award, or it will be converted into a loan. The student does not need to be employed during this period, however they cannot be employed in another state.

Website

<https://hesc.ny.gov/find-aid/nys-grants-scholarships/excelsior-scholarship-program>

<https://www.ny.gov/programs/excelsior-scholarship-answer-center>

Enacting Legislation

https://assembly.state.ny.us/2017budget/budget_bills/A3009C.pdf#page=142

<http://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2017/s2009c>

Funding Source

The state budget. In the 2024-25 academic year, the program awarded more than \$101 million to nearly 25,000 students.

Eligibility

An applicant must:

- Be a resident of New York State (NYS) and have resided in NYS for 12 continuous months prior to the beginning of the term;
- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen;
- Have either graduated from high school in the United States, earned a high school equivalency diploma, or passed a federally approved "Ability to Benefit" test, as defined by the Commissioner of the State Education Department;
- Have a combined federal adjusted gross income of \$125,000 or less;
- Be pursuing an undergraduate degree at a SUNY or CUNY college, including community colleges and the statutory colleges at Cornell University and Alfred University;
- Be enrolled in at least 12 credits per term and successfully complete at least 30 credits each year, applicable toward his or her degree program through continuous study with no break in enrollment except for certain reasons that can be documented;
- If attended college prior to the 2024-25 academic year, have earned at least 30 credits each year, applicable toward his or her degree program prior to applying for an Excelsior Scholarship;
- Be in a non-default status on a student loan made under any NYS or federal education loan program or on the repayment of any NYS award;
- Be in compliance with the terms of the service condition(s) imposed by any NYS award that you have previously received; and
- Execute a Contract agreeing to reside in NYS for the length of time the award was received, and, if employed during such time, be employed in NYS.

New York Opportunity Promise – CUNY/SUNY Reconnect

Description

Launched following passage of the FY26 Enacted Budget, CUNY and SUNY Reconnect provides a tuition-free pathway for New York State adults, ages 25 to 55, without a college degree to pursue an associate's degree in a high-demand field. According to Governor Kathy Hochul (D), "SUNY and CUNY

Reconnect represent another important step forward in ensuring that quality education remains affordable and accessible for any student who is looking to fill key roles in fast-growing, good-paying fields throughout New York State.”

The statewide program was preceded by a CUNY Reconnect pilot program championed by New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, who aimed to assist working-age New York City residents with some college credits but no degree. Following the success of the CUNY pilot, which helped thousands of students return to school, Governor Hochul championed a statewide expansion in her FY 2026 budget.

The last dollar program covers tuition, fees, books, and supplies after other forms of tuition assistance, such as NYS TAP and Pell Grants, are applied.

Website

<https://www.suny.edu/communitycollege/free-cc/>

<https://www.cuny.edu/admissions/reconnect/>

Enacting Legislation

https://nyassembly.gov/leg/?default_fld=%0D%0A&leg_video=&bn=A03006&term=&Summary=Y&Text=Y

Funding Source

The program is currently funded by a \$47 million appropriation in the New York State FY 2026 budget. This funding is divided between the two systems, with \$28.2 million allocated to SUNY and \$18.8 million to CUNY.

Eligibility

Eligible students must:

- Be a resident of New York State or eligible for in-state tuition;
- Be between the ages of 25-55;
- Not currently have a degree. Previous college credits, certificates, and/or microcredentials do not restrict eligibility;
- Enroll in an approved associate degree program at a CUNY/SUNY community college.

North Carolina – Next NC Scholarship

Description

The Next NC Scholarship was established by the state's 2021 budget bill. Beginning with the 2023-24 Academic Year, it consolidated several existing state financial aid programs into a single, simplified award for North Carolinians from households with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$80,000 or less.

The guaranteed minimum award varies based on the type of institution. Students attending any of North Carolina's 58 community colleges are guaranteed at least \$3,000 per year, which fully covers tuition and fees for full-time enrollment. Students attending one of the 16 University of North Carolina (UNC) System public universities are guaranteed at least \$5,000, which covers at least half of their tuition and fees. Students with the greatest financial need may also qualify for additional funds beyond the minimum guarantee.

Website

<https://www.cfnc.org/pay-for-college/next-nc-scholarship/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://www.ncseaa.edu/psr/higher-education-state-grants-scholarships/>

Funding Source

The program is funded from both state and lottery funds. The state's recurring appropriation for the NC Scholarship is approximately \$181 million annually.

Eligibility

To receive the Next NC Scholarship, students must be:

- A North Carolina resident who is eligible for in-state tuition;
- A high school graduate (high school equivalency completers are eligible);
- Enrolled in an eligible undergraduate curriculum program;
- Taking at least 6 credit hours per semester (part-time students will receive a partial award);
- Have a Student Aid Index (SAI) at or below 7,500 after completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- From a household with an annual Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$80,000 or less;
- Meet Pell eligibility criteria;
- Meeting the Satisfactory Academic Progress standards of the college or university;
- Not be in default on any State loan or grant program;

- Not exceed the semester limits for state grants, currently as follows:
 - 6 semesters (FTE) for a two-year degree program
 - 10 semesters (FTE) for a four-year degree program
 - 12 semesters (FTE) for a five-year degree program

Oklahoma Promise

Description

Oklahoma's Promise was originally enacted in 1992 as the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program. The program, which is administered by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, allows students whose families earn up to \$80,000 or less annually – depending on the number of dependent children in the household – and who meet academic and conduct requirements to earn a last dollar college tuition scholarship.

Oklahoma's Promise will pay up to the full tuition at an Oklahoma public two-year college or four-year university. Students wishing to enroll at an accredited Oklahoma private college or university, or in a program that does not qualify for federal financial aid at a public career technology center are eligible for partial scholarships. The scholarship amount does not cover fees, books, supplies, or room and board.

High school students apply for the Oklahoma Promise in the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grades, no later than December 31 of their senior year. Family adjusted gross income limits are \$60,000 for one or two dependent children, \$70,000 for three or four dependent children, and \$80,000 for five or more dependent children. The family income limit is verified when the student applies for the program in high school and each year the student is enrolled in college. However, the federal adjusted gross income (AGI) of the student's parents (or the income of the student if the student is officially determined to be financially independent of their parents) can be up to \$100,000 when the student enrolls in college. Oklahoma Promise students are required to complete a FAFSA each year in college to determine whether adjusted gross income exceeds \$100,000.

High school students must complete a specific college preparatory curriculum that meets Oklahoma Academic standards in order to receive an Oklahoma's Promise Scholarship. According to state data, 75.3% of the high school class of 2024 completed the program's high school requirements.

Website

<https://okpromise.org/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://www.okhighered.org/okpromise/statutes-rules.shtml>

Funding Source

Legislation creating a dedicated funding process for Oklahoma's Promise was enacted in 2007. This law allows the program to be funded "off the top" from the state's General Revenue Fund each year. The program cost \$68 million to provide 14,935 scholarships in the 2023-24 academic year.

Eligibility

Applicants must be:

- Oklahoma residents and a U.S. citizen or lawfully present in the United States.
- Enrolled in the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grade in an Oklahoma high school. (Homeschool students must be age 13, 14, 15 or 16.)
- Students whose parents' federal adjusted gross income for the most recent federal tax year does not exceed \$60,000 with 1-2 dependent children, \$70,000 with 3-4 dependent children, or \$80,000 with 5 or more dependent children.
- Submit an Oklahoma's Promise application by December 31 of their senior year in high schools.

In high school, the student must:

- Graduate from high school and complete all high school requirements by the time of graduation.
- Achieve at least a 2.50 cumulative GPA for all coursework attempted in grades 9 through 12.
- Complete the 17-unit college prep core curriculum and achieve at least a 2.5 cumulative GPA for the 17-unit core curriculum. The curriculum must be strictly followed, and students should be aware that some courses that meet high school graduation requirements do not meet Oklahoma's Promise requirements.
- Attend school regularly and do homework.
- Refrain from substance abuse.
- Refrain from criminal or delinquent acts.
- Have school work and school records reviewed by an appropriate school official.
- Provide information to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education or the State Board of Education, if requested.
- Be contacted by the OKPromise office with information relevant to my application or the program when contact information is provided on the application.
- Apply for other financial aid during the senior year of high school.
- Participate in program activities.

College students must:

- Complete the FAFSA annually to determine that federal adjusted gross income does not exceed \$100,000.
- Meet the regular admission standards for first-time entering students at the college or university to which the student applies.
- Start taking college courses within three years after graduating high school.
- Meet the college's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy requirements for eligibility to receive federal financial aid.

Oklahoma's Promise Scholarship awards:

- May not be used for non-credit remedial courses.
- Are limited to no more than five consecutive years after enrolling in college.
- May not be used for courses taken after completion of the requirements for a bachelor's degree.
- May not be used to complete more than 129 semester credit hours, unless the student's degree program requires more than 129 hours.
- Will be permanently lost if the student is suspended from college for more than one semester for conduct reasons.

Oregon Promise

Description

The Oregon Promise is a state grant program that helps cover tuition costs at any Oregon community college. Eligible recipients are recent Oregon high school graduates and GED recipients who enroll in an Oregon community college within six months of graduation. For full-time students, awards range from \$2,202 to \$4,584 in 2025-26, depending on financial need and other state and federal grants and awards. As originally enacted, the college automatically deducted a \$50 co-pay from the award each term.

The passage of an equity focused bill – SB 1522 – in March 2022 made the following changes to the Oregon Promise Grant.

1. Starting with the Class of 2022, the high school GPA requirement has been lowered to a cumulative, unweighted 2.0.
2. For the 2022-23 academic year and beyond:
 - a. The \$50 per term co-pay has been removed from the award calculation.

- b. The minimum award will increase from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for full-time, full-year students, and will be adjusted for inflation, along with the maximum award, based on the average increase of Oregon community college tuition costs.
- c. The First-Year Experience, which varies by community college, is no longer a requirement to renew the Oregon Promise Grant.

Oregon’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission has the authority to apply an Expected Family Contribution limit as necessary when state funding levels are insufficient for this program. For Class of 2025 students who started college in the Fall of 2025, the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) limit was \$18,000 “due to a high number of applicants, strong renewal retention, and limited funds.” Since 2016, EFC limits have been imposed on three high school classes.

Website

<https://oregonstudentaid.gov/grants/oregon-promise-grant/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2015R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB81/Enrolled>

Legislative Budget Report

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2015R1/Downloads/MeasureAnalysisDocument/32321>

2022 Amendments

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2022R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB1522>

Eligibility

Applicants must meet all of the following application and eligibility requirements:

- Complete an Oregon Promise Grant Application;
- File a FAFSA or ORSAA application listing at least one Oregon community college;
- Be a recent Oregon high school graduate or GED recipient;
- Document a 2.0 cumulative high school GPA or higher, or a GED score of 145 or higher on each test;
- Enroll at least half-time at an Oregon community college before their required start term – determined by graduation date;
- Be an Oregon resident for at least 12 months prior to enrolling in community college; and
- Have no more than 90 college credits completed or attempted.

Rhode Island's Promise

Description

Rhode Island's Promise was enacted in 2017 and allows students to enroll right out of high school at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) tuition-free. It provides a last dollar scholarship for up to two academic years and can be applied to any associate degree program at CCRI. It may not be used for certificate or non-credit programs.

Recipients of the Promise commit to live, work, or continue their education in Rhode Island after graduation. However, the program does not contain a penalty for leaving the state.

The Ocean State is also piloting the Rhode Island College (RIC) [Hope Scholarship](#), which provides last-dollar tuition and mandatory fee payments to in-state students at Rhode Island College for their junior and senior years, if they are in good academic standing, with a 2.5 GPA or higher, and on track to graduate or to earn an approved certificate in a total of four years. The program was launched with the passage of the state budget in 2023 and is scheduled to sunset on July 1, 2030.

Both Governor McKee and key state legislators have called for making the RIC Hope Scholarship permanent. To this end, 2026 legislation is pending in the General Assembly ([SB 2807](#)).

Website

<https://www.ccri.edu/ripromise/index.html>

Enacting Legislation

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText17/HouseText17/H5175Aaa.pdf>

The Rhode Island Promise was made permanent by the enactment of S0079 Substitute A/H5224 Substitute A in May 2021.

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law21/law21028.htm>

Funding Source

A \$7.68 million appropriation is included in the state's FY 2022 budget.

Eligibility

All recipients must:

- Be Rhode Island residents that qualify for in-state tuition and fees;
- Be a high school graduate (public, private or homeschooled) or a GED® recipient who was younger than 19 years of age when they completed high school or the GED® program.
- Be admitted to CCRI and enroll in the semester immediately following high school graduation.
- Additionally, students need to take the following steps to receive/maintain the Promise:

- Apply to CCRI and register for a full-time fall course load;
- Fill out the FAFSA;
- Get an official, final high school or GED transcript from their high school or GED program and submit it to the Office of Enrollment Services at any CCRI campus;
- Fill out the Rhode Island Promise Attestation form;
- Earn at least 30 credits each college academic year;
- Enroll each semester for two years; and
- Maintain at least a 2.5 GPA in college.

South Carolina Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship

formerly the South Carolina Workforce Scholarships for the Future

Description

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster established the Workforce Scholarships for the Future pilot program in November 2021 using Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds. The program was extended through June 30, 2024, using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The scholarship covered tuition and required fees at the state's 16 technical colleges for state residents – both adults and recent high school graduates – enrolled in a high-demand field such as manufacturing, healthcare, computer science and information technology, transportation, distribution and logistics or construction.

In 2022, the legislature codified a successor program – the South Carolina Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship (SC WINS) – by passing HB 3144. The last dollar program for SC Technical College System students provides awards up to \$5,000 per academic year. South Carolina Lottery Assistance Funds – which provides South Carolina residents \$80 per credit hour to be used toward the cost-of-tuition – are applied before SC WINS funds.

SC WINS students must be enrolled in a career education program that leads to a professional certificate, industry-recognized credential (IRC), diploma, or associate degree in a critical workforce area as determined by the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education (SBTCE).

Website

<https://www.sctechsystem.edu/sc-wins/>

Enacting Legislation

https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess124_2021-2022/bills/3144.htm

Funding Source

The State's FY 2025-2026 budget provides \$91.4 million for the South Carolina Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship.

Eligibility

Qualifying students must:

- Be a South Carolina resident;
- Complete a FAFSA annually;
- Meet one of the following eligibility criteria and sign a State Aid Affidavit to:
 - Be employed or;
 - Take a financial literacy course or;
 - Complete 100 hours of voluntary time with a nonprofit or public service organization.
- Have a GPA of 2.00 or higher by the end of each year;
- Not be in default on a federal student loan or have a grant overpayment;
- Not be receiving Veteran Chapter 31 or 33 benefits.

Tennessee Promise

Description

The Tennessee Promise is both a scholarship and mentoring program focused on increasing the number of students attending college in Tennessee. It provides students a last-dollar scholarship, meaning the scholarship will cover tuition and fees not covered by the Pell grant, the HOPE scholarship, or state student assistance funds. Students may use the scholarship at any of the state's 13 community colleges, 27 colleges of applied technology, or other eligible institutions offering an associate degree program.

Website

<https://www.collegefortn.org/tnpromise/>

Enacting Legislation

<http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/108/Bill/SB2471.pdf>

Funding Source

A \$300 million endowment that was established from surplus lottery funds. The program cost just over \$23.3 million for the 2023-24 Academic Year.

Legislative Fiscal Note

<http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/108/Fiscal/SB2471.pdf>

Eligibility

To be eligible, students must:

- Be a Tennessee resident;
- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen;
- Complete the Tennessee Promise application by November 3 and complete the FAFSA by April 1 of the high school senior year;
- Graduate from a TN high school, bordering high school, or home school. A student is also eligible by earning a high school equivalency credential approved by the state board of education, e.g. – GED, HiSET, or New Pathways, prior to the 19th birthday;
- Attend a mandatory Tennessee Promise meeting;
- Complete and submit at least 16 hours of community service for each year in the program;
- The student must be continuously enrolled at an eligible postsecondary institution in the fall and spring semesters, if enrolled at a community college or eligible four-year institution OR maintain continuous enrollment as determined by the TN College of Applied Technology;
- Students must also maintain a 2.0 GPA at the end of each academic year while enrolled at a community college or eligible four-year institution OR maintain satisfactory academic progress at a TN College of Applied Technology.

Tennessee Reconnect

Description

Tennessee Reconnect is a last dollar scholarship for adults to attend a community or technical college tuition-free. It was established in its present form in 2017 as an extension of Governor Bill Haslam’s Drive to 55 initiative, which initially sought to equip 55% of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or certificate by the year 2025.

Website

<http://tnreconnect.gov/>

Enacting Legislation

<https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/110/pub/pc0448.pdf>

Legislative Fiscal Note

<http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/110/Fiscal/HB0531.pdf>

Funding Source

The Lottery for Education Account. For the program's fifth cohort (2023), \$19.4 million was awarded to 12,640 postsecondary enrollees.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Tennessee Reconnect grant, an applicant must:

- Be a Tennessee resident
- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Qualify as an independent student on the FAFSA *OR be at least 23 years of age on or before January 1 of the academic year of initial enrollment
- Not be incarcerated
- Not have previously earned an associate or baccalaureate degree
- Not be in default on student loan
- Must submit transcripts from all previously attended institutions
- Be admitted to and enroll in a Tennessee public community college at least part-time (minimum 6 hours) in courses leading to a certificate or associate degree

To receive and maintain this grant, an adult learner must:

- Enroll in at least six (6) credit hours in the fall and spring semesters through degree completion [Summer term is the only optional term, and is covered if eligibility is maintained]
- Maintain a minimum 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year
- Continue to participate in the Reconnect Success Plan and update the plan each academic year
- Complete degree/certification within five (5) calendar years

Vermont 802 Opportunity Grant

Description

The last dollar scholarship program allows Vermonters with a family income of \$100,000 or less the opportunity to attend the Community College of Vermont (CCV) tuition free. In addition to tuition, it covers CCV's \$100 administrative fee. Course fees and textbooks are not covered by the program.

The program – initially launched in 2021 by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) and the Community College of Vermont (CCV) – offered free tuition at CCV to Vermonters with a family income of \$50,000 or less. The income threshold was increased to \$75,000 in 2022 and was expanded again in 2025 to cover families with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$100,000 or less.

Website

<https://www.vsac.org/free-tuition-ccv-yes-really>

Funding Source

In 2023, the legislature and Governor Phil Scott (R) included 802 Opportunity Grant in the state's base budget to provide permanent funding for the program. The program is currently a component of VSAC's \$27.1 million FY 2026 base appropriation.

Eligibility

A Community College of Vermont student is eligible for the 802 Opportunity grant if he or she is:

- A Vermont resident;
- A U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen;
- Pursuing an associate degree or certificate;
- Has completed a FAFSA and a Vermont grant application;
- Has a family adjusted gross income less of \$100,000 or less as reported on the FAFSA;
- A high school graduate or equivalent;
- Does not already have a bachelor's degree;
- Making Satisfactory Academic Progress if already enrolled in CCV; and
- Not in default on an education loan.

Virginia Get a Skill, Get A Job, Get Ahead (G3) program

Description

G3 makes tuition-free community college available to low- and middle-income Virginia residents who pursue jobs in high-demand fields. The last dollar program, established in 2021, can be used for designated programs in the following industries: education, healthcare, hospitality and culinary arts, information technology, public safety, and skilled trades, manufacturing and construction.

The program is funded by the state's biennial budget and pays for tuition, mandatory fees, and a textbook stipend. The enacting legislation allows for proration of financial assistance if sufficient funding for maximum awards is not available. Additionally, full Pell Grant recipients enrolled full-time are eligible for a \$2,250 Student Support Incentive Grant.

Website

<https://virginiag3.com/>

Enacting Legislation

HB 2204/SB 1405 (2021) - <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?212+ful+CHAP0397+pdf>

Funding Source

The program is funded by the state's general fund. The 2020-2022 biennium budget contains \$34.5 million (in FY 2022) to provide the necessary financial assistance.

Eligibility

Initial applicant qualifications include:

- A total household income less than or equal to four hundred percent of the Federal Poverty Level;
- Acceptance and enrollment as a full-time or part-time community college student – a minimum of six credit hours per semester – at an approved institution in an approved program specific to a high demand field;
- Completion of a FAFSA and/or state financial aid applications.

Continue eligibility requirements include:

- Meeting standards for Satisfactory Academic Progress;
- Demonstrating reasonable progress to complete their specific program of study to earn an associate degree in no more than three years;
- Not exceeding 150 percent of required credits of certificate or degree.

Washington College Grant

Description

The 2019 enactment of the Workforce Education Investment Act (HB 2158) established the Washington College Grant (WCG) to replace the State Need Grant (SNG). The program began in Fall 2020 and bases the award on income, family size, and school or program cost.

For 2025-26, an eligible student from a family of four with income of \$78,500 or less per year would get a full award that would cover public college tuition. For middle-income families, grant amounts are lower. But students from a family of four making up to \$131,000 per year can get some money to help pay for college or training. Click [here](#) for information regarding income and award amounts.

According to an official bill summary, “a maximum Washington College Grant covers tuition fees, building fees, and services and activities fees at public institutions of higher education (both two- and four-year). Grants for students attending private institutions are tied to the current SNG levels, with increases per year equal to the tuition growth factor.”

Enacting Legislation

<http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/2158-S2.PL.pdf>

Funding Source

The enacting legislation establishes a three-tiered Workforce Education Investment surcharge to the state’s business-and-occupations tax that is expected to raise approximately \$1.6 billion over the next five fiscal years. The legislature appropriated \$160.3 for the Washington College Grant in the 20192021 biennium.

Eligibility

The Washington College Grant is available to eligible Washington residents, including undocumented students, based on median family income. There is no age limit.

Eligibility and awards are determined by the FAFSA or a state student aid application. Recipients must meet program requirements – including not previously obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher – and attend an approved institution or program, part-time or full-time.

WV Invests Grant Program

Description

WV Invests Grant Program, enacted in March 2019, provides last dollar scholarships to make eligible certificate and associate degree programs at community and technical colleges tuition free. The state’s Department of Commerce determines the programs based on workforce needs. Associate degree

programs at public baccalaureate institutions are also eligible, but the grant amounts are limited to the average cost of tuition and mandatory fee of the community and technical colleges.

Beginning with the 2021 Fiscal Year, community and technical colleges or public baccalaureate institutions that form one or more partnerships with public secondary schools to establish Advanced Career Education (ACE) programs and pathways will have priority in offering WV Invest Grant eligible programs. Such partnerships feature “defined pathways” that start when a student is in secondary school and ultimately lead to an advanced certification or associate degree.

Website

<http://wvinvests.org/>

Enacting Legislation

http://www.wvlegislature.gov/Bill_Text_HTML/2019_SESSIONS/RS/bills/SB1%20SUB2%20ENR.pdf

Funding Source

The enacting legislation establishes a special revenue account – the WV Invests Fund – to fund the grants. The fund may consist of:

1. All appropriations by the Legislature for the WV Invests Fund;
2. Any gifts, grants, or contributions received for the WV Invests Fund; and
3. All interest or other income earned from investment of the WV Invests Funds.

The state’s FY 2026 appropriations for the program is \$5.05 million.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a WV Invests Grant, applicants must:

- Be a citizen or financial aid eligible resident of the United States;
- Be a resident of West Virginia for at least one year immediately preceding the date of application for a grant;
- Complete a FAFSA and a WV Invests Grant application;
- Have completed a secondary education program in a public, private, or home school;
- Have not previously received a postsecondary degree or have attempted 90 or more college credits;
- Not be in default on a federal student loan;
- Meet the admission requirements of and be admitted into an eligible postsecondary institution;

- Enroll in an eligible postsecondary program for at least six credit hours per semester;
- Pay for and pass a drug screening during the 60 days before the start of their first term each academic year;
- Agree to reside in West Virginia for the two years following obtainment of the degree or certificate for which the grant or grants were awarded. Violation of this agreement would require repayment of the awards with interest. The Act has exemptions for individuals serving in the armed services or attending an out-of-state postsecondary institution at least half-time; and
- Satisfactorily meet any additional qualifications of enrollment, academic promise, or achievement established by the state's Council for Community and Technical College Education through rule.

Grants may be renewed until the course of study is completed or until the student has reached 90 attempted credit hours if they meet the following criteria:

- A check at the beginning of each term to verify that the student has not attempted 90 credit hours;
- Annual completion of the FAFSA;
- Maintenance of satisfactory academic standing, including a 2.0 cumulative grade point average, and adequate progress towards completion of the eligible postsecondary program;
- Maintenance of continuous enrollment for at least 6 credit hours each semester;
- Compliance with drug screening requirements; and
- Completion of at least two hours of unpaid community service during each academic term.

Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship

Description

The scholarship has its roots in Governor Stanley Hathaway's 1974 decision to create the state of Wyoming Permanent Mineral Trust Fund. Nearly two decades later, legislators created a scholarship fund that rewards eligible Wyoming students with both merit- and need-based scholarships to attend the University of Wyoming or a Wyoming community college.

Hathaway offers four individual scholarships, and a need-based scholarship that can supplement these merit-based awards. They include:

- Honors (min 3.5 GPA/25 ACT): \$1,680 per semester
- Performance (min 3.0 GPA/21 ACT): \$1,260 per semester
- Opportunity (min 2.5 GPA/19 ACT): \$840 per semester
- Provisional Opportunity (min 2.5 GPA/17 ACT): \$840 per semester

In-state tuition at a Wyoming community college ranges from \$3,456 to \$4,500 per year.

Website

<http://hathawayscholarship.org/>

Enacting Legislation

<http://law.justia.com/codes/wyoming/2014/title-21/chapter-16/article-13/>

Funding Source

A \$400 million permanent endowment.

Eligibility

Minimum eligibility includes a 2.5 HS GPA, completion of Hathaway approved HS courses, and a score of 17 on the ACT. Continued eligibility for college students requires continuous enrollment, meeting satisfactory academic progress criteria, and maintaining a minimum GPA of 2.25 or 2.5 depending upon a recipient's scholarship level.

Additional eligibility information can be found at:

<https://hathawayscholarship.org/bin/eligibilityrequirements/>

CHAPTER III

What's in Your
Promise?

Chapter III —

What's in Your Promise?

The first decision policymakers designing programs to make college tuition-free will need to address is if and how other, existing financial aid money is used to cover the price of tuition. In a first-dollar model, existing aid money will be made available regardless of other forms of tuition aid, particularly federal Pell Grants. A last dollar model – which is the most-popular at the state level – will only cover the price of tuition after students exhaust all other forms of financial aid available to them.

First Dollar Scholarships

Only two states – California and New Mexico – have established free college tuition programs that are available regardless of other forms of financial aid. The California College Promise program, fully funded in 2019, provides two years of community college tuition for first-time, full-time students – defined as taking at least 12 credit hours per semester. New Mexico's legislature established the nation's most comprehensive and universal free college tuition program in February 2022. Effective July 1, 2022, eligible New Mexicans will be able to attend two- and four-year public colleges tuition free. In both states, students are free to use federal Pell Grant and state grants, if eligible, to pay for the other costs associated with going to college without impacting their eligibility for free tuition.

Indeed, the principal argument in favor of such a “first dollar” Promise program is that it allows low-income students to use Pell Grants and state aid to address non-tuition related costs, increasing the likelihood that recipients will be able to stay in school and have more time to focus on their studies. According to Sara Goldrick-Rab of Temple University, [non-tuition costs](#) as a share of attendance costs are 50% at four-year institutions and over 70% at two-year colleges. The main argument against first dollar scholarships is the cost of such an approach. Using data derived from the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS), CFCT [estimates](#) total foregone revenues, if free college tuition was offered to all in-state undergraduates, range from \$42.8 million in Delaware to \$4.96 billion in California.

Last Dollar Scholarships

The pioneering Tennessee Promise and almost all other state free college tuition programs provide “last dollar” scholarships. This means that the scholarship will only cover tuition and fees not covered by Pell Grants or state aid.

The main advantage of a last dollar scholarship is that it takes advantage of existing Pell Grant and state aid dollars to reduce the cost of the program. While tuition at Tennessee community colleges is about \$4,500 annually, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) reports that the average

Tennessee Promise award for Academic Year 2023-24 was \$516 in the Fall Semester and \$534 in the Spring Semester when \$0 payments are included.

Robert Kelchen, Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Seton Hall University, [argues](#) that “another important benefit of last-dollar scholarship programs is informational. Students may be induced to attend college simply by having better knowledge of what college costs, even if they do not receive any additional money.”

Last dollar scholarships are criticized for not providing benefits to some Pell-eligible students. U.S. Representative Steve Cohen [writes](#) in *The Tennessean*, “the federal need-based Pell Grant provides up to \$5,700 – nearly \$2,000 more than the cost of full-time tuition at a community college in Tennessee. So, the neediest students will not benefit at all.” He also expressed concern that “ill-prepared students will receive Promise and then fail to complete community college.” But as Tennessee has demonstrated, a well designed free college tuition program can address both of these issues and lead to greater enrollment among traditionally under-represented populations as well as greater persistence in college attendance by those who do become “Promise scholars.”

A Middle Dollar Approach

The Oregon Promise, enacted in 2015, takes a middle ground in this debate, offering what many have termed a “Middle Dollar” approach to the issue. Starting with the high school class of 2022, their plan provides a minimum benefit of \$2,000 even if the student’s Pell Grant and/or Oregon Opportunity Grant would cover all their tuition costs. By providing low-income students, who have tuition covered by federal and state grants, funds to assist with books, transportation, food, housing, and other costs outside of tuition, the state’s program partially addresses the criticism often leveled at last dollar programs such as Tennessee’s.

Data from the Oregon Student Aid Commission shows 6,918 new students entered a community college during the 2023-24 academic year having received an Oregon Promise grant. A [2016 survey](#) conducted by Education Northwest of over 1,400 Oregon high school graduates found that among those familiar with the Oregon Promise, 75% agreed, and 69% strongly agreed that the program helped them see that college could be affordable and made them think more about going to college.

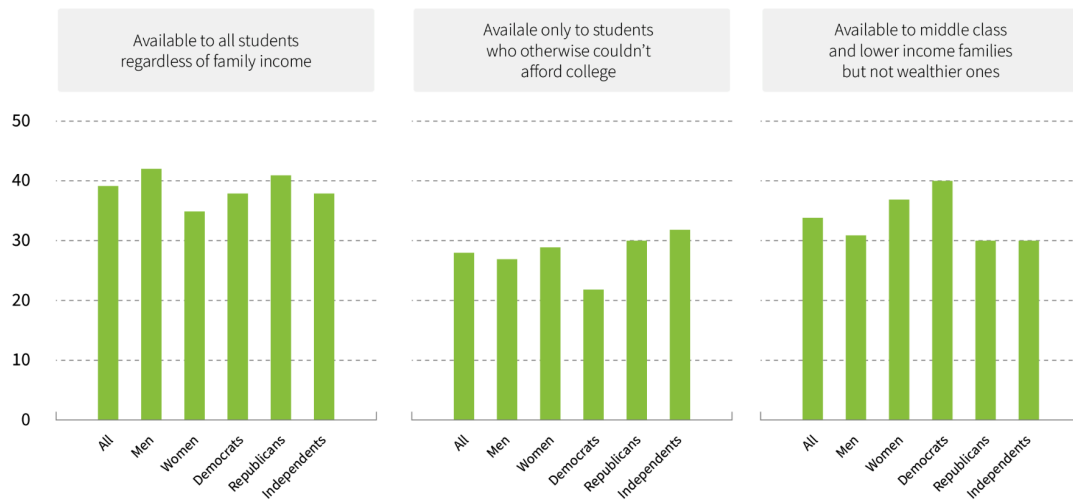
Eligibility Criteria

Once this fundamental question of how the state will cover the cost of a student’s college tuition bill has been answered, the program must then address a series of eligibility questions that often dominate legislative debates. But, with a few exceptions, CFCT’s exclusive polling suggests these questions have little impact on the overall support for the concept of free college tuition.

One question that does impact the level of political support for a program of free college tuition is whether the income of a student’s family should have any impact on their eligibility to receive a tuition free college education. There are three policy options a state can choose in developing their free

college tuition program – a universal model, or a family income cap model, or a strictly needs based model. Each of them has its own pros and cons depending on what the overall goal of the program is. However, in practice, which one a state chooses is usually based on the amount of money available to fund the program and the political dynamics of the particular state legislature.

Highest Support for Universal Free College Tuition



QUESTION: Many states are now considering programs to provide residents free public college tuition. States are also considering several financial requirements. Which of the following comes closest to your opinion of the financial requirements of a free public tuition program in your state?

SOURCE: Penn Schoen Berland - Q Tuition1

Universal Model

Universal Promise programs do not stipulate any income limit for initial scholarship eligibility. This does not mean that these programs are without eligibility criteria. The Tennessee Promise, for example, requires adherence to a strict application deadline, completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), attendance at two mandatory meetings with mentors from the local partnering organization, the completion of eight hours of community service per semester, and full-time enrollment in an eligible institution.

Research from the W.E. Upjohn Institute [indicates](#) that the Kalamazoo Promise, which only requires attendance at that city's public schools and has no income eligibility requirements, has had a 12-percentage point positive effect on overall education attainment and 10 percentage points on the attainment of a college degree. "These overall effects are larger than found in recent studies of scholarships that are more targeted. For the merit-based West Virginia PROMISE program, Scott-Clayton (2011) finds a 4–5 percentage point increase in bachelor's completion, a little more than 10% of the pre-treatment mean. For the need-based Florida Student Access Grant, Castleman and Long (forthcoming) find bachelor's completion effects of about 4–5 percentage points (22%). For the need-based Wisconsin Scholars Grant, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015) find a 4–5 percentage point (29%) increase in bachelor's attainment." In general, the research shows that the more universal the program, the greater its impact on increasing college enrollment.

Family Income Cap Model

To avoid being accused of giving away government money to families who don't need the help, some states have limited the benefit based on a dependent student family's income or an independent student's own income. This type of eligibility requirement also helps limit the program's cost, making it a policy option likely to be negotiated. Surprisingly, the idea is more popular with women than men, but its overall popularity is not as great as making the program as universal as, for example, Social Security.

This political dynamic impacted the negotiations that established the nation's first program for free college tuition for four-, as well as two-year state universities, New York's Excelsior Scholarship program. Excelsior scholarships were first made available to students in the 2017-2018 school year to students whose family's adjusted gross income on their federal income tax filing for the year 2015 was \$100,000 or less. In the 2018-19 school year the limit was raised to \$110,000, and in the 2019-20 school year and every year thereafter the family income cap has been set at \$125,000.

The Maryland Community College Promise requires applicants to have an annual adjusted gross income of not more than \$100,000 if he/she is single or resides in a single-parent household, or \$150,000 if he/she is married or resides in a two-parent household.

Need Based Model

The main argument for a need-based model is that it targets limited resources to students with the most need. It is a relatively common-place approach to awarding state financial aid.

According to the [National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs](#), exclusively need-based aid constituted 47% of all state aid to undergraduates, exclusively merit-based aid accounted for 18%, with the rest, 35%, accounted for by other programs and by programs with both need and merit components. Eight states (California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, and Virginia) collectively awarded about \$8.0 billion in undergraduate need-based grant aid, accounting for about 68.7% of all aid of this type.

It is the move away from such need-based models in favor of a more universal approach to free college that often causes some to be resistant to the idea of free tuition, fearing the impact such an approach might have on those whose financial needs are greatest. However, in practice, effectively implemented free college tuition programs can expand the number of students who enroll in college, particularly among underrepresented minority populations. In Tennessee, the racial composition of students at the state's community colleges shifted after the Tennessee Promise was put in place. The percentage of black students increased from 14% to 19% and the share of Hispanic students went up from 4% to 5%. The percentage of white students enrolled in community colleges declined from 74% to 70%.

Researchers Sara Goldrick-Rab, Professor of Higher Education Policy and Sociology at Temple University and Michelle Miller Adams, senior researcher at the W.E. Upjohn Institute, summed up the reasons to move away from need-based models to free college tuition this way: "Free-college

programs are wise to take a new approach to college affordability. They not only seek to support low-income students but to actually transform the systems where they are educated. By amplifying the message that going to college is possible and valuable, and by simplifying the financial aid journey by communicating in clear terms that tuition costs will be covered (not just ‘affordable’), they inject elements of a college-going culture into the K-12 setting, elicit new student support resources from schools and community members, and create incentives for colleges and universities to better serve their students.”

State officials attempting to enact a program of free college tuition should keep in mind that the public, overall, is much more in favor of a universal model and least supportive of a need-based model that makes the program, in its critic’s words, “a poor people’s program.” Most Americans have come to expect that state funded education should be provided to everyone who wants to take advantage of it, just as K-12 education is offered universally to everyone who wants their kids to attend public schools.

Merit Based Model

Some state programs, such as the Oregon Promise, have merit components. Both the Oregon Promise and the Rhode Island Promise, for example, require a 2.5 high school grade point average. However, some programs, such as Wyoming’s Hathaway Scholarship program also have ACT or SAT score requirements beyond GPA. Missouri’s long-standing A+ scholarship program even requires demonstrated academic proficiency in math. Applicants must achieve a score of “proficient” or “advanced” on the Algebra I exam at the end of the course or a higher level DESE approved end of course exam in some other course in the field of advanced mathematics.

Proponents of merit-based criteria argue that such requirements ensure post-secondary readiness and allow students to “earn” tuition-free college. But, [according to Donald Heller of the University of San Francisco](#), “the research has demonstrated that merit aid programs do not increase college access for students who would otherwise be unlikely to attend college.” He also notes that data from Michigan and Florida indicate that the rate at which scholarships were awarded differed greatly among students from different racial and ethnic groups, and among students from communities of different income levels. “In both states, students in the 20% of schools in the wealthiest communities (as measured by the proportion of students on free- or reduced-price lunch in high school) received scholarships at rates more than twice that of students in the poorest communities.”

Despite this research and the relative paucity of merit-based models at the state level, the single thing any state can do to improve the public’s support for a program of free college tuition is to include some sort of academic performance in its requirements.

Our exclusive polling shows that 58% of the public considers having a High School GPA requirement an essential component of a free college tuition program. The problem is that free college tuition programs are usually designed to get students who wouldn’t otherwise do so, to enroll in college. And those who are at the margin of making that decision often have not demonstrated outstanding academic performance in high school. Just raising the HS GPA requirement from 2.0 to 2.5, for

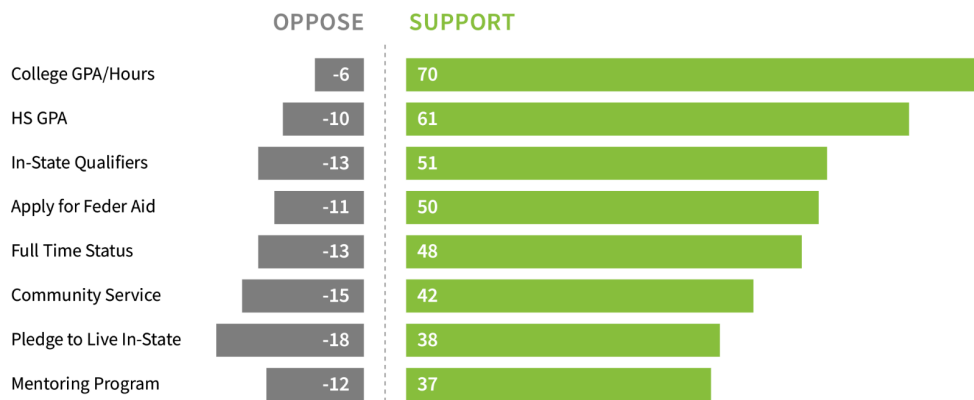
instance, has been estimated to eliminate one quarter of the number of eligible students from the program. This tradeoff, between gaining increased public support by imposing a high school GPA requirement versus getting the highest number of students to enroll in college, is one policymakers must make with their eyes wide open.

By contrast, requiring maintenance of a minimum GPA level once enrolled in college is a feature of just about every state free college tuition program, although the exact requirements vary between them. Indeed, the high level of bipartisan support for free college tuition programs being provided by the state is partially contingent upon the program being described as being for “those who are academically qualified.” Without such a requirement, Republican support, in particular, drops off quite a bit.

However, just as with high school GPA requirements, adding a minimum level of academic performance in college also has an impact on the success of a program. Of course, if enrollment without regard to graduation is the program’s purpose, this is not an issue at all. But since all state programs seek to boost graduation rates through increased enrollments, state policymakers have to be careful to not impose academic requirements that are either unrealistic or unsupported by other reforms designed to provide students the support they need to succeed academically. The type of support can vary greatly and can add to the program’s cost but should be part of policymaking discussions from the beginning.

GPA Requirements in High School and College Garner Highest Support

Support vs. opposition for various requirements to access free tuition.



QUESTION: Many states are now considering programs to provide residents free public college tuition. They are considering several requirements for students to qualify. Some of those requirements are listed below. Using the scale provided, how important is it that your state would include the following requirements in a free public college tuition program?

SOURCE: Penn Schoen Berland - Q/Tuition1

Other Eligibility Criteria

FAFSA Completion

Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a near universal requirement for last dollar free college tuition programs to ensure the state doesn't pay money for the program that the Federal government is prepared to subsidize through Pell Grants. However, some states, including Oregon, California, and Maryland, permit alternative applications for otherwise eligible undocumented students.

The Tennessee Promise, and the required mentoring program that provides constant reminders to prospective Promise scholars, has bolstered Tennessee's FAFSA completion rate to one of the highest in the nation.

Mentorship

Mentorship is a central component of the Tennessee Promise and many believe it is the key to its success. In Tennessee, the non-profit tnAchieves serves as the partnering organization to Tennessee Promise in 85 of the state's 95 counties.

Tennessee Promise mentors are required to be at least 21 years old, subject to a background check, and must attend a local mandatory Tennessee Promise meeting to learn more about the tnAchieves program. After the meeting, mentors are assigned a group of students who indicated that they want a mentor and are tasked with connecting with their students on a biweekly basis.

A paper authored by Randy Boyd, the Founder of tnAchieves and Tennessee's former Commissioner of Economic and Community Development, and Teresa Lubbers, Indiana's Commissioner of Higher Education, indicates that "tnAchieves relies heavily on its local advisory councils to provide guidance on the best place to recruit mentors in each community. In addition to assisting students through the Tennessee Promise process, tnAchieves is building advocates for education through the mentoring program. tnAchieves forms partnerships with the business community to engage its employees to serve as mentors, particularly in metropolitan areas. In 2015, 35% of mentors came from business/industry. It is logical for this sector to participate and support tnAchieves, as the ultimate goal is to provide the state's business and industry with a more qualified workforce."

A University of Tennessee Working Paper found that Knox Achieves participants were 24.2 percentage points more likely to seamlessly enroll in college within nine months of graduation and 29.6 percentage points more likely to seamlessly enroll in community college. For the 2011-12 school year, this scholarship and mentoring program expanded to serve 22 counties across the state and changed its name to tnAchieves.

Arkansas, Nevada, and Oregon also have their own versions of mentoring programs designed to ensure new students are able to navigate the often-unfamiliar nature of college life.

Community Service

The Tennessee Promise also requires the completion of eight hours of community service per semester. Then Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam said, “the research shows that students who serve in their communities are more engaged and more successful, and it’s a great lesson to teach them – that while we’re engaged in assisting you in your higher education goals, we’re also asking you to give back.”

Even greater community service requirements are part of plans in Arkansas (15 hours per semester) and Missouri (50 hours of mentoring or tutoring in high school). Each of these states have used this type of provision to respond to the frequently heard argument that students getting free tuition should have some “skin in the game.”

However, CFCT's exclusive polling suggests Americans are likely to object to this type of provision more than almost any other eligibility requirement. The best way to respond to the “skin in the game” argument is to require some sort of academic performance related to the student’s success in completing college.

In 2019, Nevada’s legislature slightly reduced the number of community service hours required for Nevada Promise Scholarship eligibility. The number of required community service hours prior to receiving the scholarship was reduced from 20 hours per year to 8 hours per semester. College students must also complete eight community service hours per semester to retain the scholarship.

Age at Time of College Enrollment

Many studies have shown a strong correlation between how soon after high school graduation a student enrolls in college and completion of their chosen college program. For that reason, many free college tuition programs require applicants to be an immediate high school graduate or complete a home school program prior to turning 19 or at least enroll in college no later than their 20th birthday. States with such eligibility requirements include Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Wyoming.

By contrast, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) has noted that states serious about achieving their goals for a college educated workforce cannot attain those goals without free college tuition programs open to students who dropped out of college without a degree or who failed to enroll upon graduation from high school. The [report](#) points out that most states do not have a sufficient number of high school students to meet their targets even if a large percentage of them graduate and enroll in college. Accordingly, they call for free college tuition programs to include revised state residency and dependency status requirements.

Specifically mentioned is the inclusion of “independent” students in the scholarship programs’ eligibility requirements. The federal government considers students who are at least 24 years of age or who are married or who have children as “independent” in calculating financial aid benefits, but it

also includes younger students who are in foster care or are homeless. Military veterans regardless of age are also considered independent under FAFSA rules.

Additionally, current free community college proposals require students to graduate from an in-state high school. ECS argues that the eligibility criteria for in-state college tuition should be used instead so as not to exclude current adult residents who may have graduated from high school in another state.

This issue of age or time of college enrollment is clearly related to the goals a state adopts for its college completion policies. Tennessee has addressed the potential conflict by creating two programs – one for recent high school graduates and another, called Tennessee Reconnect, for adults. Student eligibility criteria include: not already having an associate or bachelor degree; being a Tennessee resident for at least one year preceding the date of application for the grant; completion of the FAFSA and designation as an independent student; admission in an eligible postsecondary institution; enrollment in a degree or certificate program at least part time (6 semester hours); and participation in an advising program approved by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Unlike the state’s Promise program for high school graduates, there is no community service requirement.

Other states that have adopted “adult promise” programs of their own, include Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York.

Michigan Reconnect, championed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer (D), was launched in 2021. The Governor’s strategy has been to work with Democratic and Republican legislators towards a comprehensive system of publicly funded tuition. In her first State of the State message in January, 2019, she proposed free community college tuition for both recent high school graduates and for adults. Legislative support existed for the latter but not the former, so she advanced a Reconnect program for adults 25 or older without a college degree. It passed with strong bipartisan majorities, but funding was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic, however, provided an opportunity to assist essential workers risking their wellbeing with tuition-free community college. An influx of federal funds enabled Governor Whitmer to launch a GI Bill for frontline workers, which the public overwhelmingly believed was deserving of such a benefit. Futures for Frontliners, as the program was called, was instrumental in providing a strong foundation for successor free college tuition programs.

Between 2021 and 2025, more than 66,500 students have enrolled in community or Tribal colleges through Michigan Reconnect and over 8,100 individuals have successfully earned their credentials. According to Governor Whitmer, “Michigan Reconnect’s success is driven by ongoing, bipartisan support from legislators and collaboration with our incredible network of community colleges. Together, we will keep lowering costs and creating opportunities for everyone to earn more money and find a rewarding, in-demand career.”

Stay or Pay Requirements

Just as corporations often debate the value of training employees who might then change their employment, some legislators have argued in the course of debates about implementing a free college tuition program that it should contain a “stay or pay” provision to ensure those who enjoy the state’s largesse stay in the state upon graduation long enough to return a benefit to the economy of the state who paid for their education. Even though such a provision was the most controversial of all eligibility requirements tested in our polling, adding such a provision has often been the key to winning passage of the overall program.

In New York, for instance, then Governor Cuomo accepted a Republican amendment to his Excelsior scholarship proposal that requires students to live in New York state upon graduation for a number of years equal to the years for which they received a scholarship. It also requires that if the student works during the time they are receiving the scholarship, the employment must be in New York state. Failure to abide by the post-graduation residency requirements converts the amount of Excelsior scholarship money received during the length of time the residency requirement was not met into a zero-interest loan that must be repaid to the state. The complexity of this and other eligibility criteria has led some to conclude it has caused a significant reduction in the take up rate for Excelsior scholarships.

By contrast, Rhode Island’s “stay or pay” provision, also added in negotiations by the Governor with the legislature, is much simpler and requires no additional administrative expense. It simply requires those who apply for free community college tuition to pledge to remain in the state upon graduation.

Additional “stay or pay” provisions can be found in Arkansas, Kansas, and West Virginia. The Arkansas Futures Grant Program requires those who receive the benefit of free college tuition to be employed in Arkansas within six months of graduating and continue to reside in the state for three years upon graduation. The 2021 Act to establish the Kansas Program Scholarship stipulates that recipients sign an agreement to live and work in Kansas for at least two-years following the successful completion of their college program. West Virginia’s Invests Grant Program requires recipients to reside in West Virginia for the two years following obtainment of the degree or certificate for which the grant or grants were awarded. In all three cases, the grant turns into a loan that must be repaid to the state if the residency and/or employment provisions are not met. However, many states allow deferrals or exemptions to “stay or pay” requirements for military service and to pursue additional postsecondary education. West Virginia, for example, exempts individuals serving in the armed services or attending an out-of-state postsecondary institution at least half-time.

Drug Testing

The West Virginia Invests Grant Program [requires recipients to pay for and pass a drug screening](#) before the start of their first term each academic year. Students have a 60-day window to pass the screening. Students who fail one drug screening test are eligible for the Program but must successfully pass a subsequent drug screen before their next term. If a student has a second non-successful drug

screening, he or she must complete a drug rehabilitation program to remain eligible for participation in the Program.

A list of the states that have adopted some or all of the eligibility requirements described in this chapter follows below.

State Program Requirements

High School GPA and SAT/ACT

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	A 2.5 GPA is required for an associate's degree program. Eligible residents who graduate high school with less than a 2.5 GPA may obtain an associate degree through the SEED scholarship program if they are enrolled in a pathway program and successfully complete each step. Workforce training certificates do not require a minimum GPA but do require graduation from a Delaware high school/GED program.
Louisiana	TOPS	Eligibility requirements for the HS class of 2022 include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. TOPS Opportunity Award - requires a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 20. 2. TOPS Performance Award - requires a 3.25 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 23. 3. TOPS Honors Award - requires a 3.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 27. 4. TOPS Tech Award - requires a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 17 or a silver level score on the ACT WorkKeys assessments.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	A high school cumulative GPA of at least a 2.3 (or its equivalent) is required if enrolling directly from high school. Applicants currently or previously enrolled at a community college must have earned either: a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 from the community college; or a high school unweighted cumulative GPA of at least 2.3 or its equivalent.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Graduate HS with an overall unweighted grade point average of 2.5 or higher
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	A minimum 2.50 cumulative GPA for all coursework attempted in grades 9 through 12.
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Document a 2.5 cumulative high school GPA or higher, or a GED score of 145 or higher on each test.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Honors (min 3.5 GPA/25 ACT): \$1,680 per semester Performance (min 3.0 GPA/21 ACT): \$1,260 per semester Opportunity (min 2.5 GPA/19 ACT): \$840 per semester Provisional Opportunity (min 2.5 GPA/17 ACT): \$840 per semester

State Program Requirements

Residency

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Arkansas residency demonstrated by having graduated from an Arkansas public school, private school, home school or received a high school equivalency diploma approved by the Department of Career Education; or verification that the applicant has resided within the state for the three (3) years immediately preceding application and has either: graduated from an out-of-state high school, private school, home school or received a high school equivalency diploma approved by another state.
California	California College Promise	Eligible students must be California residents or an eligible AB 540 or AB 1899 student.
Colorado	Colorado Promise	Recipients must be eligible for in-state tuition.
Connecticut	Mary Ann Handley Award	Recipients must be eligible for in-state tuition.
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	Applicants under age 25 must satisfy Delaware residency requirements at Technical Community College or University of Delaware. Adults 25 years of age and over must meet a five-year Delaware residency requirement.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	Students must be a Hawaii resident or qualify for exempt status that pays in-state tuition.
Indiana	Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant	Applicants must be an Indiana resident and U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen.
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Applicants must be an Indiana resident when applying for and receiving the scholarship. They also must be enrolled in the 7th or 8th grade at an Indiana public or private school accredited by the Indiana Department of Education.
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Recipients must be eligible for in-state tuition.
Iowa	Future Ready Last-Dollar Scholarship	Recent high school graduates must have earned an Iowa HS diploma, completed an Iowa homeschool, or received an Iowa high school equivalency diploma. Adult learners (age 20 and older) must be a resident of Iowa at the time of application.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	*Applicants must be a Kansas resident, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have graduated from a Kansas high school within the preceding 12 months or have received a GED or other high school equivalency credential within the preceding 12 months, OR - Be 21 years of age or older and a Kansas resident for the preceding three consecutive years, OR - Be a dependent child of a military servicemember who is stationed in another state and who, within the preceding 12 months, graduated from an out-of-state high school or obtained a GED or other high school equivalency credential. -"
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship	All applicants must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident; - Be a Kentucky resident.

State Program Requirements

Residency (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Applicants must be a U.S. Citizen and a Louisiana resident. A HS credential recognized by the State of Louisiana is also required.
Louisiana	TOPS	The programs requires Louisiana residency and the completion of a core HS curriculum. Any independent or dependent student who actually resides in Louisiana while attending his last two full years at an eligible Louisiana high school, graduates from such a school, and FASFA or TOPS on-line application lists Louisiana as state of residency for at least two full years preceding the date of high school graduation is considered a Louisiana resident.
Maine	Free College Scholarship	Students must have a physical Maine address at enrollment and for the duration of their studies,
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Applicants must be eligible for in-state tuition, as determined by the community college.
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	Students must physically reside in Massachusetts for at least one year prior to the start of their first enrolled term.
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	Applicants must have lived in Michigan for a year or more.
Michigan	Community College Guarantee	Eligible high school graduates must be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or approved refugee. They must also be a Michigan resident since July 1 of the previous calendar year. Additionally, the parent(s) of dependent students must be a Michigan resident since July 1 of the previous calendar year.
Minnesota	North Star Promise	Minnesota resident, including students who apply for state financial aid via the MN Dream Act Application.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Applicants must: be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident; attend a designated A+ high school for 2 years prior to graduation; and have at least a 95% attendance record overall for grades 9-12.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Applicants must be a Missouri resident and a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
Nevada	Nevada Promise	A student must be classified as a Nevada resident for tuition purposes by the institution where they plan to receive the Nevada Promise Scholarship.
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	All students must be eligible for state financial aid. This requires legal residency in the state for a period of not less than 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the academic period for which aid is being requested. Non-citizen and resident alien students may obtain grants by providing evidence that they are not in the United States for the temporary purpose of obtaining an education.
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	All students must be eligible for state financial aid. This requires legal residency in the state for a period of not less than 12 consecutive months immediately prior to the academic period for which aid is being requested. Undocumented students can qualify for the GSG under the NJ Dream Act if they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attended a New Jersey high school for at least three years. - Graduated from a New Jersey high school or received a New Jersey GED. - File an affidavit stating they have filed (or will file) to legalize their immigration status as soon as they are eligible.

State Program Requirements

Residency (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
New Mexico	New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship	*Students must be a New Mexico resident, which requires proof of living in the state for the past 12 consecutive months. There are limited exceptions for Tribal members, active members of the armed services, and others.*
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	An applicant must: be a resident of New York State (NYS) and have resided in NYS for 12 continuous months prior to the beginning of the term, and; be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen.
New York	CUNY/SUNY Reconnect	Students must be a New York State resident or eligible for in-state tuition.
North Carolina	Next NC Scholarship	Students must be a North Carolina resident eligible for in-state tuition.
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	Applicants must be Oklahoma residents and a U.S. citizen or lawfully present in the United States.
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Applicants must be an Oregon resident for at least 12 months prior to enrolling in community college. Undocumented and DACA students must complete the Oregon Student Aid Application (instead of the FAFSA) and the Oregon Promise application.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Recipients must be Rhode Island residents that qualify for in-state tuition and fees. Non-citizens may qualify for the Rhode Island Promise if they meet the criteria to be considered RI residents.
South Carolina	SC Workforce Scholarships for the Future	Recipients must be South Carolina citizens enrolled in a qualified program.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	A student must be a Tennessee resident and a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen.
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	A student must be a Tennessee resident for at least one year preceding their date of application and complete the FAFSA.
Vermont	802 Opportunity Grant	Eligible Community College of Vermont students must be a state resident and a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen.
Virginia	G3 Program	A student must be eligible for in-state financial aid, which requires them to be domiciled in Virginia for at least 12 months preceding the first day of classes. State law however contains several exemptions.
Washington	Washington College Grant	Eligible Washington State residents, including undocumented students, must maintain a primary residence in Washington for at least 12 consecutive months immediately before their first term in college.
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Applicants must be a citizen or financial aid eligible resident of the United States and have been a resident of West Virginia for at least one year immediately preceding the date of application for a grant.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Students must demonstrate Wyoming residency, which is determined by the postsecondary institution.

State Program Requirements

Merit or Need-Based - Initial Eligibility

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
New Mexico	Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative	Need-based
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	Merit-based Students who graduate high school with less than a 2.5 GPA may obtain an associate degree through the SEED scholarship program if they are enrolled in a pathway program and successfully complete each step. Workforce training certificates do not require a minimum GPA but do require graduation from a Delaware high school/GED program.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	Need-based
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Need-based Students must meet family income eligibility guidelines -- currently \$49,025 for a family of four.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last Dollar Scholarship	Need-based Applicants must have a Student Aid Index (SAI) at or below \$20,000.
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Need-based Students have an eligible Student Aid Index (SAI) on the 2025-26 FAFSA. The SAI range for scholarship eligibility for 2025-26 is (-1,500) - 10,669.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Need-based Students must have a family household income of: \$100,000 or less for a family of two; \$150,000 or less for a family of three; and \$150,000 + \$4,800 per additional family member beyond three.
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Need-based Students must certify that they have a family income that does not exceed three hundred percent of the federal poverty guidelines; or certify that they are currently unemployed or have been underemployed for a period of at least six months prior to the date they would receive an award.
Louisiana	TOPS	Merit-based Eligibility requirements for the HS class of 2022 include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. TOPS Opportunity Award - requires a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 20. 2. TOPS Performance Award - requires a 3.25 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 23. 3. TOPS Honors Award - requires a 3.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 27. 4. TOPS Tech Award - requires a 2.5 HS GPA in core courses and a ACT composite score of at least 17 or a silver level score on the ACT WorkKeys assessments.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Merit and Need-based Applicants must have earned an unweighted high school cumulative GPA of at least a 2.3 (or its equivalent) if enrolling directly from high school. Applicants currently or previously enrolled at a community college must have earned either: a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.5 from the community college; or a high school unweighted cumulative GPA of at least a 2.3 or its equivalent. Applicants must also have an annual adjusted gross income not more than \$100,000 if the applicant is single or resides in a single-parent household; or \$150,000 if the applicant is married or resides in a two-parent household for the 2023 tax year;

State Program Requirements

Merit or Need-Based - Initial Eligibility (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Minnesota	North Star Promise	Need-based Students must have a family Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) as reported on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Minnesota Dream Act Application below \$80,000.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Merit-based All applicants must graduate HS with an overall unweighted grade point average of 2.5 or higher, and achieve a score of proficient or advanced on the Algebra I end of course exam or a higher level DESE approved end-of-course exam in the field of mathematics.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Need-based Eligible students must have an adjusted gross income, as reported on the FAFSA, that does not exceed \$80,000 if married or \$40,000 if filing under any other tax status.
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	Need-based Recipients must have an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) between \$0 - \$65,000.
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	Need-based Recipients must have an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) between \$0 - \$65,000.
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	Need-based Applicants must have a combined federal adjusted gross income of \$125,000 or less.
North Carolina	Next NC Scholarship	Need-based Students must be Pell eligible, have a Student Aid Index (SAI) at or below 7,500 after completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and be from a household with an annual Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$80,000 or less.
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	Need and Merit-based Students must achieve at least a 2.50 cumulative GPA for all coursework attempted in grades 9 through 12, and indicate that their parents' federal adjusted gross income for the most recent federal tax year does not exceed \$60,000 with 1-2 dependent children, \$70,000 with 3-4 dependent children, or \$80,000 with 5 or more dependent children.
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Merit-based Students must document a 2.0 cumulative high school GPA or higher, or a GED score of 145 or higher on each test.
Vermont	802 Opportunity Grant	Need-based Students must have a family Adjusted Gross Income of less than \$100,000.
Virginia	G3 Program	Need-based Except for frontline healthcare workers, applicants must have a total household income less than or equal to four hundred percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
Washington	Washington College Grant	Need-Based Students with a family income up to 100% of the state's median family income qualify on a sliding scale.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Merit-Based A minimum 2.5 GPA/17 ACT is required.

State Program Requirements

College Performance - Continued Eligibility

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Colorado	Colorado Promise	Students must maintain at least a 2.5 GPA each term.
Connecticut	Mary Ann Handley Award	Satisfactory Academic Progress (2.0 GPA)
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	Associate degree students must maintain a 2.5 minimum cumulative GPA, which is calculated using all college-level credits attempted. The cumulative GPA is verified at the end of the summer semester to determine eligibility for the next academic year. In extenuating circumstances, students may submit a SEED scholarship appeal to request consideration to maintain eligibility with a lower cumulative GPA.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Indiana	Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	College students must Maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress, earn at least 30 credits each academic year, and complete the College Scholar Success Program annually.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Students must be continuously enrolled in college.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress. Institutions can provide an appeals process.
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Satisfactory Academic Progress & at least a 2.00 GPA in a qualified program.
Louisiana	TOPS	Steady Academic Progress -- cumulative 2.00 GPA on a 4.00 scale -- at the end of every semester, quarter, term, session, or intersession for which grades are reported.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Students must maintain at least a 2.5 cumulative community college GPA if enrolled in a credit bearing program; make satisfactory academic progress toward a vocational certificate, or; participate in a registered apprenticeship program.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Students must maintain at least a 2.5 cumulative community college GPA if enrolled in a credit bearing program; make satisfactory academic progress toward a vocational certificate, or; participate in a registered apprenticeship program.
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Michigan	Michigan Community College Guarantee	Satisfactory Academic Progress

State Program Requirements

College Performance - Continued Eligibility (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	Students must maintain a cumulative 2.0 community college GPA.
Minnesota	Minnesota North Star Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Postsecondary students must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress and a minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA at the end of the initial fall semester. A minimum 2.5 cumulative GPA is required thereafter.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Satisfactory Academic Progress (2.5 GPA)
Nevada	Nevada Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	Satisfactory Academic Progress
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	Satisfactory Academic Progress
New Mexico	New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship	Students must maintain at 2.5 (or higher) cumulative GPA each semester of
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	The program requires students to be on track to complete an associate's degree in two years or a bachelor's degree in four years
New York	CUNY/SUNY Reconnect	Satisfactory Academic Progress
North Carolina	Next NC Scholarship	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Students must maintain at least a 2.5 GPA.
South Carolina	SC Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship	Credit-seeking students must maintain a 2.0 GPA.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	Satisfactory Academic Progress (2.0 GPA)
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	Students must maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) at the end of each academic year.
Vermont	802 Opportunity Grant	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Virginia	G3 Program	Satisfactory Academic Progress
Washington	Washington College Grant	Satisfactory Academic Progress
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Satisfactory Academic Standing -- including a 2.0 minimum cumulative GPA.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Students need to maintain a minimum 2.25 to 2.5 GPA depending on the scholarship level.

State Program Requirements

Mentorship

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Students receive monthly mentoring from an organization determined by the Department of Higher Education. Mentors certify that at least one time each month they provided mentoring services by email, phone, or in-person to each student he or she is mentoring.
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Students need to complete Scholar Success Program activities in high school and college in order to earn the 21st Century Scholarship. They include: creating a graduation plan, participating in an extracurricular or service activity, watching a "paying for college" video, taking a career interest assessment, visiting a college campus, taking a college entrance exam, and submitting college applications.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship	Recipients must attend a college orientation session, register for courses with the assistance of an advisor, participate in available academic advising sessions, and participate in available career counseling required by the college or program of study.
Maine	Free College Scholarship	Recipients are required to participate in academic planning and advising to stay on track for completion.
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	While mentorship is not required, Michigan Reconnect Navigators guide students start on their path to a college degree or certificate. This includes applying for federal student aid, setting a career goal, selecting a program of study, registering for classes and creating a plan to graduate.
Nevada	Nevada Promise	Recipients must meet at least once with a mentor (assigned by the college) before the first semester of enrollment and at least once every semester while in college.
South Carolina	SC Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship	Taking a financial literacy course offered at the technical college is an optional eligibility requirement. Students could also work or fulfill a volunteer requirement, but must complete one of the three options.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	All applicants must view a mandatory webinar and connect with a mentor from a partnering organization.
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	Students must answer questions to identify challenges they may face when returning to school as an adult. The resulting Reconnect Success plan guides personalized advising and navigation services.

State Program Requirements

Volunteer

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	15 hours each semester the students receives a grant.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Applicants are required to perform at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring, of which up to 25% may include job shadowing, prior to HS graduation.
Nevada	Nevada Promise	8 hours of eligible community service as a HS Senior and during each semester of college enrollment.
South Carolina	SC Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship	Completing 100 hours of voluntary time contributing to a nonprofit or public service organization is an optional eligibility requirement. Students could also work or take a financial literacy course.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	8 hours for each semester. HS applicants must complete the community service requirement by July 1.

State Program Requirements

Age

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	None
California	California College Promise	None
Colorado	Colorado Promise	Students must have completed high school after January 1, 2024.
Connecticut	Mary Ann Handley Award	None
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	None. Applicants aged 25 years old and older are however subject to a five year residency requirement.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	None
Indiana	Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant	None
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Requires enrollment in the 7th or 8th grade at an Indiana public or private school accredited by the Indiana Department of Education.
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Eligibility is limited to students who have graduated HS or completed a high school equivalency diploma within the last two years.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship	While there are no age requirements, high school graduates must enroll in an eligible program at a participating Iowa college full-time (at least 12 credit hours) in the fall semester immediately following graduation. Adults over age 20 are permitted to enroll in college part-time (at least 6 credit hours per term).
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Applicants must be 21 years of age or older and have been a Kansas resident for at least three consecutive years OR have graduated from a Kansas HS, or received a GED, within the past 12 months.
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship	None
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Students must be 19 years of age when applying. The minimum age requirement is scheduled to decrease annually until it reaches 17.
Louisiana	TOPS	Most programs require enrollment as a first-time freshman by the fall semester following the first anniversary of high school graduation.*
Maine	Free College Scholarship	Students must graduate from high school or earn a HiSet/GED in 2023 to 2025.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	None
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	None with the 2024 MassEducate expansion.t
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	Applicants must be at least 25 years old.
Michigan	Michigan Community College Guarantee	Students must enroll within 15 months of high school graduation.

State Program Requirements

Age (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Minnesota	North Star Promise	None
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Eligibility expires when the earliest of the following occurs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 48 months after the graduation date documented on your high school transcript. Students providing service to any branch of the U.S. armed forces can defer their eligibility. Students graduating from high school in mid-year may be eligible for a spring award if their high school transcripts indicate the mid-year graduation date. Receipt of an associate's degree Completion of 105% of the hours required for the program in which you are currently enrolled
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	The program has three eligibility categories, including: individuals who are 25 years or older or individuals who have not been enrolled in any school within the last two years.
Nevada	Nevada Promise	Community college enrollment in the school year immediately following high school graduation is required. GED General Equivalency Diplomas (GED) or equivalent documents must be obtained before 20 years of age.
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	None
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	None
New Mexico	New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship	None
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	None
New York	CUNY/SUNY Reconnect	Students must be between the ages of 25 and 55.
North Carolina	Next NC Reconnect	None
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	Students must start taking college courses within three years after graduating high school.
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Applicants must enroll at least half-time at an Oregon community college within 6 months of high school graduation or GED completion.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Recipients must be a high school graduate (public, private or homeschooled) or a GED® recipient who was younger than 19 years of age when they completed high
South Carolina	SC Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship	None
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	A student must enroll in an eligible postsecondary institution and participate full-time in the fall term following graduation from an eligible high school or homeschool program, or completion of a GED/HiSET diploma earned before he/she reached 19 years of age.

State Program Requirements

Age (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	Applicants must be an "independent" student or be at least 23 years of age on or before January 1 of the academic year of initial enrollment.
Vermont	802 Opportunity Grant	None
Virginia	G3 Program	None
Washington	Washington College Grant	None
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Applicant must be at least 18 years of age. However, younger individuals may qualify for the grant upon completion of a secondary education program.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Students must apply for the Hathaway Scholarship within 48 months of their HS graduation date.

State Program Requirements

College Attendance (full-time or part-time)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
California	California College Promise	Full-time enrollment is required.
Colorado	Colorado Promise	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Connecticut	Mary Ann Handley Award	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	Student may attend part-time after their first semester.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	Student are required to enroll for at least 6 credits per semester.
Indiana	Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant	Full-time enrollment is required for dependent students. At least half time enrollment is required for independent students.
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Students are required to earn at least 30 credits each academic year.
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Louisiana	TOPS	With limited exceptions, full-time enrollment continuous enrollment is required.
Maine	Free College Scholarship	Full-time enrollment is required. Students are required to earn at least 30 credits each academic year.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Half-time or greater (6+ credits per semester) attendance is required.
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	While full- or part-time attendance is allowed, students must earn 12 credits each academic year.
Michigan	Community College Guarantee	Full-time enrollment is required.
Minnesota	North Star Promise	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	Full-time enrollment is required.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	At least half-time enrollment is required.

State Program Requirements

College Attendance (full-time or part-time) (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Nevada	Nevada Promise	At least 12 credits per semester are required (with the exception of the last semester if fewer credits are required to graduate).
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	At least 6 credits per semester are required.
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	Full-time enrollment is required.
New Mexico	New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	Full-time enrollment is required -- at least 12 credits per term and successfully completion of at least 30 credits each year.
New York	CUNY/SUNY Reconnect	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
North Carolina	Next NC Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed. However, recipients can only receive awards for up to five consecutive years after enrolling in college.
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Students must maintain at least half-time continuous enrollment (6 or more credits) during fall, winter, and spring terms each year.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Full-time enrollment is required.
South Carolina	SC Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	Continuous full-time enrollment is required.
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Vermont	902 Opportunity Grant	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Virginia	G3 Program	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed. However, students have only three years of eligibility to complete an associate degree.
Washington	Washington College Grant	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
West Virginia	WV Invest Grant	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Full- or part-time attendance is allowed. However, students are limited to six years to earn 96 credits.

State Program Requirements

Drug/Alcohol/Criminal

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	A 2021 expansion of the program made individuals with non-violent felonies eligible for scholarships.
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Students pledge to not use illegal drugs, commit a crime or delinquent act, or consume alcohol before reaching the legal drinking age.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Students pledge to remain drug free for the full term of the award.
Missouri	A+ Scholarship	HS students must maintain a record of good citizenship and avoid the unlawful use of drugs and/or alcohol. Additionally, students cannot have a criminal record preventing receipt of federal Title IV student financial aid.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Students cannot have a criminal record preventing receipt of federal Title IV student financial aid.
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	High school applicants are required to refrain from substance abuse and criminal or delinquent acts. College students will permanently lose eligibility if they are suspended from college for more than one semester for conduct reasons.
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Students must pay for and pass a drug screening during the 60 days before the start of their first term each academic year.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Convicted felons are not eligible. Exceptions may be granted by the Wyoming Department of Education.

State Program Requirements

Post-College Residency

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Recipients must reside and work in Arkansas for a minimum of three years following community college graduation. The grant converts into a loan if the residency and employment stipulation are not met.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Recipients sign an agreement to live and work in the State of Kansas for two consecutive years following the successful completion of their program of study. Failure to do so requires repaying the scholarship with interest.
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Students must agree to reside and work full-time in Louisiana for at least one year after college graduation. However, the program does not contain a penalty for leaving the state.
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	At the time of application, students must certify an "intent to remain" in Massachusetts. However, there is no penalty for leaving the state.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	Graduates are required to report their employment and residency to the Missouri Department of Higher Education for three years post-graduation. Students who started college after July 2022 do not need repay funds for moving out of the state.
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	Recipients are required to reside in New York State for the same number of years in which they received the award, or it will be converted into a loan. The student does not need to be employed during this period, however they cannot be employed in another state.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Recipients commit to live, work, or continue their education in Rhode Island after graduation. However, the program does not contain a penalty for leaving the state.
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Recipients agree to reside in West Virginia for the two years following obtainment of the degree or certificate for which the grant or grants were awarded. Violation of this agreement would require repayment of the awards with interest. The Act has exemptions for individuals serving in the armed services or attending an out-of-state postsecondary institution at least half-time;

State Program Requirements

Term or Semester Limitations

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Arkansas	ArFuture	Up to 5 semesters or the completion of an Associate degree.
Colorado	Colorado Promise	Eligibility is limited to 65 earned credit hours (approx. 2 academic years).
Connecticut	Mary Ann Handley Award	Eligibility is limited to 72 earned credit hours (3 academic years).
Delaware	SEED Scholarship	Up to 10 continuous semesters.
Hawaii	Hawai'i Promise	Eligibility is limited to no more than eight (8) semesters.
Indiana	Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant	The grant is available for up to two years.
Indiana	21st Century Scholarship	Eligibility is limited to no more than eight (8) semesters or twelve (12) trimesters or quarters.
Iowa	All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship	Up to eight full-time semesters or 16 part-time semesters.
Iowa	Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship	Eligibility is limited to 5 or 6 semesters (depending on the program length and institution) for full-time students and 8 semesters for part-time students.
Kansas	Kansas Promise	Recipients have 30 months from the date that the scholarship was first awarded to complete a Promise eligible program.
Kentucky	Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship	Eligibility expires when the first of the following conditions is met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receipt of scholarship funding for four academic terms; - Receipt of the scholarship for 60 credit hours of enrollment; or - Receipt of a first associate's degree
Louisiana	MJ Foster Promise Program	Up to three academic years.
Louisiana	TOPS	With limited exceptions, eligibility is limited to eight semesters or 12 quarters.
Maine	Free College Scholarship	Recipients who have graduated HS between 2023 & 2025 have up to four years to complete an Associate degree.
Maryland	Maryland Community College Promise	Up to three academic years.
Massachusetts	MassReconnect and MassEducate	Eligibility is limited to 6 semesters for full-time Associate degree students and 10 semesters for part-time students. Certificate students are limited to 4 semesters for full-time students and 8 semesters for part-time students.
Michigan	Michigan Reconnect	Up to four years.
Michigan	Michigan Community College Guarantee	Up to three years.
Minnesota	North Star Promise	Eligibility is limited to 120 college credits.

State Program Requirements

Term or Semester Limitations (continued)

STATE	PROGRAM	REQUIREMENT(S)
Missouri	A+ Scholarship Program	Eligibility expires when the earliest of the following occurs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 48 months after the graduation date documented on your high school transcript; - Receipt of an associate's degree; or - Completion of 105% of the hours required for the program in which the student is enrolled.
Missouri	Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant	A student's eligibility expires when any of the following occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Receipt of the grant for four semesters or the equivalent - Receipt of a bachelor's degree - Reaching 200 percent of the academic time typically required to complete the program of study.
Nevada	Nevada Promise	Up to three academic years.
New Jersey	Community College Opportunity Grant	With limited exceptions, eligibility is limited to five semesters.
New Jersey	Garden State Guarantee	Up to four semesters.
New Mexico	Opportunity Scholarship	Up to 90 credit hours on towards an Associate degree or up to 160 credit hours toward a Bachelor's degree.
New York	Excelsior Scholarship	A recipient of an Excelsior Scholarship is eligible to receive award payments for not more than two years of full-time undergraduate study in a program leading to an associate's degree or four years of full-time undergraduate study, or five years if the program of study normally requires five years, in a program leading to a bachelor's degree.
New York	CUNY/SUNY Reconnect	Up to 10 semesters. Students can take a one-year break from college without losing eligibility.
North Carolina	Next NC Scholarship	Eligibility is limited to 6 semesters for full-time Associate degree students and 10 semesters for full-time Bachelor degree students.
Oklahoma	Oklahoma Promise	A student may receive awards for no more than five consecutive years after enrolling in postsecondary education. There are limited exceptions for students on active military
Oregon	Oregon Promise	Eligibility is limited to 90 attempted college credits.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Promise	Up to two academic years.
Tennessee	Tennessee Promise	Up to five semesters, exclusive of approved leaves or absence, or the completion of an Associate degree.
Tennessee	Tennessee Reconnect	Recipients will receive the grant until they either (1) earn an associate degree, (2) complete the total number of semester hours necessary to complete the degree, or (3) fail to maintain either continuous enrollment or a minimum 2.0 GPA.
Virginia	G3 Program	Up to three years to complete an Associate degree.
Washington	Washington College Grant	Up to ten full-time semesters or fifteen full-time quarters or the equivalent combination of these two or the clock hour equivalent.
West Virginia	WV Invests Grant	Up to 90 attempted credit hours.
Wyoming	Hathaway Scholarship	Most students are limited to the equivalent of eight full-time semesters.

CHAPTER IV

Putting It
All Together

Chapter IV –

Putting It All Together

A Three Step Process for Designing Your State’s Promise Program

This briefing book is designed to help state policymakers think through the elements of making college tuition free, so they can develop and effectively implement programs that can reap significant economic and societal benefits. We realize that each state has its own unique challenges, tax structures, higher education systems, and political make up. So, while we have provided many proven examples on different elements that we believe will both justify the expenditures and prove to be politically popular, we have not attempted to provide a single, “model legislative proposal” or suggest there is only one path that states must follow to address the challenge of college affordability.

Instead, this concluding chapter in the briefing book provides policy makers with a guide that will enable each one to make an informed decision on what should be included in their state’s free college tuition program, considering all the variables that must be addressed to make the program effective.

Here are the steps we recommend each state take to put together a program tailored to its fiscal and political environment.

STEP 1.

Begin by gaining clarity on what goals you are trying to achieve by creating a free college tuition program.

A great example of a clear policy goal that helped define and focus a state’s program is the “Drive for 55” plan of then Tennessee Governor Haslam. By making it clear that increasing the number of higher education trained workers in the state was the reason for the program, the Governor won support from the business community and other constituencies that might have otherwise questioned the expenditure of funds required to make their community colleges tuition free.

Many states have followed Governor Haslam’s model and begun their push for a more educated workforce by stating the percentage of the workforce they want to have degrees at a specific date in the future. This often leads states, as it did for Tennessee, to offer two different free college tuition or Promise programs--one for recent high school graduates and another for adults already in the workforce.

Clear goals not only help generate support for the program, they also greatly increase the effectiveness of the program’s design. The following chart provides examples of the relationship

between goals and program design for two different policy goals often associated with free college tuition programs.

Define Promise Program Goals and Design Policy Accordingly

Before designing the program and calculating costs, the strategy and need for the program must be defined

PROGRAM GOAL	DESIGN LEVER	DESIGN LEVER IMPLICATION
Increasing access, affordability, and attainability of higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove financial barrier Increase capacity and productivity of HE institutions Reduce HE costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal rather than need-based financial support Lower residency requirements Less restrictive eligibility constraints Innovation incentives for colleges Performance based HE funding
Increasing economic growth by upskilling workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create college going culture in K-12 Improve public school quality Focus community college funding on transfer degrees and career technical education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic and mentoring support services in high school and college Provide career pathways from HS through college Wide array of post-secondary school options including private schools Tighter residency requirements post-graduation Less restrictive application time limits post HS Support for adult learners seeking degree completion

Once the policy goal has been agreed upon, each design lever will need to be considered in the context of the funds available to pay for them and the political implications of each decision. Fortunately, free college tuition programs have demonstrated the ability to change outcomes at both the K-12 and college level, so the same investment can be used to help achieve more than one goal if a state is reluctant to choose among them. Nevertheless, clarity of goals will help you decide which specific design levers you will want to pull.

By way of example, here are the questions that guided policymakers in Tennessee as they drafted their Promise program once the overall goal was agreed upon:

- a) What is the Promise you are making?
- b) To whom is the Promise being made? (traditional, non-traditional students, or both)
- c) Who will provide the Promise?
- d) What services will be included in the Promise?
- e) What will the metrics of success be for the Promise?

- f) How will the Promise be funded?
- g) How will the Promise be diversified and sustained over time – financially, politically, and programmatically?

In order to settle upon an affordable and effective free college tuition program for your state, the next step in the process is to focus on answering those last two questions.

STEP 2.

Compare your goals and policy design choices to the potential cost of implementing a system of free college tuition.

Each state will need to make its own estimates of the cost in terms of revenue lost by making any part of their system of higher education tuition free. Start by gaining an in-depth understanding of what revenues are currently being generated from in-state tuition by institution and year of attendance. This information is publicly available in the U.S. Department of Education's IPEDS database but may not be as current as your state's own fiscal information. The data by year, as in Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, or Senior, will let you calculate the revenue that will be lost by making the first year, for example, of college free in the first year of the program's implementation. The calculations for the out years of the program are more complicated. They will need to incorporate, if possible, the state's experiences with dropout rates after the first year, potential shifts in attendance from private to public colleges in response to the offer of free college tuition, and historic transfer rates between community colleges and four-year institutions.

If the state's own budget systems and personnel are not able to make this estimate given the number of variables involved, there are services available – some of which are fee based – for doing so. These include the Upjohn Institute in Kalamazoo, MI, which has dedicated staff who have done such analyses for a number of states as part of their overall research on Promise programs.

There are two potential sources of money, already in a state's higher education financial system, that can be used to offset whatever number is initially agreed upon as the cost of making college tuition free. The first is Pell Grant revenue, which is the major federal program to provide money to students to cover the price of tuition based on their family's financial need. If a decision has been made to make the state's free college tuition program a "last dollar" program, then the money each student receives from Pell Grants will reduce your calculation of the amount of tuition revenue "lost" by creating a Promise program, since the state will only be obligated to pay a student's tuition for what the Pell Grant revenue does not cover. Keep in mind this amount will change as the program impacts student enrollment and therefore the number of people who apply for federal aid. The more who do so, the lower the cost to the state, assuming the state's Promise is a "last dollar" program.

One of the keys to the success of the Tennessee Promise is their requirement that each applicant for a Tennessee Promise Scholarship complete a FAFSA application for federal student aid. Based on their experience and your state's own plans for encouraging every high school student, regardless of need, to "fill out their FAFSA", the normally stable amount of Pell Grant revenue flowing to a state should be adjusted based on estimates of the impact the overall program will have on Pell Grant applications.

In addition to a focus on improving your state's FAFSA application completion rate, you may also want to consider adding a mentoring component to your Promise program initiative such as Arkansas, Nevada, and Tennessee have done. The University of Tennessee's Center for Business and Economic Research found that a strong mentoring program coupled with a last-dollar scholarship increased a student's likelihood of attending college by more than 500%.

Tennessee's mentoring program pairs all applicants with mentors from the private sector to assist students in eliminating the barriers associated with postsecondary access and success. The state hires non-profits to recruit and train their mentors enabling them to run the program at a greatly reduced cost to the state. For example, tNAchieves, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, currently serves as the partnering organization in 85 of the state's 95 counties. They have established county-based advisory councils of local higher education, secondary education, and business leaders, as well as public officials to ensure local ownership and sustainability. They have recruited and trained over 7,500 mentors annually since the establishment of the Tennessee Promise; and established summer bridge programs for students requiring remediation.

Mentors serve three roles: resource, taskmaster, and encourager. The mentor plays the role of trusted resource when the student has questions and/or encounters a barrier to post-secondary entry. The role of taskmaster is also incredibly important as the program seeks to ease the transition from high school to college. Ensuring students understand the critical nature of deadlines is essential to the mentor's role. Finally, students often face difficulties as they attempt to break family cycles. The role of "encourager" is invaluable to these students' success.

Tennessee added about 4,000 students into post-secondary education and improved its college-going rate among high school graduates by 5-6 percentage points in the first year of its Promise program. That gain was achieved with only a \$15 million dollar expenditure of state funds with Pell Grant scholarships covering the rest of the cost. Rhode Island's Promise of free community college tuition increased enrollment of full-time Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) students directly from high school by a staggering 47% in its first year. The program was funded by an initial appropriation of \$2.75 million in the first year. Other states with last dollar tuition free college programs have experienced enrollment gains within the range of these two states' experiences.

The other potential source of existing revenue to offset the cost of making tuition free is state and/or private college scholarship programs that currently exist. Some states, such as Washington and California, have robust systems for providing grants to students based on need or family income. This

money can be aligned with the state's Promise program to reduce the amount of new revenue that is needed. It is therefore important to properly identify the amount of state aid currently being provided and how a Promise program might impact those expenditures.

However, there are arguments against taking this step. Advocates for free public college tuition, such as Sara Goldrick-Rab, point out that the cost of attending college is not limited to tuition, and therefore, scholarship money should not be used to offset the cost of a free tuition program but instead continue to be given to students to help offset those costs. This is an important policy choice that should be made in the context of each state's unique fiscal and political environment. Oregon responded to this argument by having the Oregon Promise pay a minimum \$1,000 benefit for any student whose tuition is fully covered by a Pell Grant, creating a so-called "Middle Dollar" Promise program. Both California and New Mexico have made their tuition free college programs "first dollar scholarships," allowing students to use whatever Pell Grant money they are able to secure to be used to cover the other costs of attending college.

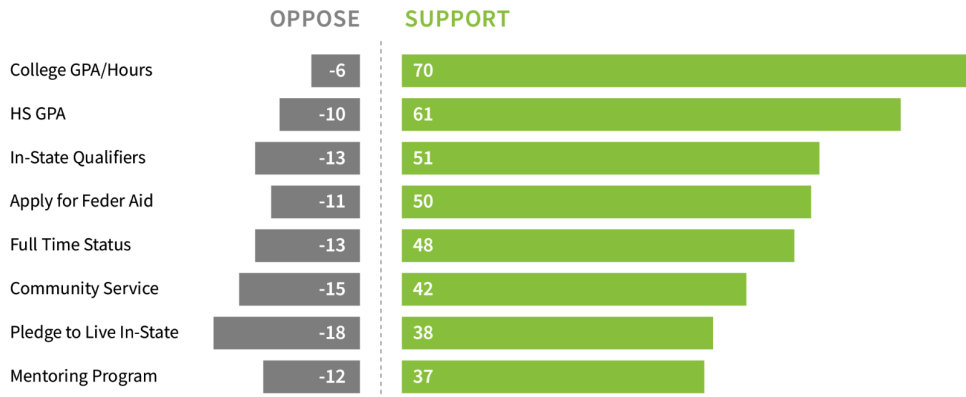
Of course, the cost of a free college tuition program can be further reduced by adding requirements that will ultimately lessen the number of students eligible to receive the Promise program's "scholarship." It is important to keep in mind that these requirements reduce the cost of the program by reducing the number of students who can apply, potentially working at cross purposes to a state's overall goal. They also can quickly become the subject of vigorous political debate.

Still, academic requirements, particularly high school grade point averages, or residency requirements, such as how long the student or family has resided in the state, are not uncommon. Other requirements, such as requiring community service or staying in the state upon graduation, are often included to make sure students have some "skin in the game," in the words of those often advocating for such provisions. The experience of many states, such as New York and Arkansas, particularly with regard to "Stay or pay" requirements, however, suggest including such provisions greatly reduces the desired impact on enrollment gains, in effect working at cross purposes with the overall goal of creating a more educated workforce.

Even though political debates surrounding free college tuition during the legislative process often focus on these types of requirements, CFCT's polling suggests there is a large difference between what legislators might advocate and what the public supports.

GPA Requirements in High School and College Garner Highest Support

Support vs. opposition for various requirements to access free tuition.



QUESTION: Many states are now considering programs to provide residents free public college tuition. They are considering several requirements for students to qualify. Some of those requirements are listed below. Using the scale provided, how important is it that your state would include the following requirements in a free public college tuition program?

SOURCE: Penn Schoen Berland - Q Tuition

Our research shows that academic requirements generate the highest percentage of those who say such a requirement “must be included in the program” (the right side of the chart above) and the least opposition (the left side of the chart above). Those that require students to be part of the state’s population, maximize federal monies and attend full time, also are relatively popular requirements.

However, other provisions that can be found in some state programs – such as requiring community service or residing in the state after graduation – draw the greatest amount of opposition and do little to add to a program’s popularity. That doesn’t mean such requirements shouldn’t be included in a state’s plan for reasons other than gaining popular support. For example, CFCT strongly supports the inclusion of mentoring programs because of their positive impact on student graduation rates, even though our polling suggests the public is not particularly fond of such a requirement being part of a free college tuition program.

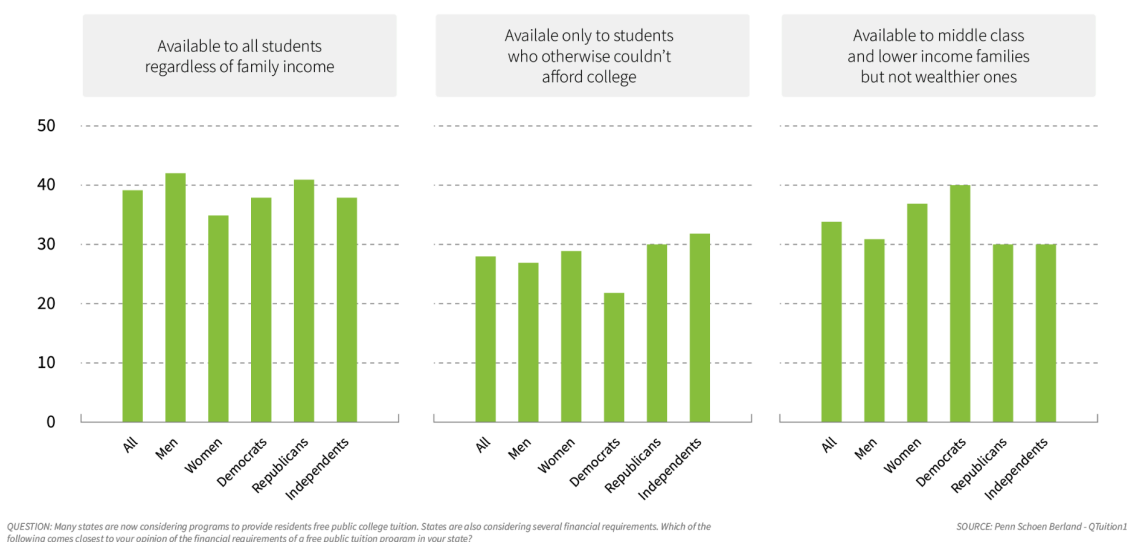
The other major requirement that will spark a great deal of debate is whether the program should be universal, as is true of all states’ K-12 education programs, or only available to students from families with a certain level of income, i.e., means tested.

As noted in Chapter I, CFCT’s polling shows that universal programs tend to generate more political support across partisan lines and, therefore, are more sustainable over time. However, universality has made some programs a target for those who say they “don’t want to use taxpayer dollars to subsidize the education of rich families’ children.” Oregon initially addressed this issue, and the question of “skin in the game,” by making their Promise program fairly universal and requiring every

student to pay \$50 toward their tuition. The \$50 co-pay was eliminated, starting in the 2022-23 academic year, due to the legislature’s passage of equity-focused reforms in the 2022 legislative session.

It is also quite common for those invested in existing financial aid programs to criticize free college tuition programs because in their opinion it “spends scarce tax dollars on people other than those most in need of the help,” i.e., students from poorer families. Whatever the merits of this argument, CFCT’s polling shows focusing free college tuition only on middle class and lower income families and not wealthier ones is not a popular idea — particularly with Republicans and Independents.

Highest Support for Universal Free College Tuition



Policymakers should anticipate that eligibility requirements will occupy a great deal of the political debate over the program and be prepared to provide an estimate of the fiscal impact of each requirement on overall costs.

Extending Your Promise Program to Adults

Policymakers will encounter an entirely different set of policy issues when they turn to the question of whether or not to make college tuition free for adults who want to finish or even start their post-secondary education. Tennessee addressed this challenge by creating an entirely separate tuition free college program called Tennessee Reconnect. Mike Krause, who was the point person for designing Tennessee’s adult promise program, underlined how different the challenges facing such learners are from those of a recent high school graduate in an interview with [EdNC.org](https://www.ednc.org):

“When an adult has made the decision to crossover and go to college, if we can just get them through the first week, their retention rates are through the roof. Adult learners succeed, once they’ve made the decision to cross the Rubicon, at much higher rates than traditional students, in my experience, but there’s a really risky week to a month to first semester in there that we’ve got to be sensitive to.”

Krause found his own experience in returning to college after military service helped give him insights on how to build a successful program for adult learners. He found that the campus structures that were built for 18-year-olds don’t work for adult learners. They are built for somebody that is always going to take four to five courses, and that’s just not realistic for some adults. His state’s campus’s counseling center, for example, was closed at 4:30, just when people in the workforce began to have time to visit them.

Based on that experience, his office made sure that support services were available after hours and on weekends. They required that their colleges recognized prior work experience by giving the returning student credits toward their degree based on what they had already learned by doing the work. And they encouraged each campus to hire or train faculty that understood how to teach adult learners.

Despite the differences between each campus’s capability to assure the success of those in the workforce returning to college, when Governor Haslam made it clear to the entire state that any adult could go to college tuition free the message resonated with its target audience. Tens of thousands of adults went back to college tuition free and then returned to the workforce with a fundamentally different earning capacity.

Combined with the success of their path breaking Tennessee Promise, Tennessee Reconnect’s success has enabled the state to increase its college attainment rate from 32% in 2013 to 46.8% in 2025, according to the Lumina Foundation.

Based on Tennessee’s success, Michigan’s Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer created the Michigan Reconnect program with the support of Republican legislators who then comprised a majority in both houses of the state legislature, despite being a major initiative committing the state to tens of millions of dollars in current and future expenditures. 70,000 adults applied for tuition-free community college in the first four months of the program, which offers free community college tuition to anyone 25 or older without a college degree.

The organized business community was the key to the program’s enactment. It started with business and industry groups, including the state Chamber of Commerce, communicating to both candidates for Governor in 2018 that lack of skilled workers had become the biggest obstacle to business growth in Michigan. So, when Governor Whitmer introduced her Michigan Reconnect proposal she had her staff look for Republicans to be the chief sponsors of the proposal in both houses; and she asked the business community to formally support this initiative to increase the number of available skilled

workers. With business on board, labor and education groups that supported new opportunities for adults to acquire more skills came out publicly for Reconnect—which they did at a high-visibility press conference with business leaders, the Governor, and Republican bill sponsors in the spring of 2019.

Other states, such as Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and New York have chosen to expand their existing Promise program originally designed for high school graduates, to the entire state population, usually by simply eliminating any age or recent high school graduate requirements from their eligibility requirements. It's a welcome development but it does not obviate the need to provide the necessary support services to adult students.

STEP 3.

Once you have decided the scope of your tuition free college program (high school graduates and/or adults), and how much it will cost, it's important to turn your attention to making the program as effective as possible in achieving your goal and delivering its expected return on the state's investment.

Obviously, each state will need to determine how many support services and success strategies it wants to implement and can afford. We strongly recommend that at a minimum your tuition free college program legislation address the issues of college readiness and preparation, mentoring, and counseling at both the high school and college level, as well as some form of performance-based incentives for those schools that will be gaining the benefit of free tuition under the state's program. Coupled with effective marketing strategies to ensure students and families know the benefits a free college tuition program offers, these additional strategies will help ensure the program enjoys the success it will need to ensure its long-term popularity.

A Promise is More than Money

EARLY OUTREACH

So students and parents, especially lower income families, can understand that cost will not be an obstacle to college attendance.

MENTORSHIP

Including outreach to high school students that continues through completion.

MEANINGFUL REMEDIATION

States and/or school districts offer meaningful educational remediation for students not college ready.

HOLD SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE

Create higher but reasonable expectation of schools themselves, including high schools and community colleges.

Once an agreement has been reached on eligibility requirements and support services, it is time to compare the estimated costs of that proposed policy design with available revenue. Developing a free college tuition program that is fiscally responsible and effective is inevitably an iterative process, requiring several attempts to bring funding into balance with estimated costs.

For answers to further questions you may have about the process of designing a program for free college tuition in your state, please contact the Campaign for Free College Tuition and be sure to review all the resources included in this book.



Campaign for Free College Tuition

About the Campaign for Free College Tuition

The Campaign for Free College Tuition (CFCT) is a bipartisan, inter-generational coalition of individuals and groups who believe 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 for us 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 Resources

[CFCT Policy Resource Center](#)

[Promise Program Hub](#)

Contact Information

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