

Aim Higher

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Community College Student Success Act

Section 1. Short Title.

The Act may be cited as the Community College Student Success Act.

Section 2. Community College Student Success Grant Program Authorized.

Directs the Secretary of Education (the Secretary) to establish a competitive grant program to community colleges to plan and implement student success programs designed to increase the rates at which community college students either transfer or complete their programs of study within 150 percent of the normal time of completion.

Section 3. Grants to Plan Community College Student Success Programs.

Creates a one-year competitive planning grant for community colleges to develop community college student success programs and gives priority to institutions eligible to receive Title III or Title V funds under the Higher Education Act. Applications must be peer-reviewed by non-federal employees who have research or practical experience with community college student support programs. This section also delineates application requirements.

Community colleges receiving planning grants must submit a report to the Secretary of Education on its plan for implementing a student success program. Report requirements are outlined in this section.

Section 4. Grants to Implement Community College Student Success Programs.

Creates a five-year competitive grant for community colleges to implement student success programs. Ensures implementation grants are only awarded to community colleges that received a planning grant described in Section 3. This section also delineates application requirements. Requires that the Secretary approve or deny applications within 60 days of receipt.

To promote program sustainability, this section requires a non-federal match starting in the second grant year. For years two to five of the grant, institutions will contribute based on the following sliding scale: 20 percent of program costs during year two, 40 percent of programs costs during year three, 60 percent of programs costs during year four, and 80 percent of program costs during year five. Tribal Colleges and Universities and colleges located in the U.S. territories are not required to match more than 5 percent of the cost to carry out the community college student success program for each year.

Community colleges must use funds to implement a community college student success program as defined in Section 9, regularly review student progress through data monitoring, and employ individuals specifically responsible for administering the student success program. This section also specifies allowable uses of funds including the creation or expansion of data tracking systems; providing financial assistance to help cover the cost of textbooks, living expenses, and childcare; funding to cover financial gaps for summer courses; and establishing or expanding career development services and tutoring services.

Further, this section requires community colleges to submit annual reports to the Secretary on grant progress, including data comparisons to two years prior to grant receipt. Report requirements are further described in this section.

Additionally, this section requires a final report within a year after the grant concludes on the success or failure of the program; challenges faced and opportunities for improvement; and plans for program continuation.

Section 5. Evaluations.

Requires the Institute of Education Sciences to contract with an independent evaluator prior to awarding implementation grants. Mandates program evaluation, using What Works Clearinghouse Standards as criteria, of each individual community college student success program as well as the average impact, variation in program impacts, and cost effectiveness of student success programs on graduation and transfer rates compared to eligible institutions without such programs. Evaluation results are to be made public. This section limits spending on evaluation to 15 percent of appropriated funds each fiscal year.

Section 6. Outreach and Technical Assistance.

Directs the Secretary to notify eligible institutions of the availability of grants under this program and to provide technical assistance in developing ambitious outcome goals and implementing community college student success programs. Limits spending on technical assistance to 7 percent of appropriated funds each fiscal year.

Section 7. Report to Congress.

Requires the Secretary to submit a report to Congress within 1 year of receiving the final evaluation results under Section 5.

Section 8. Supplement, Not Supplant.

Prevents grantees from carrying out activities that would have been carried out in the absence of federal funds under this program.

Section 9. Definitions.

Defines “community college student success program” as a program carried out by an eligible institution (i.e., a public two-year institution of higher education) that provides eligible students with additional support to meet unmet financial need. Requires such students to enroll full-time during fall and spring semesters, meet with a program advisor twice monthly during the first semester and as directed in subsequent terms, and participate in career advising events at least once per semester. For students referred to remedial education, students must meet with tutors at least weekly. Additionally, these programs require institutions to actively offer students tutoring, career services, and program advisors who provide comprehensive advising, including help with the creation and implementation of an academic plan and academic goals. Advisors must have a caseload of not more than 150 eligible students and are required to track meeting attendance and monitor academic progress. For students with satisfactory meeting attendance, advisors are required to provide at least monthly financial incentives such as transportation passes or gas cards.

An eligible student is defined as a full-time community college student enrolled in an associate degree program and is either a first-time undergraduates or a transfer student with no more than 15 credits and a 2.0 minimum GPA. Eligible students must need no more than two remedial courses and have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Section 10. Authorization of Appropriations.

Authorizes \$10,000,000,000 to carry out this program for fiscal years 2018 through 2028, to be available until expended.