

America's College Promise Act of 2026

Title I – Grants for Tuition-Free Community Colleges

Establishes a new Part J in the *Higher Education Act* (HEA) to authorize a federal-state partnership. The following is a breakdown of new language that would be included in the HEA.

Part J, Subpart 1 of HEA– Grants for Tuition-free Community College

Sec. 499A – General

Establishes a grant program to create a federal-state partnership addressing college costs.

Sec. 499B – Federal Share; Nonfederal Share

Outlines the formula for federal and non-federal shares of funding required for the federal-state partnership:

- There is a sliding scale for federal share beginning at 100 percent (state share at 0 percent) for the first award year and ending at 85 percent (state share at 15 percent) for the fourth and subsequent award years.
- Requires that even if states provide tuition-free community college, the state must still contribute its expected share.
- Outlines that if the state share poses substantial hardship for outlying areas and territories, the Secretary may reduce or waive the state share.
- Allows for states to include in the state share any state need-based financial aid and local funds, so long as the state can show there will not be a net reduction in total per-student state revenue.
- Requires the Secretary to develop and implement a formula for states to accurately determine the number of eligible students for the purposes of the nonfederal share calculations.
- Exempts the Secretary from applying any requirements applicable only to states to TCUs.

Sec. 499C – Applications

Outlines the requirements for States and TCUs to submit applications for participation in this federal-state partnership grant. Requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Assurance that each community college set tuition and fees at \$0;
- A description of institutional reforms and innovative practices to improve student outcomes that each community college has been or will be adopting (e.g., basic needs support, health services, accelerated learning opportunities, developmental education reforms, etc.);
- A description of how the state or TCU will ensure that certificate programs meet quality criteria established by WIOA;
- Assurance that each community college has entered into a program participation agreement (PPA);

- Assurance that the state or TCU will assist eligible students in obtaining information about and accessing means-tested Federal benefit programs and similar state and local programs;
- Assurance that states will work towards increasing access to benefit programs; and
- Assurance that states will meet requirements to align secondary and postsecondary education and improve transfer pathways.

Sec. 499D – Program Requirements

Outlines requirements of states and TCU to continue receiving a grant. Requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Working toward alignment of K-12 and higher education;
- Establishing transfer pathways; and
- Ensuring state maintenance of effort to fund higher education at levels no lower than the average of previous three years.

Sec. 499E – Allowable Uses of Funds

Outlines allowable uses of funds for states, TCUs, and community colleges. In general, the grant must be used to ensure that tuition and fees total \$0 for eligible students. Additionally, states and TCUs may also:

- Provide additional need-based financial aid;
- Improving student outcomes by implementing evidence-based institutional reforms or practices;
- Investing in and diversifying the academic workforce;
- Expanding the scope and capacity of skills-based training programs;
- Improving college readiness;
- Expanding dual enrollment programs; and
- Reducing unmet need at four-year institutions.

An institution may not use funds for administrative purposes.

The section also requires that funds made through this grant shall be used to supplement, not supplant other federal, state, tribal, and local funds.

Requires states to report to the Secretary and requires the Secretary to annually report analysis of all state reporting.

Requires the Secretary to provide technical assistance regarding best practices to implement institutional reforms and innovative practices and to disseminate such best practices to entities.

Allows for states and TCUs receiving a grant to continue receiving funding for future fiscal years but gives the Secretary authority to discontinue funding the federal share of a grant if the state, TCU, or institution violated terms of the grant or not making adequate progress on implementing the reforms described in the application.

Sec. 499F – Automatic Stabilizers for ACP

Establishes automatic stabilizers for the program. The Secretary shall provide relief from non-federal share requirements in a tiered approach depending on the severity of economic downturn of the state.

Sec. 499G – Appropriations

Appropriates such sums to fund the grant program for each fiscal year.

Sec, 499H – Definitions

Defines terms throughout the subpart including: apprenticeship, career pathway, community college, dual or concurrent enrollment program, early college high school, eligible student, evidence-based institutional reforms and innovative practices, institution of higher education, means-tested federal benefit program, recognized postsecondary credential, state fiscal support for higher education, state fiscal support for higher education per FTE student, and tribal college or university.

Title II – Student Success Fund

Establishes a student success fund, to also be included in the newly proposed Part J of HEA. Below is a breakdown of new language that would be included in the HEA.

Part J, Subpart 2 of HEA – Student Success Fund

Sec. 499I – General

Establishes the Student Success Fund grant program to carry out services that support student completion. Priority is given to entities that plan to use funds to improve success for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, first-generation students, and other underserved populations.

Sec. 499J – Federal Share and Matching Funds

Requires the Secretary to develop a formula for the federal share and non-federal matching funds for the grant. The Secretary shall take into consideration the share of eligible students, share of Pell recipients served, and ratio between funding per FTE student and the average net price at 4-year public institutions in the state.

Non-federal sources shall equal 25percent of the grant amount in state matching funds for the first three years, 50percent for the following two years, 75percent for the next two years, and 100percent for the subsequent years of participation in the program. The Secretary may modify or waive the matching requirements for TCUs.

Requires that funds made through this grant shall be used to supplement, not supplant other federal, state, tribal, and local funds.

Sec. 499K – Applications

Outlines application requirements for the Student Success Fund grant. Requirements include but are not limited to:

- Explanation of how funds will be used to implement reforms and practices;
- Information on how the grantee will use funds to implement and improve evidence-based and innovative initiatives to improve student outcomes;
- Assurance of how entity will meet matching requirements;
- Plan for prioritizing higher education spending (if a state); and
- Details on anticipated improvement to student outcomes.

Sec. 499L – Program Requirements

Outlines requirements of grantees to receive and continue receiving a grant. Requirements include reporting out on demonstrated progress towards implementing practices and improving student outcomes. Outlines next steps for failure to meet annual implementation benchmarks.

Sec. 499M – Allowable Uses of Funds

Describes allowable use of funds for the Student Success Fund grant. Grantees may only use funds to carry out the plan approved in section 499K. Only 5 percent of the grant can be used for administrative purposes.

Sec. 499N – Eligible Entity Defined

Defines eligible entity to mean a state or TCU that is a recipient of a grant under subpart 1 of part J.

Sec. 499O – Appropriations

Appropriates no less than \$1 billion annually to implement student success grants.

Title III – Pathways to Student Success for HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs

In addition to providing tuition subsidies for Community College, America's College Promise Act would establish a grant program to provide students enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) with two years of subsidized tuition. Below is a breakdown of new language that would be included in the HEA.

Part J, Subpart 3 of HEA – Grants to HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs**Sec. 499P – Pathways to Student Success for HBCUs**

Establishes grants to HBCUs to encourage students to enroll and complete bachelor's degrees, incentivize transfer pathways, and support reforms to improve student outcomes at HBCUs.

Sec. 499Q – Pathways to Student Success for TCUs

Establishes grants to TCUs to encourage students to enroll and complete bachelor's degrees, incentivize transfer pathways, and support reforms to improve student outcomes at TCUs.

Sec. 499R – Pathways to Student Success at ANNHs, AANAPISIs, HSIs, NASNTIs, and PBIs

Establishes grants to MSIs to encourage students to enroll and complete bachelor's degrees, incentivize transfer pathways, and support reforms to improve student outcomes at MSIs.

Sec. 499S – Grant Terms

Outlines institutional eligibility for the grant program. Public and nonprofit four-year institutions with a student body of at least 35 percent low-income students are eligible. Institutions must also commit to adopting or improving and implementing evidence-based institutional reforms and innovative practices to improve student outcomes. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Providing comprehensive academic, career, and student support services;
- Providing direct services that address students' basic needs;
- Providing accelerated learning opportunities and degree pathways, such as dual enrollment;
- Partnering with other organizations and employers to advance work-based learning and cultural exchange; and
- Strengthening remedial education practices for historically underrepresented students.

Grantees must also set performance goals for student outcome improvement and establish formal, statewide articulation agreements if doing grant work for transfer students.

Initial grant amounts are determined by cost of tuition and fees and the number of eligible students enrolled at the institution. For subsequent award years, institutions shall generally be calculated the same, except that there cannot be an increase of more than 3 percent in funding per year.

Outlines that use of funds should primarily be used to waive or significantly reduce tuition and fees for eligible students.

Requires that funds made through this grant shall be used to supplement, not supplant, other federal, state, tribal, and local funds.

Sec. 499T – Definitions

Defines MSI designations, eligible student, and low-income student.

Sec. 499U – Appropriations

Authorizes the appropriation of the program starting at \$98.1 million for year one and ending at \$2.5 billion for year 10 and all subsequent years.