California faces several daunting economic and educational challenges. California's unemployment rate exceeds 11 percent, which is well above the national jobless rate of 8.3 percent. More than 2 million Californians are still jobless. In addition to high unemployment, the state’s higher education systems have experienced severe budget cuts over the past few years. These cuts severely limited the ability of community colleges to provide access and support to the growing number of students seeking transfer, associate degrees, apprenticeships and certificates.

Given the current economic realities, targeted investments in education and job training are key to increasing the nation’s competitiveness in the global economy. Higher education is also critical to California’s continued economic growth and vitality. The California Community Colleges is the largest and most diverse postsecondary system in the country, serving 2.6 million students at 112 campuses. One quarter of all community college students nationwide are enrolled at California community colleges. The California Community Colleges also are the state’s largest workforce training provider. The colleges offer more than 175 degree and certificate programs in hundreds of career technical fields. California's community colleges are well positioned to be key players in working with the federal government to continue economic recovery by preparing a skilled workforce that meets the needs of a changing job market.

This year the California Community Colleges have identified several major federal priorities.

1. Keep College Affordable: Continue Funding the Pell Grant Program

President Obama refers to community colleges as key to meeting the needs of the 21st Century and moving our economy forward; however, cuts to the Pell Grant program have disproportionately hurt community college students.

Pell Grants are essential to expanding access and enhancing college completion for low-income community college students. In fiscal year 2010-11, Pell Grants represented $1.6 billion in federal assistance to approximately 500,000 California community college students. In its most recent budget actions, Congress voted to maintain the maximum Pell Grant award of $5,550 for fiscal year 2011-12, but significantly tightened Pell Grant eligibility requirements in an effort to reduce the cost of the program. These changes, which take effect July 1, 2012, will potentially reduce the pool of California Pell Grant recipients by more than 31,000 students.

ACTION

The California Community Colleges urges Congress to maintain the Pell Grant maximum award of $5,550 without further limiting student eligibility.
The major Pell Grant eligibility changes with the greatest impact on California Community College students include:

- New students are required to have a high school diploma or General Education Development diploma. In California, approximately 19,000 community college students will lose their Pell Grants. This new requirement does not apply to enrolled students.

- Pell Grant eligibility was reduced from nine to six years. In California, 11,000 community college students will have received a Pell Grant for five or more years, and will not be eligible for further federal financial aid assistance after July 1, 2012. This new requirement applies to enrolled students and incoming first-time students.

Congress is now engaged in new budget deliberations for the 2012-13 fiscal year. Pell Grant funding is again in jeopardy of being further reduced.

2. Support $5 Billion for Community College Infrastructure

President Obama has proposed $5 billion for community college infrastructure and modernization. This funding is included in the “Fix America’s Schools Today” or FAST Act, introduced in the House and Senate as H.R. 2948 and S. 1597. Investments in new community college facilities and deferred maintenance are desperately needed.

The California Community Colleges have not received new state funds for its facilities and infrastructure since 2006. The California Community College system needs about $40 billion for modernization and new construction and deferred maintenance costs over the next 10 years. In addition to providing vast improvements of community colleges facilities, these projects increase local construction jobs and improve our state economy.

3. Fund the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College And Career Training Grant Program (TAACCCT)

The Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College And Career Training Grant Program (TAACCCT) provides funds to expand, improve, and deliver two-year education and career training programs that prepare participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations. TAACCCT provides vital funding to colleges to offer high-quality training to workers in need of retraining in order to re-enter the work force as quickly as possible. The targeted population of the TAACCCT is workers who have lost their jobs or are threatened with job loss as a result of foreign trade.

ACTION

The California Community Colleges urges Congress to support the Fix American’s Schools Today Act.

ACTION

The California Community Colleges urges Congress to continue funding for the TAACCCT Grant Program.
In September 2011, nearly $500 million was awarded to the first set of TAACCCT grants. A consortium of eleven California community colleges was awarded $19,993,055. The C-6 Consortium in California’s Central Valley will serve more than 3,000 job seekers who have been negatively impacted by the economy. The TAACCCT program is scheduled to be funded for three more years. Congress should preserve funding for this important program.

4. Training for Jobs of the Future: Support Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

Community colleges are the linchpin of a transitioning workforce. In his recent State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama discussed education and focused on community colleges as a solution for workers seeking jobs and employers seeking skilled employees. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is the centerpiece of the federal government’s workforce delivery structure.

The WIA job training and adult basic education programs provide workers, including those with little means or skills, with the education and training needed to enter the workforce. Reauthorization of WIA has been pending since the 2004 fiscal year. Although there is broad bipartisan support to reauthorize WIA, negotiations have started and stalled numerous times.

Several WIA issues have a significant impact on the California Community Colleges’ ability to deliver the most effective workforce training and career technical education programs. These issues include:

1) Require Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to include a community college representative on their local boards.

2) Identify community colleges as “preferred partners” in working with local WIBs.

3) Oppose provisions in WIA reauthorization measures that authorize governors to consolidate Perkins career technical education funds into a larger workforce investment fund.

5. Support Funding for the Carl Perkins Act

The Carl Perkin’s Act is one of the largest and most established sources of federal institutional support for community colleges, helping improve all aspects of cutting-edge career and technical education programs. The Perkins Basic State Grants give postsecondary institutions the opportunity to identify local priorities and to fund innovation in occupational education programs. The program has tight accountability standards. Congress should preserve funding for the Basic State Grants.
6. Support Veterans on Community College Campuses

California leads the nation in veterans who return from military service to our state. In 2010, approximately 2.2 million veterans identified California as their home, and more than 44,000 enrolled at a California community college. These numbers are expected to increase dramatically as more military personnel leave Iraq and Afghanistan. In today’s economy there are limited employment opportunities for returning veterans.

The Securing Success for Veterans on Campus Act was adopted in 2008. This is an important federal program that provides federal funds for competitive three-year grants to develop and establish Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success. These centers provide a single point of contact for the coordination of comprehensive support services for students who are veterans.

In California three community colleges, Santa Monica, Citrus, and Chaffey, received grants to establish Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success. Congress should preserve funding for this important program.