April 18, 2012

Honorable Jack Scott, Ph.D.
Chancellor
California Community Colleges
1102 Q Street
Sacramento, CA 95811-6549

Dear Dr. Scott:

Thank you for your letter regarding the California Community Colleges’ efforts to improve completion rates and help close the achievement gap for historically underrepresented students. I am encouraged by initiatives like the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force to identify and work toward such urgent and commonly shared education and workforce goals.

Both President Obama and I greatly recognize the importance of community colleges in reaching the Administration’s 2020 college attainment goal and fulfilling our economic, moral, and civic imperative to close the achievement gap. Let me take this opportunity to share with you the Department of Education’s most recent efforts to support community colleges and advance our college access and completion agenda.

Demonstrating the Administration’s appreciation for the significance of community colleges, President Obama has requested $8 billion for the Community College to Career Fund (the Fund) as part of his FY 2013 budget proposal. The Fund would support community college partnerships to build a highly skilled workforce and train 2 million workers for high-need, high-skill fields. It would also create pathways to entrepreneurship for 100,000 small business owners. In addition, the Fund would support community colleges’ capacity to implement and build targeted training programs that prepare workers for jobs in growing industries, using approaches such as on-the-job training opportunities, including registered apprenticeships and paid student internships that allow students to earn postsecondary credit for work-based learning. Included in the fund are also promising incentive-based strategies, such as “Pay-for-Performance,” for training providers that include community colleges and local workforce organizations to help Americans secure long-term employment after attaining their postsecondary education, training, and credentials.

As you know, this year, we are also proposing a Race to the Top: College Affordability and Completion initiative, designed to spur State reforms that reduce costs for students while increasing quality and productivity in higher education. Additionally, we recognize that innovative reforms are often tough to implement and evaluate, and we are thus proposing $55.5 million for a “First in the World” fund. This program will improve higher education by investing in applied research to boost student completion rates and enhance quality. Institutions
of higher education with their public and private partners would be funded to develop, validate, or scale up innovative and effective strategies to increase student success. Additional information is available on our Web site at www.ed.gov.

In addition to these budget proposals, we continue to work with our colleagues at the Department of Labor on the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program. Now in its second year, this program will provide $2 billion over four years to assist community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education to expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less and that prepare participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations. The Department of Labor already awarded $500 million through this program last year and a competition for the next round of $500 million funding is currently under way.

I believe that through these types of key investments and the efforts of States to meet these important challenges, we can create and deliver the environment for education reform that will dramatically improve student achievement and level the playing field for our nation’s youth and adults. I appreciate knowing that the California Community Colleges have been doing their part in this shared responsibility. As always, I welcome continued information on California’s progress and implementation of the recommendations from the Task Force.

Thank you for your dedication to increasing student success. I look forward to working with you to reach President Obama’s goal of once again leading the world in college completion by 2020.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan