

## College Promise in California: Recommendations for Advancing Implementation, Impact, and Equity

College Promise programs provide support for students to attend, persevere in, and complete college based on where they live or where they attend school.<sup>1</sup> It has grown from its first program 15 years ago to more than 320 programs in 47 states.<sup>2</sup> College Promise is not just one specific program — it serves as an umbrella that covers a wide range of programs led by colleges, universities, foundations, and local and state governments. Some only provide financial support, while others offer comprehensive financial, academic, and social support. Despite this variation, they all share a common goal — helping students succeed in higher education and beyond.

College Promise has a sizeable and growing presence in California — a state with a strong historical commitment to accessible higher education. California also has a unique College Promise model because there is not just one state-level program with a discrete set of eligibility requirements and benefits for all students. Instead, the state provides financial support to its community colleges, enabling them to develop individual programmatic and institutional approaches that meet local student needs.

California's first College Promise program started in 2006. Today, there are 130 active programs — more than any other state.<sup>3</sup> More than 90 percent of the state's programs (118 of the 130)<sup>4</sup> are anchored in community colleges or community college districts.<sup>5</sup> These programs are the focus of the policies and

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<sup>1</sup> Rauner, M., Perna, L., & Kanter, M. (2018). *California College Promise program characteristics and perceptions from the field*. California College Promise Project at WestEd. Retrieved from <https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/College-Promise-Landscape-Scan-2018.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> College Promise Campaign. (forthcoming, 2019). *College Promise Campaign 2018–2019 Annual Report*. Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> See [the California College Promise map](#) and [list of active programs](#) at the [California College Promise Project website](#).

<sup>4</sup> The number of College Promise programs is higher than the total number of community colleges in California because students at four community colleges are served by more than one program.

<sup>5</sup> Eleven programs in California are implemented through cities or nonprofit organizations. California's State University system also uses the College Promise nomenclature with [Senate Bill 412](#) (Glazer), which promises students on-time college completion. Only one of these programs is counted as a College Promise program according to this brief's definition because it also provides students with financial support.

reforms described in this brief. With nearly 2.4 million students and 115 campuses, community colleges serve a majority of the students who are in California’s public higher education system. More than two-thirds of California’s community college students are underrepresented minorities and 65 percent are considered low-income based on family income.

This brief outlines the policy landscape that helped fuel the growth of College Promise in California. It reflects on issues that have arisen as the state’s College Promise legislation and reforms have been implemented, and offers recommendations for maximizing the equity and impact of the California model of College Promise.

The flexibility built into California’s College Promise legislation can make it complicated and difficult to understand. But it also provides a useful opportunity for study and analysis: In what ways has legislation contributed to the growth of College Promise and the types of program designs in the state? What can policymakers do to improve College Promise program implementation? The insights in this brief can inform future California College Promise policy and implementation, as well as provide valuable information to leaders in other states who are considering adopting an approach similar to California’s College Promise model.

For the purposes of this brief, College Promise programs are counted if they provide direct financial support to students, have universal eligibility criteria rather than subjective admissions processes, and intend to continue the program over time. Also included are colleges that provide only the need-based California College Promise Grant (CCPG) to eligible students. Programs are not included if they only provide students with financial and other support outside of the standard school year, such as small stipends for summer coursework.

#### ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The content of this brief draws on College Promise research as well as insights and lessons learned from the [California College Promise Project at WestEd’s work with individual programs and regions across California since 2016](#). The sections that describe the implementation challenges and provide suggestions for improving California’s model of College Promise draw heavily on conversations with community college leaders, program directors, and representatives from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

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## The Evolution of College Promise in California

Through various reforms and pieces of legislation, California has supported the development and growth of College Promise across the state. Today, College Promise programs in California’s community colleges retain local variation, while also benefiting from state-level legislative and financial support. A brief look at the history of California’s commitment to college access and affordability offers insights into the policy evolution that created the state’s multifaceted College Promise programs.

### California’s Historical Commitment to College Access and Affordability (1868–1985)

College Promise programs, and the legislation that has supported their growth, are congruent with California’s history of making and keeping higher education affordable for its residents. In 1868, the

Legislature declared that higher education “admission and tuition shall be free to all residents of the state” (California Assembly Bill 583, 1868). Almost one hundred years later, in 1960, this declaration was codified in the policy framework known as the California Master Plan for Higher Education.<sup>6</sup> The state’s initial commitment to tuition-free education held until the mid-1970s, when its four-year public institutions began charging modest tuition and fees. Fifteen years later, in 1985, community colleges followed suit by initiating per-unit tuition and fees, but also implemented the California Board of Governors (BOG) Fee Waiver for students with family incomes below 150 percent of the national poverty level. A commitment to this history and culture of equitable access and success continues to permeate California state policy conversations and legislation.

## Pioneering College Promise Programs in California (2006–2016)

Although there was no state support for College Promise programs when they first emerged on the scene in California, their existence was a natural extension of the state’s historical commitment to higher education access. The Ventura College Promise was the first program to launch in 2006, followed by the Long Beach Promise and the Valley Bound Commitment in 2008. New College Promise programs emerged at a slow but steady rate — approximately one new program every two years — until 2016, when 12 programs started, making a total of 23 programs, with at least four more programs in development.<sup>7</sup>

## College Promise Legislation and Reforms

Beginning in 2016, California’s legislative activity brought both visibility and financial incentive to the already growing College Promise landscape.

### California College Promise Innovation Grant Program

In 2016, California [Assembly Bill 1741](#) provided funding to community colleges for Innovation Grants to develop or improve College Promise programs that reduce equity gaps, improve access to college, and support students to complete a certificate or degree, or to transfer to a four-year university. Fourteen colleges or districts — a relatively small proportion of the 114 colleges in 72 districts in the system at the time<sup>8</sup> — benefitted from this funding stream.

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<sup>6</sup> Callen, P. (2009). *California higher education, the master plan, and the erosion of college opportunity* (National Center Report #09-1). National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED508092>; Johnson, H. (2010). *Higher education in California: New goals for the master plan*. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from <https://www.ppic.org/publication/higher-education-in-california-new-goals-for-the-master-plan/>

<sup>7</sup> Rauner, M., Perna, L., & Kanter, M. (2018). *California College Promise: Program characteristics and perceptions from the field*. California College Promise Project at WestEd. Retrieved from <https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/College-Promise-Landscape-Scan-2018.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> An online community college district was established since that time, making a total of 73 California community college districts and 115 colleges.

## California College Promise Grant (CCPG)

Since 1985, the community college system has been providing fee waivers to low-income students through the Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOG Fee Waiver) program. With 45 percent of California's community college students eligible for this program, College Promise programs leveraged this funding to cover the cost of tuition<sup>9</sup> and local and state foundations, companies, and donors raised additional funds to pay for other program costs, such as non-tuition fees, books, transportation, student academic support, and student services such as coaching and peer mentoring. In August 2017, the BOG Fee Waiver was renamed the [California College Promise Grant \(CCPG\)](#). Although the program's benefits and requirements remained the same, the shift to a new name signaled the commitment of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to College Promise.

## California College Promise AB19 and AB2

State legislation passed in 2017 ([Assembly Bill 19](#)) and 2019 ([Assembly Bill 2](#)) — called *California College Promise* — allocated funding to community colleges to close achievement gaps, improve college readiness, and increase persistence, completion, and transfer rates.<sup>10</sup> In fall 2018, \$46 million was allocated through AB19 to community college districts that opted into the program.<sup>11</sup> The total allocation increased to \$85 million in fall 2019 with the passage of AB2.

Although there are a number of requirements for colleges to receive AB19 and AB2 funding,<sup>12</sup> the guidelines for using the funds are highly flexible. The legislation states that colleges may, but are not required to, use funding to waive tuition and fees for up to two years for full-time students who have not yet earned a postsecondary degree or certificate. Subsequent guidance from the community college system office explains that AB19 and AB2 funds can be used to cover the cost of books, transportation, and childcare expenses, or to hire additional counselors, tutors, and other student support staff, as long as these investments support the goals of the legislation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2016). *2016 state of the system report*. Retrieved from <https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/About-Us/State-of-the-System/Files/2019-sos-final-web.ashx?la=en&hash=E3997F2DC0573E12C28F0877701E91DECF2EC947>

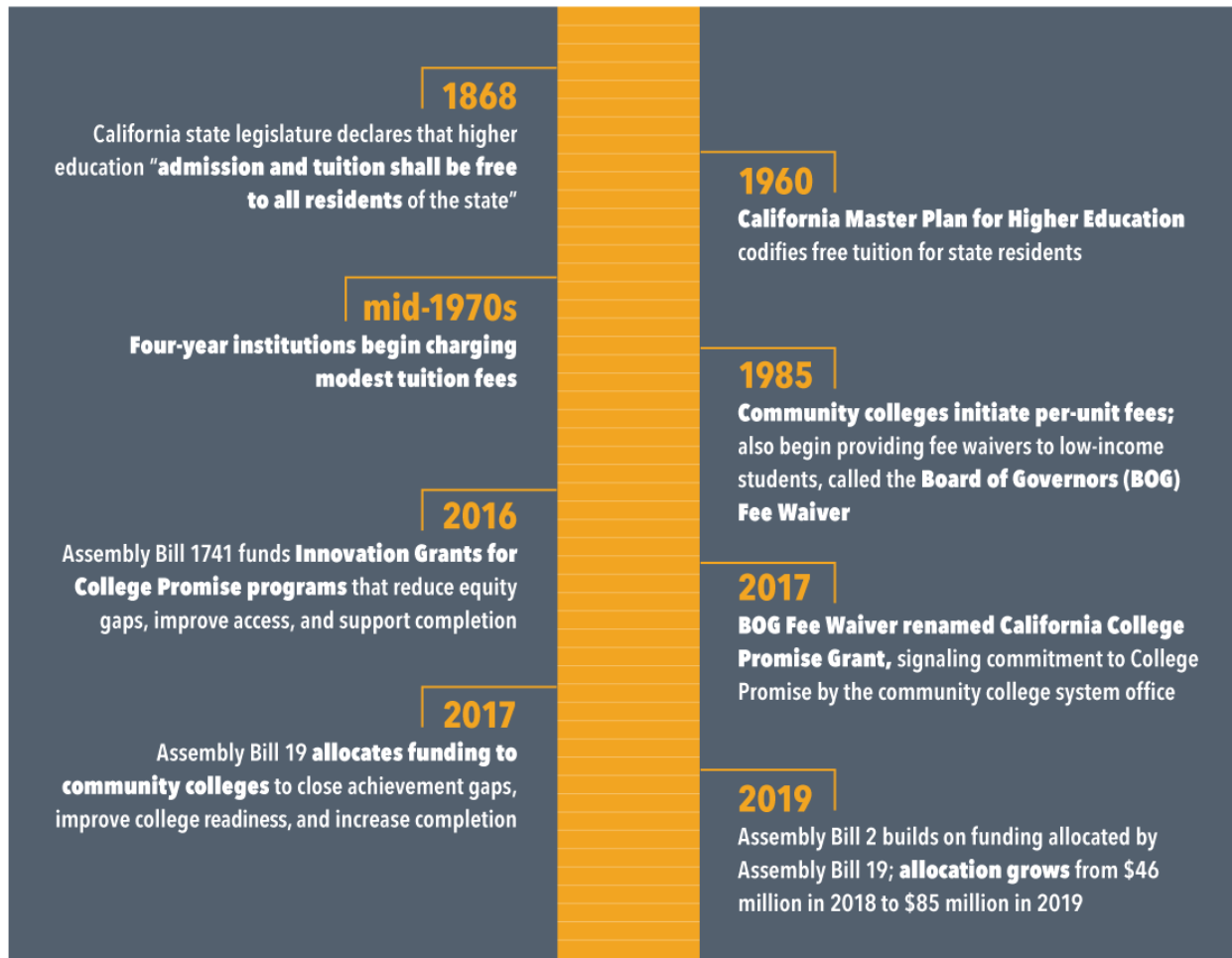
<sup>10</sup> Assem. Bill 19 (2017–2018). Chapter 725 (Cal. Stat. 2017). Retrieved from [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB19](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB19); Assem. Bill 2 (2019–2020). Chapter 509 (Cal. Stat. 2019). Retrieved from [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200AB2](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB2)

<sup>11</sup> California State Budget Office. (2019). *Enacted budget summary: Higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/2018-19/pdf/Enacted/BudgetSummary/HigherEducation.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> To receive College Promise funding, community college districts must partner with a local education agency to improve college readiness and reduce remediation; use evidence-based multiple measures for assessment and placement; participate in the California Community College Guided Pathways Program; require students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or a Dream Act application if funds are used for fees; and participate in the federal loan program.

<sup>13</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2019). *California College Promise questions and answers as of 7-3-2019* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from <https://californiacollegepromise.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AB19-2-QandA-07032019.pdf>

Figure 1. Timeline



## Related California Legislation and Reforms

Looking at College Promise legislation and reforms within the broader context of the California community college system provides insight into the ways that College Promise aligns with and is buoyed by other reforms.

In 2017, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) released a strategic plan, the [Vision for Success](#), along with a series of reform efforts that, like College Promise, are tightly aligned with the goals outlined in the plan. The Vision for Success goals include improving college readiness and increasing enrollment, completion, and transfers — all with an emphasis on equity. The reforms include Guided Pathways, Assembly Bill 705 (AB705, which amends the Student Success Act of 2012), the Student Equity and Achievement Program, and California’s new student-centered funding formula. Together, these strategic priorities — coupled with their funding streams — are designed to increase college success for all students and reduce or eliminate achievement gaps for students who are underrepresented in community colleges. Each reform includes features that are designed to remove

certain barriers to college completion by implementing them at scale and in close coordination with other reforms.

Under [Guided Pathways](#), community colleges in California are reorganizing their programs of study to offer students a set of clear, discipline-specific course sequences (with sufficient seats available when needed) to expedite the completion of certificate and degree programs. Closely related to Guided Pathways is the mandate of [AB705](#), which requires colleges to fundamentally restructure developmental education to increase the likelihood that students complete these transfer-level English and math courses during their freshman year in order to enroll in credit-bearing courses as soon as possible. AB705 requires colleges to use multiple measures to determine course placement and provide concurrent support for underprepared students in lieu of offering developmental education courses that do not count toward a degree or transfer certification.<sup>14</sup> These initiatives are undergirded by the [Student Equity and Achievement Program](#) and are also linked to the progress and completion metrics in the state's new [Student Success Funding Formula](#), which is being phased in over a three-year period that began in the 2018–19 academic year.

Many College Promise programs in California provide students with financial support beyond tuition, including books, materials, and transportation. However, no College Promise program covers the full cost of community college even after factoring in family contributions, employment, Pell Grants, and the Cal Grant program. Pending [Senate Bill 291](#), the California Community College Financial Aid program, was proposed to do just that. SB291 calls for the consolidation of all state need-based financial aid to cover a substantially greater percentage of unfunded college and living expenses for students.

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## Continued Growth of College Promise (2016–2019)

In addition to state-level College Promise legislation and reforms, expert practitioners, advocates, researchers, and technical assistance providers have also contributed to creating an environment conducive to the growth of College Promise in California. The Chancellor of the California Community College System, Eloy Oakley, is a strong champion of College Promise who, as president of Long Beach College, was a central partner in the long-running Long Beach College Promise program. Martha Kanter, the Executive Director of the College Promise Campaign in Washington, DC, has deep roots in California's community college system and regularly engages with California leaders on College Promise strategy.

More mature programs in California, as well as local and state programs in other parts of the country, have also influenced the types of College Promise programs that have emerged in the state. Local College Promise teams have benefited from one-on-one communication with early College Promise adopters and through participation in state and regional College Promise training opportunities and the nationwide gathering of College Promise professionals, PromiseNet.

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<sup>14</sup> California Community Colleges. (n.d.). *What is AB 705?* Retrieved from <https://assessment.cccco.edu/ab-705-implementation>

Another influence on California College Promise program growth has been the research, professional development, and technical assistance provided by the [California College Promise Project \(CCPP\)](#) and its partners since 2016. In addition to communicating with the field about legislative updates, the CCPP has provided customized support to individual colleges and regions, hosted statewide College Promise convenings in [2016](#) and [2017](#), and led a series of [regional College Promise workshops](#) in spring 2019. The CCPP released a [College Promise Guidebook and accompanying cost estimator tool](#) in June 2019 to help teams design and improve their programs using embedded tools and exercises.

Taken as a whole, these powerful driving forces have resulted in College Promise programs in California nearly doubling in number from 23 in 2016 to 42 in 2017. The rate of growth dramatically increased in fall 2018 when colleges received funding from AB19. By fall 2019, the CCPP documented 118 programs in community colleges across the state. See the forthcoming CCPP research brief, *The Changing Landscape of California College Promise Programs*, for a detailed analysis.

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## College Promise Implementation: Challenges to Address

California's College Promise legislation and reforms have helped to enable the growth and financial sustainability of College Promise programs. Importantly, they are aligned with the community college system's equity and completion goals to increase student success. However, as with any statewide initiative, there are various implementation challenges that can impede College Promise programs from achieving their full impact in the field.

Informed by the CCPP's work with College Promise programs across California, this section provides reflections on various challenges related to College Promise legislation and its implementation, and offers recommendations to maximize equity and impact. These insights can inform future College Promise policy and implementation in California and provide guidance to leaders in other states who are considering adopting California's unique College Promise model.

### Expand the Vision of College Promise

#### ***AB19 and AB2 frame College Promise narrowly as a tuition-waiver program.***

The current legislation generally signals to the colleges and the public a narrow vision of College Promise as a tuition-waiver financial-aid program. This can constrict the public's perception of the program and limit funding for program features that extend beyond tuition coverage.

The funding formula for College Promise is calculated to cover tuition costs for non-CCPG students but does not factor in the full cost of college, which includes other major expenses such as books and materials, transportation, housing, and childcare. While covering students' tuition is an important piece of needed financial support, the average cost of tuition at a California community college is \$1,254, which is only 6 percent of the total cost of attendance (\$19,596).<sup>15</sup> Also excluded from the College Promise funding calculation are costs associated with academic support and student services, even

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<sup>15</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2019). Presentation at the Promises that Count Alliance Meeting, California Community Foundation, Los Angeles.

though 81 percent of College Promise programs in California provide these benefits to participating students.

Another implementation challenge is that communication about the timing, parameters, and requirements of the funding has been sent exclusively to colleges' financial aid departments. Therefore, the 68 percent of College Promise programs that are implemented through other departments, usually student services, may not receive critical information in a timely manner, or at all.<sup>16</sup>

Although AB19/AB2 legislation does not require that colleges use the funding for tuition, colleges may feel pressure to do so because much of the statewide messaging about College Promise frames it that way. Colleges may also think that they will, to some extent, be evaluated by the amount of funding they use to cover tuition — as they are required to provide this data to the system office.

### Recommendations

- Signal to the field that College Promise is more than a financial aid program by expanding the way AB19/AB2 funding is calculated. For example, include the costs associated with features beyond tuition — such as books, workshops, mentoring programs, and program staff.
- Acknowledge that most colleges are implementing their programs in close collaboration with other college leaders by providing College Promise information and guidance to chief student services and instructional officers at the same time it is transmitted to financial aid directors. Communicating to a broader audience may also encourage more college-wide collaboration and program alignment, including leveraging assets and resources across the institution to increase College Promise program impact.

## Provide Funding for Equitable Impact

### ***Colleges with more students from middle- to high-income families receive more AB19/AB2 funding.***

The California College Promise legislation (AB19/AB2) was designed to provide tuition for full-time community college students without a postsecondary degree or certificate. Because CCPG provides tuition for the lowest-income students, funding levels for AB19/AB2 were calculated to cover tuition for students who are ineligible for CCPG — that is, students whose family income is greater than 150 percent of the poverty level. Under this funding formula, colleges with more high-income students receive higher levels of AB19/AB2 funding than colleges with more low-income students.

The current College Promise funding formula may have the inadvertent effect of working against the legislation's stated goal of closing equity gaps. For instance, higher-income students who may be able to cover their community college expenses might have their tuition subsidized through AB19/AB2, while lower-income students facing significant financial barriers to participating in college, such as expenses

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<sup>16</sup> Of 109 College Promise programs in California, 35 are primarily administered through financial aid offices. The other 74 programs are administered through student services (51), foundations (8), outreach and partnerships (7), district or college administration (5), community and workforce development (2), or enrollment (1). The nine colleges that are only administering the California College Promise Grant are not included in the 109 programs in this analysis.



for textbooks, housing, food, technology, childcare, and transportation have a significantly greater unmet need.

### Recommendation

- Include the non-tuition needs of low-income students in the College Promise funding formula to encourage programs to provide more support for students with the greatest need. This could help accelerate the closure of equity gaps related to college progress and completion. If SB291 passes, fold it into existing College Promise benefits.

### *Requiring full-time enrollment limits access.*

If colleges choose to use AB19/AB2 funding to cover tuition, it can only be used to cover tuition for students enrolled on a full-time basis.<sup>17</sup> Because the cost of tuition is only a small percentage of the total cost of college, most students — particularly those from low- and middle-income families — must work to cover all of their expenses,<sup>18</sup> making it difficult or impossible to be a full-time student. This is especially true for adult students who are more likely to work full time and enroll in school on a part-time basis.<sup>19</sup>

Community college students with family incomes that are 150 percent of the poverty level are entitled to tuition waivers through CCPG, even if they enroll on a part-time basis. However, because most site-based College Promise programs require full-time enrollment, part-time CCPG students are often not eligible to participate. While their tuition will still be waived, these students are unable to access the additional financial and non-financial benefits that most College Promise programs in California provide.

### Recommendation

- Encourage College Promise programs to expand eligibility requirements to include CCPG students who are enrolled part time, enabling them to access additional financial and non-financial benefits and services.

## Clarify Messaging and Branding

### *Messaging in the press is often incorrect or misleading.*

The significant press coverage that California's College Promise legislation has received in recent years

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<sup>17</sup> [AB2 legislation](#) makes an exception to the full-time (12 unit) course-load requirement for students with disabilities.

<sup>18</sup> The Institute for College Access and Success. (2019). *What college costs for low-income Californians* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from [https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy-files/pub\\_files/what\\_college\\_costs\\_for\\_low-income\\_californians\\_0.pdf](https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy-files/pub_files/what_college_costs_for_low-income_californians_0.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> The Governor's Office, the legislature, and California higher education leaders have identified adult college completion as a critical economic and equity issue. In fall 2019, California opened its 115th community college, [Calbright College](#), which is designed for adult learners who need access to short-term upskilling opportunities. While adults at Calbright can participate in College Promise, adults at most other California community colleges are not eligible to participate in College Promise programs due to eligibility requirements. The system is also conducting a landscape analysis of the ways in which the system is serving adults. This analysis focuses on barriers, opportunities, and services in areas such as financial aid, payment options, counseling, recruitment and outreach strategies, technology, career development, teaching and learning processes, and completion transitions. The analysis will inform development of a communications strategy to adult students about the system's offering and opportunities.

has often described College Promise as either “free college” or “free tuition.” Both of these descriptions lead to confusion and misunderstanding by students and the public. “Free college” is a misnomer because even the most generous College Promise programs fail to cover the full cost of college. This characterization of College Promise can be especially problematic for first-generation college students and their families who may not be aware of the additional expenses beyond tuition. Accordingly, they may feel misled as they struggle to piece together the money required to be a full-time college student.

“Free tuition” can be misleading because not all students are eligible to receive tuition remission. In fact, the only California community college students who are guaranteed tuition waivers are those who are eligible for the need-based CCPG program (formerly called the BOG Fee Waiver) that has been in existence since 1985. Even CCPG students may not meet their school’s College Promise eligibility requirements, which vary by program.

Finally, in fall 2019, eight colleges do not have an active College Promise program beyond providing the California College Promise Grant to eligible students.<sup>20</sup>

### Recommendations

- Carefully craft state-level messages. The word “free” should be avoided and messages should clearly state that College Promise programs vary in eligibility requirements and benefits across the state.
- Provide colleges with financial support and technical assistance to help them develop and communicate clear messages to their communities about their College Promise program’s eligibility requirements and benefits.

### *Differentiating among the multiple programs and funding sources that are called College Promise can be confusing for students and others.*

Because multiple efforts with the name College Promise are being simultaneously implemented, it can be difficult for students, families, educators, and the community to understand the differences among them, and the implications of those differences. For instance, the term College Promise is used to reference both the California College Promise Grant (CCPG), which remits tuition costs for students, and the California College Promise (AB19/AB2), which provides resources to colleges. In addition to having these two funding streams labeled as College Promise, most colleges (109 of 118) have a College Promise program with their own branding, messaging, and services related to that program. Comprehending and navigating all of these College Promise elements may be unnecessarily challenging for students, the community, and the colleges that serve them.

### Recommendations

- Guide colleges to use one name for all College Promise efforts at their institution. At some colleges, CCPG, California College Promise (AB19/AB2), and the college’s branded College Promise program are listed separately on their website. Confusion could be minimized if

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<sup>20</sup> Although this brief counts the colleges that only administer the CCPG as having a College Promise program, CCPG is simply listed as a financial aid opportunity for eligible students and does not provide students with any additional benefits.

colleges describe a single College Promise program to their students, even in cases where students receive different benefits based on various criteria (for example, eligibility requirements and benefits might be different for low-income students). Institutions could coordinate across departments and funding streams to provide students with financial, academic, and student-support services without passing the internal complexities on to their students.

- If pending legislation (SB291) passes that will fund much more of the full cost of college for low-income students, consider requiring colleges to combine it with their College Promise program to streamline the financial benefits.

***Donors mistakenly think their dollars are not needed to fund College Promise programs.***

Current and prospective College Promise program donors are also confused about the extent of the funding authorized by the legislation. Based largely on what they read in the press coverage about College Promise, some incorrectly believe that the state covers all College Promise program costs and that their financial support is not needed.

As a result, it is incumbent upon college leaders and their foundations to explain that the CCPG does not provide new funding and that AB19/AB2 does not cover all program costs in most cases. Depending on the college's program design, costs that may not be funded through the state legislation include non-tuition financial support as well as expenses related to academic support, student services, staffing, and staff professional development.

**Recommendation**

- Partner with college foundations to develop messaging and talking points that clarify to donors how important their contributions are to fund the full range of student supports associated with College Promise programs.

**Provide the Field with Research Findings and Technical Assistance**

***Research on California College Promise programs is limited to descriptive studies.***

Publications that describe the history, structure, and features of individual College Promise programs and statewide College Promise landscape scans can help policymakers, college and community leaders, and practitioners understand the trends and variations within California's College Promise programs. A number of these publications exist but the field lacks analyses on the impact of legislation on the growth, structure, and sustainability of the state's College Promise programs, as well as more rigorous analyses of participation in College Promise programs on students' persistence in and completion of their higher education and career goals, by student demographics and program characteristics. Outcomes from these types of studies could provide policymakers with information from which to consider future legislative action, and college leaders with findings that could inform the design, improvement, and implementation of their programs.

## Recommendation

- Fund statewide research on College Promise programs to understand the impact of legislation on the number and type of programs and the impact of programs on student outcomes, including the reduction of equity gaps. Conducting research of this nature requires access to individual student record-level data at the system level through the Chancellor’s Office Management Information System and collaboration with colleges to identify students participating in College Promise programs.

### ***Colleges lack guidance on developing robust College Promise programs that align with other student success initiatives.***

Although 24 College Promise programs existed in California prior to the legislation and reforms starting in 2016, these initiatives, as well as more recently implemented programs, have been largely reliant on guidance from outside of the CCCC. Programs have received guidance and advice through foundation-funded workshops, guidebooks, and convenings provided by technical assistance providers and from College Promise practitioners in other states. College Promise program leaders and the students they serve could benefit from targeted professional development that helps them maximize the effectiveness of their College Promise programs, while also aligning them with other powerful equity, success, and completion efforts on their respective campuses.

## Recommendations

- Provide resources for College Promise professional development on equity-centered program design, evaluation, implementation, and sustainability.
- Encourage colleges to create a College Promise Success Team, with representatives from relevant academic and student services departments, dedicated to implementing the interrelated elements of College Promise according to the goals of the CCCC’s Vision for Success strategic plan.

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## Conclusion

California’s governor, legislature, and state policy leaders have seized the opportunity to provide ongoing funds to community colleges to develop and strengthen College Promise programs that align with the CCCC’s strategic plan, the Vision for Success. Financial support has helped foster further growth in the number and scope of College Promise programs in the state. Requiring colleges that accept College Promise funding to engage in a coordinated way in related student success reforms — such as guided pathways and AB705 — has the potential to further increase college attainment and close equity gaps for California’s students.

The momentum surrounding College Promise legislation has also catalyzed further legislative action in the form of the pending SB291, which is designed to provide additional financial support to low-income students. If passed, SB291 will address a substantial number of the equity concerns raised in this brief.

The extent to which College Promise, together with the related student success initiatives under the Vision for Success, will make a significant difference in student equity and outcomes likely depends on how the state, local colleges, and others will address the various challenges highlighted in this brief. Addressing these challenges will involve broadening the vision and communication around College Promise programs; encouraging programs to expand their eligibility criteria and provide extra support for students with the greatest need; decentralizing messaging around College Promise; providing technical support to colleges to maximize the effectiveness of their program structure, expand internal and external partners, and provide clear and actionable communications to their communities; funding and disseminating research on effective program models and student outcomes; and supporting leaders to unite the student success initiatives under the Vision for Success.

Not only are millions of current and future students positioned to benefit from refinements to the implementation of College Promise at colleges across California, but other states will have a robust set of policy and implementation examples to consider as they implement their own college access, affordability, completion, and success initiatives.

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