Annual Report
College Promise Campaign
2016-2017
Letter from Dr. Biden and Gov. Geringer

What tremendous progress the College Promise Campaign has made! Since President Obama launched the National Advisory Board at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan on September 9, 2015, the number of College Promise programs has increased almost fourfold. Our latest tally counts more than 200 College Promise programs throughout the country. Across the United States, from Hawaii to Rhode Island, from Kentucky to Arkansas, from San Francisco to Boston, in rural America and in major cities, a bipartisan group of innovative leaders recognizes why it is necessary to make a community college or technical education as universal and free as public high school.

None of this would have happened without the vision, dedication, and leadership of the National Advisory Board and the support of donors and partners, who have inspired so many local and state leaders to build College Promise programs. Across the country, in cities, townships, counties, and states, leaders are using their ingenuity to build financially sustainable, completion-focused College Promise programs.

As we enter the third year, the Campaign has an ambitious agenda, and we need to keep the drumbeat rolling. We must work through various sectors to build broad public support for College Promise programs and make the case that a high school education is not enough to prepare students for the workforce and the greater society.

We must share the success stories of students, families, and communities that have benefited from College Promise programs. We must gather and showcase the evidence demonstrating that the College Promise is a worthwhile investment for this nation’s future prosperity.

We must emphasize that any College Promise program should include interventions, incentives, support services, and program elements that boost student’s opportunities to complete their course of study. We need more college graduates. It’s that simple!

Our Campaign will do all that it can to build widespread support for creating and expanding high-quality College Promise programs in communities and states. Just as local and state leaders pushed for the free high school movement 100 years ago, we must do what’s right for the future of our country. We will keep pressing to make an education beyond high school an affordable opportunity for responsible students.

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College Promise Campaign Honorary Chair

Gov. James “Jim” Geringer  
College Promise Campaign Honorary Vice Chair
College Promise National Advisory Board

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Principles

A College Promise is a commitment to fund a college education for every eligible student, advancing on the path to earn a degree, a certificate, and credits that transfer to a four-year university, starting in America’s community colleges.

It’s a promise to prepare students for the 21st Century workforce and the pursuit of the American Dream without the burden of unmanageable college debt.

It’s a promise to make the first two years of community college — at a minimum — as universal, free, and accessible as public high school.
Our Mission

We are a national nonpartisan, local and state-led higher education initiative — beginning in America’s community colleges. We seek to build broad public support for state and localities to provide all responsible students with access to a free community college education. In the 21st century, a high school education is no longer enough to lead Americans to a good job and decent quality of life. We are building widespread understanding that a free community college education is an investment in America’s future and a necessary continuation of K-12 education.

Just a generation ago, the United States led the world in the number of college-educated adults; today we are 12th. Our Campaign is designed to help more Americans begin and complete a college education in order to acquire the critical thinking, knowledge, and skills required to meet the demands of a growing global economy and a prosperous society — without taking on mountains of debt.

The term “free community college” is used colloquially to refer to College Promise programs that cover the cost of tuition and fees for eligible students. The goal of these programs is to make two years of high-quality higher education universally accessible to all Americans in the same way that elementary and secondary education are afforded to all.

Our Campaign encourages local communities and states to cover tuition and fees for every hardworking student seeking to start and finish a community college education, whether that’s an associate degree, an occupational certificate, or credits that transfer to a four-year university.

If more students are empowered to complete postsecondary education without the burden of crushing debt, more Americans will seek and complete the college education that today seems unaffordable and out of reach. We want our country to have — once again — the greatest number of well-educated, career-ready college graduates in the world.
Our Goals

- **Build** widespread support for communities and states to make a community college or technical education, at a minimum, as universal and free as high school has been for a century.
- **Increase** the number of community college and technical school graduates by supporting community and state efforts to cover tuition and fees for all hardworking students actively progressing to complete their degrees, certificates, and university transfer requirements.
- **Encourage** communities and states to build high-quality free community college programs that prepare students for the workforce or successful transfer to a four-year college or university.
- **Create** broad public understanding that community college is an investment in America’s future and a necessary continuation of K-12 education—an opportunity for any student willing to work toward completing a one-year certificate, associate degree, or transfer to a four-year college or university.
- **Inspire** communities and states to broaden access to higher education and optimize pathways for students to successfully complete their course of study, especially for underserved and unserved populations (low-income, first-generation, veterans, re-entry, etc.).
- **Identify** and showcase the latest research on high-impact practices of institutions, communities, and states that have successfully implemented pathways to higher education by providing free tuition, mentoring, and other support services for their students.

Our Strategy

**Building Broad Public Support**
The Campaign uses a multifaceted strategy to build broad public support for making a community college education universal, available, and affordable throughout the country. Across the United States, we identify and engage local and state leaders to support and implement free community college programs for their communities and states. We support these leaders through public events and convenings. We share the latest research and best practices for designing and establishing financially sustainable College Promise programs. Our goal is for these programs to provide both a high-quality education and support services to ensure students complete their studies. Through a broad range of outreach and media, we drive public awareness about the need to provide a free community college or technical education for anyone willing to put in the work. Over the past year, we have worked with students and families to build support for College Promise on campuses and in communities, in person, and online through digital media. No student should have to go into debt to enter and advance in the workforce.

**Identifying and Empowering Leaders**
We use a cross-sector strategy to identify and engage leaders to build College Promise programs in communities and states throughout the country. Our high-performing, nonpartisan National Advisory Board includes leaders from education, business, student advocacy groups, philanthropy, labor, nonprofit organizations, and government.

Our board members actively engage leaders from their respective sectors to create financially viable and effective free community college programs for hardworking students across the nation. We empower these innovative leaders to promote College Promise programs through public events, conferences, launches, and one-on-one meetings with potential committed stakeholders. We encourage community leaders to organize efforts to build local College Promise programs for their regions.
Our Tactics

Leveraging Communications and Engagement
The Campaign uses both traditional and social media to draw attention to the need for more students to start and finish a community college or technical education without the burden of unmanageable debt. Our broad, nationwide media and outreach strategy uses social media, advertising, and digital promotions to reach our target audiences, locally and nationally. Through news releases, op-eds, blogs, press briefings, program profiles, digital media, and coverage in print, radio, and television, we build momentum for the College Promise movement. We share powerful feature stories of students and communities who have benefit from the College Promise and are achieving a community college or technical education.

Through our outreach efforts, we work with local and state leaders to hold grassroots or large-scale events to showcase the need for free community college programs and to celebrate new College Promise programs as they launch or expand. This year, through Civic Nation, our parent nonprofit organization, we have contributed regular College Promise articles on CivicVoice, the Forbes.com page.

Supporting Research and Practice
The Campaign understands that leaders promoting free community college initiatives want to create programs that are both financially sustainable and effectively deliver a high-quality education. Communities and states want to make sure that College Promise programs prepare students for the workforce or for a successful transfer to a four-year college or university. In addition, leaders want to build programs to maximize the chance that students will complete their course of study.

That’s why our Campaign supports a rich body of research for local communities and states to harness the best evidence-based models for creating sustainable and viable College Promise programs.

We work with scholars, business leaders, and practitioners to examine different financial and student support models for creating effective and sustainable College Promise programs. The information we gather span a wide range of program characteristics, such as funding mechanisms, program requirements, and support services like mentoring or community service. Each year, as more communities and states establish free community college programs, we gather more data to ascertain the growth and vitality of the College Promise movement. Our research efforts promote valuable resources for policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and the general public as the College Promise movement expands.

Advancing the Campaign
As we build momentum for College Promise programs, we continue to make a concerted effort to identify diverse organizations and individuals for strategic support and funding. Toward that end, we engage leaders from our key sectors — business, labor, education, students, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and elected officials — to help us build broad support for the development and expansion of College Promise programs across America. Our supporters represent a diverse range of public and private foundations, corporations, organizations, and individuals. While they come from a variety of sectors, they are united in their commitment to enable thousands more hardworking students to start and complete a community college education without taking on burdensome college debt.
Our Beginnings

The College Promise Campaign launched on September 9, 2015 at Macomb Community College in Warren, MI. At that event, President Barack Obama introduced Dr. Jill Biden and former Gov. Jim Geringer (R-WY) as the Honorary Chair and Vice Chair of the College Promise National Advisory Board, which includes nonpartisan leaders from education, business, philanthropy, government, students, labor, and nonprofit organizations.

“I have been focused on community colleges. They’re at the heart of the American Dream. Community colleges are everywhere. They’re accessible. They’re a gateway for folks who—maybe their parents didn’t go to college, maybe they can’t afford a four-year college, maybe the career path they want to follow isn’t the traditional one,” President Obama said. “Every American willing to work hard deserves a shot at an education. It’s (their) ticket to the middle class.”

With strong bipartisan support throughout our first two years, our Campaign has celebrated a dramatic increase in the number of College Promise programs proposed, implemented, or expanded in communities and states across the country, from Hawaii to Rhode Island. Since our launch, the number has quadrupled, with more than 200 programs now in place in 41 states.

This year, state legislatures in Arkansas, Hawaii, Nevada, New York, and Rhode Island passed versions of free college legislation. Other statewide programs are established in California, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, Tennessee, and Minnesota.
The Case For College Promise

More than six out of 10 jobs will require students to increase their knowledge, skills, and training beyond what they learned in high school. Yet, only 40 percent of U.S. adults have a postsecondary degree or certificate.

College Promise Helps to Grow the Economy for All

Earning a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to prepare a competitive workforce for 21st Century jobs. If we don’t provide more education and workforce training beyond 12th grade, our nation won’t be able to fully contend with other countries who are investing in their higher education institutions to compete in the global economy.

A failure to provide affordable higher education also has many other major economic effects. Students without a postsecondary education are less likely to earn a family-sustaining wage and more likely to require public assistance and social services. At the very time we need more Americans to start and complete their postsecondary education, the increased cost of attendance — tuition, fees, living expenses, and loans — prevents many students from acquiring a college degree.

We believe that our nation can reverse this trend — if we make the first two years of community college as universal and free as public high school has been for the last century. This investment will empower students to improve their lives and prepare them for today’s jobs.

The Real Cost of Attending America’s Community and Technical Colleges

While tuition and fees at community colleges are considerably less than those at four-year colleges and universities, these are only a fraction of the total cost of attendance. Expenses such as housing, food, childcare, and transportation are just as costly for community college students as they are for their peers at four-year colleges and universities. On average community college students have lower household incomes than those attending four-year colleges or universities. The full cost of attending a community college, beyond tuition and fees, presents a financial barrier for students and their families who do not earn enough to pay for the first two years of college without some financial assistance.

Federal data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey in 2012 show that half of all students at two-year colleges had earnings of less than $30,000. Close to one-third of independent students made less than $10,000. With the total cost of attending a community college averaging $17,000 per year, most students need additional financial support to pay for their college education.

Communities and states are building College Promise programs because they recognize the broad range of financial barriers that make a college education out of reach. By covering tuition, fees, and additional college costs for students to complete higher education at community or technical colleges, College Promise programs help alleviate the financial burden of earning a degree or certificate.

Source:
Average Tuition and Fees: US Department of Education, The Digest of Education Statistics, Table 330-40
Family Income of Students in Public Two-Year Institutions, Overall by Dependency Status: National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, 2012
Hungry and Homeless, ACCCT, 2017

We are now 12th.
The Case for College Promise

Federal Legislation

While most of the action to create free college programs has taken place at the local and state level, efforts to launch federal legislation are still underway.

This fall, Rep. Robert Scott (D-VA) introduced the America’s College Promise Act of 2017, which proposes two years of free community college and an affordable pathway to a four-year college degree. The bill would provide a federal match of $3 for every $1 invested by states to waive community college for eligible students, before other financial aid is applied. Rep. Scott’s House bill echoes the College for All Act, a Senate bill introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) this April. The bill would cover tuition and fees for students to attend a community college in their state and provide federal funds to cover 67 percent of a student’s tuition and fees. Under the terms of the bill, the student’s state would cover the remaining third of those costs.

Local and State Legislation

The College Promise movement is building steam as it takes hold across the nation. There are now over 200 College Promise programs in communities across 41 states throughout the country. City leaders in Baltimore, West Sacramento, Flint, Jacksonville, and countless other communities are modeling their initiatives after well-established programs and other College Promise leaders. Such progress does not only reside in urban centers as these programs are emerging in rural communities like Racine, WI; Barstow, CA; and Vance County, NC.

In the last year, the College Promise movement pushed far beyond city and county limits, as demonstrated by the groundswell of support for statewide programs. The Campaign has identified 42 unique legislative proposals and executive orders in 28 states used to make College Promise a statewide priority. Currently, 15 states are leading the way by implementing Promise at scale. By working in a bipartisan manner, governors and legislators in Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Montana, Nevada, New York, and Rhode Island advanced the free college movement this past year, joining Minnesota, Oregon, and Tennessee. These Promise leaders join states like Delaware, Louisiana and Missouri that have been expanding and broadening access to a community college education for decades.

As the Campaign enters our third year, we will continue to work with local and state leaders to bring free community college to all hardworking students. We have seen tremendous growth since the inception of our Campaign and predict that with the help of powerful grassroots communities and cutting-edge research of higher education, we will make the dream of attaining a college degree available to all.
The College Promise movement is gaining momentum throughout the nation. Since we launched our Campaign just two years ago, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of College Promise programs in communities and states with new programs starting up week by week and month by month. Representing almost a fourfold increase since we launched our Campaign on September 9, 2015.

In the last year alone, more than 50 new programs were announced or established in small communities, large cities, and states. Across the country, from Hawaii to North Carolina, from San Francisco to Lansing to Boston, from rural regions in California to small towns in Indiana and South Carolina, local leaders are establishing College Promise programs. Communities are modeling their programs after successful initiatives that Long Beach, El Dorado, and Kalamazoo put in place in the last decade and learning lessons from College Promise leaders in Detroit, Wichita, Milwaukee, the greater Houston region, Jacksonville, and so many more.

State momentum also grew quickly. To date, the Campaign has identified legislation and executive orders from governors and legislators in 15 states to launch their versions of the College Promise. Just this year, governors in eight states worked in a bipartisan manner to join the free college movement, with Delaware, Louisiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, and Tennessee.

New College Promise programs are evolving at a rapid pace because communities and states recognize that a high school education is insufficient to secure a good job and a decent quality of life in today’s economy. Local and state leaders understand the vital need to make at least two years of higher education as affordable and accessible as high school has been for nearly a century. As more programs evolve throughout the country, communities and states are drawing inspiration from College Promise programs already underway. Across the nation, leaders from education, business, government, and philanthropic organizations are working together to fund innovative and sustainable College Promise programs that benefit students and families in their cities and towns.

A growing number of local College Promise leaders and an increasing number of governors and state officials have crafted successful College Promise programs that provide mentoring, community service requirements, and academic support in addition to covering tuition and fees for hardworking students to attend a community college, a technical college, or a four-year university. Leaders understand the importance of making sure that students not only start, but also complete their higher education — whether that’s an associate degree, a technical certificate, or credits to finish a four-year college or university.

Looking to the future, building on the evidence garnered thus far, the Campaign predicts continued growth in the months and years ahead.
Support Services for Student Success

The Campaign applauds College Promise programs that combine free tuition and fees with support services to help student progress and complete their programs of study. The need to boost college completion and graduation rates is an urgent priority as communities and states work simultaneously to keep college affordable. Many innovative College Promise programs are incorporating mentoring and other support services to help more students stay in college and earn their degrees and certificates. In our work, we emphasize that College Promise programs should include the right combination of advising, counseling, mentoring, and other support services.

Detroit, MI is enjoying success with the Detroit Promise Path, a package of support for the Detroit Promise, the city’s free community college program, which has been in place since 2013. For the past four years, the Detroit Promise enabled the city’s recent high school graduates to attend its local public two-year colleges by covering their tuition and fees. Under this last-dollar program, students may use the scholarship for up to three years at any of the city’s five local community colleges.

The Detroit Chamber of Commerce partnered with MDRC, a nationally known social and education policy research organization, to design and evaluate the Detroit Promise Path as a way to boost students’ academic success in the program. The program added these components: monthly financial support contingent on meeting with coaches, enhanced summer engagement, and messages informed by behavioral science through a management information system created by MDRC. In July 2017, MDRC published a report, Enhancing Promise Programs to Improve College Access and Success, that demonstrates the positive impact that Detroit Promise Path had on student success.

The Campaign applauds Detroit Promise leaders for agreeing to evaluate and share the outcomes of its program. We appreciate their commitment to make programmatic adjustments as needed. Ongoing research and evaluation of important components of College Promise programs as leaders design, implement, and expand their local and state initiatives.

Key findings from the Detroit Promise Path report:

- More than 95 percent of students responded to coaches’ outreach
- Ninety-six percent of surveyed students who had been in contact with a coach said the program was “valuable” to them
- The program had a sizable impact on enrollment in the second semester and on full-time enrollment in the first and second semesters, showing an increase in persistence from semester to semester
The Milwaukee Area Technical College launched its free technical college program, MATC Promise, on September 9, 2015, the same day that President Obama and Dr. Biden launched the College Promise National Advisory Board in Warren, MI.

MATC President Vicki Martin was inspired to create the mentoring and free community college program, after attending a session on the Tennessee Promise that was organized by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), one of the Campaign’s many partner organizations.

President Martin flew back from the AACC convention in Dallas and led her team to launch the MATC Promise in less than five months. To build support, she and her colleagues convened Milwaukee leaders from business, government, philanthropy, and education. Together these city leaders launched the MATC Promise to tackle the challenge of preparing Milwaukee’s students for a changing economy, helping employers find the talented workforce they need to expand their businesses. The shared understanding that employers need trained workers now more than ever was the galvanizing point for this broad urban coalition.

By 2020, more than 50 percent of jobs in Wisconsin will be middle-skill, which require more than a high school diploma, but not a bachelor’s degree. These middle-skill jobs are exactly the types of careers made possible by a MATC education and by all of America’s community and technical colleges. In fact, MATC offers 160 associate degrees and technical diplomas in high-demand and emerging industries that are vital to Milwaukee’s economy such as construction, electronics, advanced manufacturing, and mobile application development.

Modeled in large part after the Tennessee Promise, the MATC Promise requires participating students to meet with a mentor during their course of study and to fulfill community service requirements. To qualify for the last-dollar program, students must maintain a 2.0 GPA during their senior year of high school with a 90 percent attendance rate and exhaust all other sources of available local, state, and federal funds. In addition, while enrolled at MATC students must take advantage of wraparound services that boost their chances of successfully completing their degree or certificate program.

The impact of the MATC Promise is significant because it attracts a large number of eligible high school students in the metropolitan area who live at or below the federal poverty line. MATC is Wisconsin’s largest majority-minority higher education institution and serves the state’s largest urban population. For many students who thought they couldn’t afford a college education, the MATC Promise is turning their dreams into reality.

Over 3,000 students applied to participate in the Promise during the program’s first year, which started in Fall of 2016. On May 12, Dr. Biden addressed the first graduating class of MATC Promise students at the college’s 2017 Commencement Address following a tour of Milwaukee’s Bradley Technical High School with Executive Director Kanter. Their visit garnered widespread press coverage, a boost to both MATC and the College Promise movement. During the commencement ceremony, Milwaukee County Executive and philanthropist Chris Abele announced his pledge to donate $500,000 to expand the MATC Promise to serve adult students. MATC officials are now laying plans to expand the Promise to qualified students, regardless of age.

“I am proud to invest in the expansion of this program to give more people access to a quality education.”

Chris Abele
Milwaukee County Executive

Promise Spotlights
Wisconsin — MATC Promise
During our October Month of Action, the Campaign hosted a joint event with the College of Southern Nevada to show a screening of No Greater Odds, a film that tells the stories of five community college students whose lives improved dramatically because of the quality education they received. The convening also included a panel discussion on the value of free community college.

During that discussion, Nevada State Sen. Mo Denis (D) stood up from the audience to announce his intention to introduce legislation making a community college or technical education free. Just eight months later, after garnering bipartisan support and unanimous votes in both chambers of the State Legislature, Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) signed Senate Bill 391 into law, creating the Nevada Promise Scholarship. The scholarship will fund tuition and fees for eligible recent high school graduates, who are residents of Nevada, to attend any of the state's community or technical colleges.

Nevada’s elected officials worked with officials from the private sector, K-12 schools, higher education, community organizations, and government to build broad support for the Nevada Promise. This coalition recognized that a free community college or technical education has the potential to boost the state's economic and social prosperity. A key goal of the Promise is to increase workforce preparation by broadening access to higher education and producing more college graduates in the Silver State. In passing the bill, lawmakers understood that a high school education is no longer enough for Americans to prosper.

Modeled after the Tennessee Promise, the Nevada Promise is a scholarship program that requires students to complete community service and maintain their grades to remain eligible for funding. Students who enroll for at least 12 credit hours per semester can apply to receive funds to attend any of Nevada’s community or technical colleges once they have exhausted all other sources of public aid. The scholarship can be renewed for two school years and can be used toward earning an associate or bachelor’s degree, or toward certificate of achievement.

Students must also meet with a mentor to develop their course of study, maintain their GPA, and complete community service. The $3.5 million program will enable recent high school graduates to receive the Nevada Promise Scholarship in fall 2018.

“This is a game changer for Nevada.”
State Senator Mo Denis (D)

“This bill gives Nevadans a brighter future and requires a lot from our community, our colleges, and our students.”
State Senator Becky Harris (R)
Arkansas - ArFuture

This year, Arkansas lawmakers passed legislation making a community college or technical education free for any recent high school graduate or adult enrolled in programs leading to high-demand technical careers. Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R) first proposed the ArFuture grant in his December 2016 State of the State Address as one of the state’s key workforce goals.

“Through the new ArFuture Grant, we are ensuring that all Arkansans have access to affordable higher education,” said Gov. Hutchinson. “This plan will not only increase access to postsecondary education by removing the financial hurdles that keep many from enrolling, but it will also incentivize our students to better themselves by providing an opportunity to climb the economic ladder, while serving their communities.”

The new grant covers tuition and fees for students who enroll in a science, technology, engineering, or math program at any of the state’s community or technical colleges. Students will be able to receive this scholarship once they have exhausted other sources of state or federal aid. Following graduation, grant recipients must work full-time in Arkansas for three years. If they don’t fulfill that requirement, the scholarship converts to a loan. The grant is funded by the legislature’s decision to repurpose $8.2 million in general revenue funds.

As with many other established and emerging College Promise initiatives, ArFuture requires students to work with a mentor as they pursue their degrees or certificates and to complete community service requirements. In its first year, ArFuture provided free tuition to close to 5,000 students, who applied for funds on a first-come, first-served basis.

El Dorado Promise, AR

In 2007, the Murphy Oil Corporation launched the El Dorado Promise — a program that pays the tuition and fees for all El Dorado High School graduates who have continuously been in school since the ninth grade to attend any accredited college or university in the United States.

After 10 years, 84 percent of high school graduates now go on to college compared with 50 percent statewide.

The success of the El Dorado Promise serves as a model for what other communities can do to build a college-going culture and to keep college affordable. By making a college education affordable to all students in the city, El Dorado has guaranteed its residents a pathway to a high-quality education without taking on a mountain of college debt.

The results of the El Dorado Promise:

• High school enrollment in the city has stabilized as more families move to El Dorado to take advantage of the Promise.

• More students from El Dorado are going on to college and a strong college-going culture has developed.

• More students are pursuing rigorous high school courses, with many more students now taking Advanced Placement classes, as reported by school officials.
The Boston Bridge Pilot Program launched this year and will enable low-income students in Boston to complete a four-year degree without having to pay tuition and mandatory fees. The program began distributing funds to students starting in fall 2017.

The tuition-free initiative was put together through a bipartisan partnership between the office of Boston Mayor Marty J. Walsh (D) and Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker (R). The collaborative effort between Gov. Baker and Mayor Walsh to expand opportunity for Boston’s students to complete a college degree serves as inspiration to states and cities across the country. This innovative and historic partnership between the City of Boston and the State House provides yet another model for others to follow as they build a path to college and career for students to succeed.

Under this partnership, the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts work together to cover students’ tuition and fees from the time a student enters the community college through their graduation from a four-year public college or university in the Bay State.

To qualify for the program, students must meet income guidelines for Federal Pell Grants and must be enrolled full-time at Mass Bay Community College, Bunker Hill Community College, or Roxbury Community College. Students must complete their associate degrees within two-and-a-half years before transferring to one of the Commonwealth’s public colleges. Once enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program, students must complete their course of study within two years and maintain a 3.0 GPA.

Boston Bridge is open to all 2017 high school graduates who live in the City of Boston, including students from Boston public, charter, and parochial schools. It builds upon the City of Boston’s Tuition-Free Community College Initiative, which was launched in 2016 to extend access to higher education by providing free community college tuition for eligible low-income students. It is also an expansion of the state’s Commonwealth Commitment, which provides reduced tuition and fees for the state’s community college graduates to attend public colleges and universities in Massachusetts.

“This partnership means that a free bachelor’s degree is within reach for all of Boston’s low-income high school students.”

Mayor Marty J. Walsh (D) May 30, 2017

Gov. Baker celebrated the new partnership as a way to broaden access to higher education and expand economic opportunity. “College affordability too often serves as a barrier for students in the Commonwealth seeking to complete a degree, and this program is intended to provide more opportunities for a quality education,” said Gov. Baker as the program was announced. “We are pleased to partner with the City of Boston on this important pilot and will keep pursuing ways, like the Commonwealth Commitment, to create a runway for all students to get a quality and affordable education that can unlock a bright future.”
State Promise Programs

Hawaii Promise
The Hawaii Promise is a newly announced $1.8 million pilot program that seeks to address educational inequity in the Aloha State by broadening access to higher education. This fall, an estimated 1,000 students attending one of seven community colleges in the University of Hawaii system are taking advantage of the new scholarship. The Promise goes above and beyond for students with great financial need, providing funding for books, supplies, and transportation costs. The innovative new program — which acknowledges the overall cost of attending college — is available to qualified Hawaii residents of any age once they have exhausted all other sources of state or federal student aid. Hawaii’s Legislature supported funding for the Promise as part of the state budget. Gov. David Ige (D) signed the measure into law to encourage and enable more Hawaiians to complete a college education.

Rhode Island Promise
Rhode Island is now providing a free college education for the Ocean State’s recent high school graduates. The Rhode Island Promise funds two years of tuition and fees for residents attending the Community College of Rhode Island. Under the $2.8 million pilot program, high school graduates will be able to attend any of the state’s three community college campuses for two years tuition-free. The measure was passed as part of the state’s $9.2 billion FY 2018 budget and implemented as a way to boost workforce development. Gov. Gina Raimondo (D) first proposed free college legislation in her 2017 State of the State Address. Seven months later she approved the budget which included funds for the Rhode Island Promise. Students began receiving funds in fall 2017.

Kentucky Work-Ready Scholarship Program
In December 2016, Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin (R) signed an executive order creating the “Work-Ready Kentucky Scholarship.” Work-Ready Kentucky is a $15.9 million program that covers two years of tuition and fees for students pursuing degrees in specific in-demand careers. The last-dollar program enables students to use the state scholarship at any institution within the Kentucky Community and Technical System, at any of the state’s public four-year colleges, or any other accredited college in the state. The first round of students received scholarships to pursue credentials in a number of fields including healthcare, transportation/logistics, manufacturing, business services/IT, and construction. The program also allows students to use the scholarship for technical and vocational training through state approved programs.

Indiana Workforce Ready Grant
This year, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb (R) and lawmakers passed and signed the Indiana Workforce Ready Grant, which covers tuition and fees for residents to enroll in high-demand career programs and earn their certificates at Ivy Tech Community College, Vincennes University, or any other approved training provider. Officials in the Hoosier State predict that Indiana will soon have close to one million job openings stemming from both retirement and the growing mismatch between the jobs employers need to fill and the knowledge and skills workers possess. About 750,000 of the state’s residents currently have some college, but no associate or baccalaureate degree; only about 170,000 of those residents have some kind of certificate for career advancement. This scholarship is designed to advance the state’s economic development and competitiveness.

The Excelsior Scholarship for CUNY and SUNY, New York
In April, New York became the first state to enact legislation offering free tuition at any of the state’s public two-and-four-year colleges for eligible students. The scholarship allows students with family incomes up to $125,000 to earn a college degree tuition-free, broadening New York’s longstanding support of state financial aid for low-income students. The initiative, first proposed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) requires students to live and work in the Empire State for the same number of years they receive the scholarship. If a student leaves the state before that time, the scholarship converts to a loan. This last-dollar scholarship will be phased over a three year period, and began in fall 2017.
Baltimore Promise, Baltimore, MD
Beginning in fall 2018, recent graduates of Baltimore’s public high schools will be able to attend Baltimore City Community College to earn a one-year certificate or two-year degree with the cost of tuition and fees covered by the city. Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh (D) unveiled the plan in August 2017 as part of the city’s strategy to combat crime and violence. “Community college has become critical in providing the necessary education and training that high school graduates need to pursue a trade or a four-year degree,” Pugh said in announcing her crime-fighting proposal. “What we are going to do in Baltimore City is make Baltimore City Community College free.” Mayor Pugh estimates the free community college cost at $1.5 million a year when it is put into place in fall 2018.

Gateway Promise, Kenosha, WI
Wisconsin’s Gateway Technical College now funds community college tuition and fees for eligible graduating high school seniors in Kenosha, Racine, and Walworth Counties. The program is targeted to serve low-income students who graduate from high school on time and meet certain academic requirements. To qualify for funds, students must first apply for other federal and state aid and enroll full-time at Gateway Technical College. The innovative program is designed to ensure that students complete their programs of study and work toward building careers in high-demand fields. Students must also participate in the Summer Bridge Program before their first semester and attend academic success, career planning, and job readiness workshops while they are matriculating. In addition, students are required to fulfill community service requirements to maintain their eligibility for the Promise. To finance the program, the community established the Gateway Promise Fund, which received support from private donations, including contributions from SC Johnson and philanthropist H. Fisk Johnson.

VanGuarantee Promise, Henderson, NC
In fall 2016, VanGuarantee, Vance-Granville Community College’s Promise program, began offering free community college to all qualified legal residents of Vance, Granville, Franklin, and Warren Counties regardless of age. The scholarship program is designed to cover the costs of tuition, student fees, and textbooks for eligible students whose financial needs are unmet by federal and state aid and other means of support. Students living in these rural North Carolina counties can receive the scholarship as long as they enroll in at least nine hours per semester at any of the district’s community colleges and maintain a 2.5 GPA. Many older residents are taking advantage of the program to retrain for careers in new and evolving industries. VanGuarantee is financed through a $1.6 million bequest to the college from the estate of Wilbert A. Edwards.

Florida State College at Jacksonville Promise, Jacksonville, FL
This fall, students in Florida’s Nassau and Duval Counties are benefiting from a free community college program for all public high school graduates in their community. Under this unique new College Promise program, Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) funds tuition, fees, and books for recent high school graduates. The new FSCJ Promise closes the gap that traditional financial aid does not cover, enabling these hardworking students to take advantage of a free two-year community college education without assuming burdensome college debt. Students must maintain a 2.0 GPA while in the program.
Across the country, from Hawaii to Tennessee, in small towns and big cities, local leaders recognize that providing an affordable pathway for adults to complete a college or technical education will boost the workforce and spur economic development. These leaders know that a high school education is no longer enough to prepare citizens with the knowledge and skills that employers need.

In May, Tennessee became the first state in the country to offer free community college to adults, regardless of age. The new program, called Tennessee Reconnect, is building on the great success of Tennessee Promise, a scholarship that has offered two years of community or technical college education to graduating high school seniors since 2014. The goal of Tennessee Reconnect is to enable any Tennessee resident without a college degree the funded opportunity to complete a community college or technical education.

“This is about jobs, it’s about math, and it’s about the Tennessee we can be,” said Governor Bill Haslam (R) in a signing ceremony at Walter State Community College campus in Morristown. “We know that by 2025, at least half the jobs in this state will require a college degree or certificate. Mathematically there’s no way to reach that goal just by equipping high school graduates with degrees. Just as we did with Tennessee Promise, we want Tennessee Reconnect to send a clear message to adults: wherever you fall on life’s path, education beyond high school is critical to the Tennessee we can be.”

When Tennessee Reconnect is implemented in 2018, adults without a college degree may apply for the program, a last-dollar scholarship, as long as they have been accepted at a community or technical college. In addition to covering tuition for eligible adult students, Tennessee Reconnect will provide locally based support services to ensure their success. The program will be funded through surplus state lottery funds.

This fall, San Francisco will become the first U.S. city to offer free community college tuition to all of its residents, regardless of need or age. This May, Milwaukee Technical Area College (MATC) announced its intention to extend its tuition-free college program to adults.

"Expanding the MATC Promise program to serve adult students in the greater Milwaukee area will redefine the future of higher education," said Dr. Vicki J. Martin, MATC President. "Offering a pathway to careers with family-sustaining wages in our region’s high-demand sectors will create a winning solution for residents, businesses, and our community. The success we have experienced in the first two years of our program is a strong indicator that adults will benefit from our academic offerings and support services."

Other free college programs are already underway for adult students in some rural areas, in places such as Vance-Granville Community College in North Carolina and Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Virginia.
Leaders in rural regions sense an urgent need to provide students with affordable and accessible education beyond high school. They know that businesses won’t invest in communities without a well-prepared workforce. A high school education is no longer enough to prepare students with the education and training they need for the rapidly changing 21st century workforce. With fewer agricultural and factory jobs, rural leaders know that providing employers with well-trained workers is necessary to boost economic development and strengthen their communities. That’s why College Promise programs are evolving in a growing number of rural regions throughout the nation where, on average, far fewer students attain higher education than their urban or suburban counterparts.

What’s more, rural areas have 10 percent more residents with only a high school diploma compared with metro areas, and account for 80 percent of the 467 counties in this country that have significant populations with less than a high school diploma. The educational divide between rural and urban regions results in a huge gap in economic opportunity. High skilled jobs, which pay more, are more plentiful in urban areas where there is a greater concentration of educated people.

“When the farm goes under, or the coal mine closes, or an industry goes overseas, community colleges are often the only place students in remote regions can go to get the higher education and training to prepare for the technical jobs of the 21st Century,” says Randy Smith, the President of the Rural Community College Alliance, and a member of the College Promise National Advisory Board. “The opportunity to earn a degree or certificate can open doors to well paying jobs and economic security for rural students. That’s good for students, for families, and for rural economies.”

College Promise programs are developing all over the country in diverse rural locations. A few examples of local programs include Dabney, VA, Kingstree, SC, and Fresno, CA.

Some programs, like Mohave Community College in Arizona and Vance-Granville Community College in North Carolina have the responsibility to serve a broad geographic area for their local populations. The aim of these rural programs is to help more students enter and complete a community college education within their region through shared education, business, and philanthropic partnerships that identify sustainable financial resources for the College Promise.
The Campaign organized two months of action to galvanize supporters of free community college across the country. During these months, we organized a series of events to build public support for the College Promise movement. The Campaign planned dozens of public activities in regions throughout the nation. These events drew the support of more than 100 partner organizations, celebrities, and elected officials. They also garnered the attention of millions of people on social media.

Throughout October and April, we worked with colleges, partners, and students around the country to build events that included documentary screenings, panel discussions, and tabling fairs. These opportunities allowed students and community members to learn why it’s so important to expand college opportunity for all. We also worked to drive public expression of support for College Promise on social media. Students and supporters from across the country shared their reasons for supporting free community college. The Campaign also launched a drive for our champions to write op-eds to explain the value and impact of College Promise programs.

October: PromiseNet 2016 and White House Convening

During our October Month of Action, the College Promise Campaign hosted PromiseNet 2016 in Washington, DC. The event brought together over 250 Promise practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and advocates from across the nation to discuss building, sustaining, and improving College Promise programs. The conference culminated in two events: a gathering focusing on the value of community college to women and a White House convening that shared the lessons learned from PromiseNet 2016 and celebrated the growing College Promise movement.

Our NAB members attended the White House convening along with elected officials, college leaders, and executives from a wide range of nonprofit, corporate, and philanthropic organizations. Among those addressing the convening were NAB members Karen Stout, President & CEO of Achieving the Dream and Gail Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College. Krissy DeAlejandro, Executive Director of tnAchieves and Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston, MA also attended. Several Administration officials also addressed the convening. They included: Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell, White House Domestic Policy Council Director Cecilia Munóz and White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough.

“"The students that you serve are the backbone of the American Dream.”"}

Cecilia Munóz
Former Director White House
Domestic Policy Council
Each Month of Action kicked off with our #FreeCommunityCollegeStory Instagram Video Competition. Entrants were asked to produce a video describing how free community college would benefit them or how it has already changed their life.

In October, student Aaron Lacambra shared the winning story about his journey which began in the Philippines and led him to start a successful engineering career at Broward College in Florida. Aaron’s video was a powerful expression of the value and need to make free community college available to all.

In April, Terra State Community College student Dilia Samadova shared her winning video about the challenges she experienced as an asylum seeker who balanced multiple jobs and a full-time class schedule. She described how free community college would help more students “break up” with student debt.

The video competition winners received a $2,000 grand prize, made possible by generous donors. That amount covers the average cost of a semester of tuition at community colleges. These competitions and the stories they inspire are a powerful way to elevate student voices into the national conversation about the need for College Promise programs. The competitions were supported by dozens of Campaign partners and generated millions of views on social media. We look forward to our upcoming Months of Action and invite ideas to improve upon what we’ve accomplished this year!
California Leading the Charge for College Promise

College Promise programs are prominent across California, where nearly 50 communities are delivering free community college to eligible students. So what’s the secret to their success? Why are so many communities making these investments in their students?

Through the Campaign’s work to advance California's Promise programs, we've partnered with hardworking students, bold leaders, and local partners to expand opportunity in the Golden State. Together, these groups know that free community college is a wise investment in the future.

Community college students come from all walks of life and are the reason College Promise is so important. They are working class and immigrant families, they’re single-parents, veterans, and middle-aged students, all determined to improve their lives through higher education. They are the real inspiration behind California’s free community college programs.

Take the Santa Barbara City College Promise, which provides free education to students like Leslie Marin, who had the grades and ambition to attend a four-year university but whose family couldn't afford the cost. “It was frustrating,” Leslie shares. “Why did I try so hard for four years and still have doors closed? Every student should have the opportunity to go to college and…keep on going forward with their life and be successful.” Today, Leslie is achieving her full potential through Santa Barbara’s free community college program.

Leslie’s story is inspiring, but she isn’t alone. In California and across the nation, students face challenging circumstances and rising college costs. They don’t need a handout—they need a fair shake. That's why leaders up and down the state of California are taking action by making community college free.

Leading the charge are the state’s community college administrators who are resolved to open their campus gates wider for deserving students like Leslie. This year, Gov. Jerry Brown (D) and legislators also took action by investing millions of dollars to expand free community college efforts. California’s Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), rural city councils, and big city mayors from Los Angeles, San Jose, and Oakland, among others, are also leading the movement. They are working with school districts, businesses, and local leaders to build coalitions that cross party and institutional lines. These leaders are providing the human capital and financial resources to build sustainable College Promise programs with the support needed for student success.

This groundswell of momentum didn’t happen overnight. It took individuals spearheading a vision for a college-going culture in their communities. California is filled with these champions. Take Eloy Oakley, a community college graduate and military veteran, who built broad public support for one of the state's earliest free community college programs while serving as the longtime president of Long Beach City College. “Our partners are completely dedicated to the success of the Long Beach College Promise,” shared Oakley, who now serves as Chancellor of the California Community College system.

With participation from Long Beach's city, school district, and university leaders, the Long Beach College Promise has already helped nearly 15,000 students attend college and graduate.

California’s striking combination of leaders like Eloy Oakley, the diverse coalitions of local support they galvanize, and inspiring students like Santa Barbara’s Leslie Marin are making free community college a game changer here in the Golden State. By making such investments in its people and economy, California is primed to continue leading the nation well into the future.

College Promise: A Framework for Student Success in California

In August 2017, the Campaign teamed up with more than 400 California higher education leaders to discuss strategies to improve College Promise partnerships in the Golden State. The day-long event included the heads of all the education systems in California, along with their partners and supporters in the free college movement. University of California president, Janet Napolitano, shared that three of her, “campuses have direct engagement with local [community college] Promise programs...Our commitment is to those students once they’re on campus.”

The event was a good opportunity for California’s education leaders to meet with students who benefit from Promise programs. It also enabled leaders to discuss the most effective ways to create Promise initiatives that are both successful and financially sustainable. In a range of conversations, attendees discussed how to create promising pathways for increasing student success while keeping college affordable.

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Central Valley Promise:
It’s not all sand and palm trees in California. A few hundred miles from Los Angeles, the state’s Central Valley is an agricultural giant, providing produce to countries around the globe. The Central Valley is also one of California’s fastest growing and most diverse regions, yet it possesses one of the nation’s highest rates of residents living below the poverty line. These conditions inspired education and business leaders to build the Central Valley Promise, led by CSU-Fresno President, Dr. Joseph Castro, a first-generation student who worked his way up to the university’s presidency. The Central Valley Promise provides local high school graduates with a semester of free community college and the incentive to transfer to Fresno State University to complete a baccalaureate degree. This partnership is key because “kids who transfer from community college to Fresno State tend to graduate at much higher rates than kids who start right out of high school,” says Dr. James Marshall, the university’s Dean of Research and Graduate Studies. Thanks to the collaboration of these community leaders, students can now pursue a better life in the Central Valley.

Ventura College Promise:
California’s first College Promise program began over a decade ago when Ventura Community College launched its own effort. Funded largely by revenue from a popular campus market, the Ventura College Promise has helped over 12,000 students obtain a quality education. For example, the program’s Latino students and young men overall continue on with their education at twice the rate of their non-Promise peers. Likewise, African American students continue on at three and a half times the rate. Results like these demonstrate just how hard students are willing to work when we invest in them.

Ventura College Promise’s success inspired new College Promise programs up and down the coast. From San Luis Obispo down to Oxnard, the region is filled with collaborative partners learning from the Ventura model, tailoring it to their community, and even expanding some services and benefits for students. Although these communities serve different school districts, they share the mission of providing a quality education to more residents. They are friends and partners, motivating each other to build a college-going culture and student success throughout the region.

West Sacramento:
Recent high school graduates in the city of West Sacramento are now attending their local community college for free at any of the four Los Rios Community College District campuses. Their tuition and fees are covered by community residents who overwhelmingly approved a local ballot measure. The new College Promise program is available to any resident who graduated from a local high school within the last six months. The innovative program is a partnership between the city of West Sacramento, the Washington Unified School District, and Sacramento City College.

The measure was spearheaded by West Sacramento’s Mayor Christopher Cabaldon (D) a member of the College Promise National Advisory Board. West Sacramento voters passed the measure into law as part of the city’s “Kids’ Home Run Program,” a comprehensive program that prepares, “youth for high growth, high wage entry level positions today, and bolstering our local workforce for years to come,” shares Mayor Cabaldon. “We want to give every advantage to West Sacramento children, from cradle to college or career. The West Sacramento Kids’ Home Run does just that.”
2016-17 Promise Highlights

September 9, 2016
Dr. Jill Biden joins Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti (D) and Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) to announce the LA Promise. Dr. Biden and Mayor Garcetti publish an editorial in favor of College Promise programs in Inside Higher Ed. Dr. Biden speaks about the free college movement and the San Jose Promise before a gathering of local politicians and business executives at the San Jose Headquarters of NextFlex. California Gov. Jerry Brown (D) signs legislation establishing College Promise competitive grants for California’s community colleges.

October - Community College Month of Action
The Campaign hosts PromiseNet 2016, bringing together local Promise practitioners, stakeholders, and leaders from the private and public sector to learn about how to create College Promise programs. The White House holds a convening celebrating the College Promise movement. The Campaign’s National Advisory Board (NAB) holds its fall meeting on October 26 at the White House. The Campaign hosts a student video competition and screening of “No Greater Odds” with a free college panel discussion in Las Vegas, NV.

November
President Barack Obama honors Dr. Eduardo Padrón, Miami Dade College President and NAB Member with the Presidential Medal of Freedom at a White House ceremony.

December
The Campaign celebrates the release of $111 million for U.S. Dept of Labor’s America’s Promise Grants, enabling support for regional College Promise programs.

January
Executive Director Kanter participates in a virtual convening of College Promise researchers from across the nation and presents the latest information about the Campaign at the Community College League of California’s Annual Legislative Conference.

February
The Campaign holds its fifth NAB meeting on February 24th at San Francisco’s Union Square Hilton Hotel, following the conclusion of Achieving the Dream 2017 conference. Elected officials from Oakland, Richmond, and San Francisco discuss their College Promise efforts at the Campaign forum on Bay Area Promise programs.
March

The Campaign attends a College Promise launch in Jacksonville, FL — an event led by Mayor Lenny Curry (R) and President Cynthia Bioteau at Florida State College at Jacksonville. On the West Coast, the Campaign celebrates the launch of the San Jose Promise with Mayor Sam Liccardo (D) and San Jose-Evergreen Community College District Chancellor Debbie Budd.

April - Community College Month of Action

Campuses share success stories, host events and support the movement via social media. Students and faculty hold events during the #FreeCommunityCollege Week of Action. The Campaign hosts a discussion at the American Association of Community College (AACC) convention in New Orleans. NAB member and AACC President Walter Bumphus addresses a keynote panel focusing on college pathways, completion and student success with other NAB members. Dr. Biden accepts AACC’s award on behalf of the Obama Administration for its leadership on America’s College Promise.

May

Dr. Biden delivers the Commencement Address at the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) on May 12 and addresses the first graduating class of MATC Promise students. Milwaukee County Executive and philanthropist Chris Abele announces his personal pledge to expand the MATC Promise to adult students. Boston Bridge is created; Hawaii Establishes the Hawaii Promise; and TnReconnect expands Promise to all qualified adults.

June

Passed unanimously by the Nevada assembly in 2017, the Nevada Promise Scholarship is for high school graduates. The scholarship allows students to attend any of the state’s four public community colleges ‘free.’

July

Executive Director Kanter discusses College Promise at the State Higher Education Executive Officers annual meeting in Charleston, SC and at the Jobs for the Future Annual State Policy Meeting in Ft. Lauderdale, FL.

August

The Campaign co-hosts the second California Promise meeting in Sacramento, CA. More than 400 community college leaders, policymakers, researchers, government officials, and business executives attend conference examining how to build promise programs.
Building a Promise

Providence Promise: Building with Children’s Savings Accounts

This April in Rhode Island, local leaders in government, education, and business launched the Providence Promise, a pilot program using children’s savings accounts to build a college-going culture. By holding one-on-one meetings and designing individualized savings plans, the Promise aims to help students realize that saving for college is possible, especially for low-income families.

In Providence, where 86 percent of public school students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, the idea of saving money for something far into the future — like college — seems impossible for many low-income families. Understanding that, the Providence Promise works with families to understand how modest savings over time can build the funds to make a higher education within reach. During one-on-one meetings, the Providence Promise staff work with families to explain how college savings can be accrued, even for those struggling to make ends meet.

In its first year, leaders began introducing the still evolving pilot program to families at three Providence elementary schools. The idea is to build a college-going expectation from the time a student begins kindergarten. The two-part program facilitates college savings through 529 CollegeBound Saver accounts.

Once enrolled in the Providence Promise, parents and guardians agree to contribute a small percentage of their annual household income for each of their enrolled children for a total of 15 years. Contributions are directly tied to a family’s total income: if incomes go down, contributions are reduced. If a parent or guardian becomes unemployed, contributions to the fund are suspended until they find a new job. The same is true for students once they begin to make contributions.

Students have the opportunity to use the Providence Promise for up to a decade after completing high school or service in the military or any public service. The Providence Promise team is working tirelessly to boost enrollment in the Providence program, meeting families and connecting with members of the community at block parties, farmer’s markets, and other community events.

When putting together the Promise program, Providence officials reached out to the team that developed the Wabash County Promise in Wabash, IN. Together the two teams examined the best practices for designing a Promise that incorporates Children’s Savings Accounts. Wabash County officials were able to share their lessons learned in creating a sustainable program — one that would build a college-going culture to keep an affordable college education within reach of its students.
Richmond Promise:
Public-Private Investment in Student Success

Communities and states are designing College Promise programs in a variety of innovative ways. There is no single way to construct a Promise program. Leaders across the country are finding creative ways to build sustainable College Promise scholarships to meet the specific needs of their community. Each new program that is established becomes a potential model for other communities to consider as they plan Promise initiatives for their own regions.

In 2016, the city of Richmond, California launched the Richmond Promise, a collaborative effort of the Chevron Corporation, West Contra Costa Unified School District, the Contra Costa Community College District, the California State University and the University of California systems, the City of Richmond, and private philanthropy. This public-private partnership was launched as an effort to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to secure a high-quality education after high school and that they complete their programs of study, whether that’s an associate degree, a bachelor’s degree, or a career-technical education. The goal is to build a college-graduating culture.

In 2014, Chevron contributed $35 million to the Richmond Promise, funds that will be used over the next 10 years. In addition to removing financial barriers to higher education, the Richmond Promise works in conjunction with the local K-12 community to provide educational support services that build an expectation of going to college from the time students begin elementary school. The overall goal is to promote the college-going expectation, readiness, and graduation so students can secure the education they need to prepare for well-paying careers to live a healthy life. In addition, the program aims to make all Richmond students prepared to enter one of California’s public community colleges or universities after graduating from high school.

Corporate, government, and philanthropic partners came together to build the program because they knew it would benefit students, families, and the local economy. The program is open to recent graduates of any West Contra Costa Unified School District high school as long as they are residents and have attended a Richmond or North Richmond local school since 9th grade. Qualified students are eligible to receive as much as $1500 per student to attend any accredited public two or four-year college, or not-for-profit technical school.

In order to receive the scholarship, students must take part in the First Year Success Program, a series of workshops designed to help students prepare for their transition to college. Those workshops include: a summer bridge program, targeted advising, and a learning community experience. The goal of these mandatory services is to ensure that Richmond Promise students are supported and well-prepared to graduate from start to finish.

“The goal is to create a cascading network of current college students and recent graduates who can provide a network of support to Richmond Promise scholars,” said Jessie Stewart, Executive Director of the Richmond Promise. “We want to do more than just help pay for college, we want to make sure our students succeed once they get there.”

This upcoming year, the Richmond team hopes to be transformational, focusing on providing a home-base of college access and student support for Richmond Promise students to make a difference in their lives. In fact, the Richmond Promise has recently partnered with Contra Costa College to pilot the First Year Experience Pathway. By providing students with a summer bridge program, targeted advising, and a learning community experience, students will be more prepared to succeed in college.

Other innovative supportive elements like the Near Peer Ambassador Program build a college-going culture by connecting Richmond Promise students with their younger peers at a local high school and by connecting high school students with their “near peers” at middle school. The idea is for students to serve as role models for younger students as they progress through the academic pipeline.
First-Dollar vs. Last-Dollar

College Promise programs generally distribute funds to eligible students using one of two distinct methods: “First-Dollar” or “Last-Dollar”

First-Dollar:
The amount of Promise funding awarded to an eligible student does not take into account any additional funding or grants that the student is eligible for (e.g., a Federal Pell Grant). Therefore, a “first-dollar” Promise program covers the direct costs of attending college, and has the potential to reduce the associated costs that come with being a student, such as textbooks, transportation, childcare, school materials, and other college costs.

Last-Dollar:
The amount of College Promise funding awarded to an eligible student takes into account any additional public funding or grants the student is eligible to receive (e.g., a Federal Pell Grant, state financial aid, etc.). The total amount of “last-dollar” Promise funding a student receives varies depending on other financial aid for which the student is eligible.

Last-Dollar Plus:
In a “last-dollar plus” program the amount of Promise funding awarded to an eligible student takes into account any additional public funding or grants the student is eligible to receive (e.g., a Federal Pell Grant). Different from a traditional “last-dollar” model, a “last-dollar plus” program offers additional financial aid to students, for example, a minimum guaranteed scholarship amount, or a stipend for a specific cause (e.g., a book stipend).

ETS Models

The College Promise Campaign is committed to helping stakeholders implement and maintain sustainable funding models, so that “College Promise” programs are not a short-lived commitment. We must ensure that students, families, and future generations can count on the promise of an affordable, quality education in the years ahead.

In June of 2016, over 90 scholars, business and government leaders took part in the conference, Designing Sustainable Funding Models for College Promise Programs, co-sponsored by the Campaign and Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, NJ.

Five design teams presented different financial approaches for local and state leaders to consider while designing and sustaining their College Promise models. Attendees weighed the merits of various approaches to finance effective, sustainable College Promise programs for communities and states.

On October 4, 2017, the Campaign and ETS published the results from those reports. In a seminar at the National Press Club, the report’s authors shared their work, now compiled as Designing Sustainable Funding Models for College Promise Programs by Wiley and Sons and available on our website: collegepromise.org. Communities and states may now use this work as they consider how to finance their College Promise programs. The models examined include: Children’s Savings Accounts, State Funded, Privately Funded, Federal Student Aid, and Outcomes-Based.

This report builds on lessons learned in the first two years of the Campaign. The Campaign will continue partnering with ETS, researchers, and key funders of this work to support the development of responsible models in communities and states. We look forward to working with researchers and practitioners on funding strategies that will make these programs more sustainable and successful.

“Helping students and their families build a roadmap to college and beyond is a formula we can apply to communities all over our country.”

Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) October 4, 2017

Coons and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) re-introduced the American Dream Accounts Act bill in May 2017.
Growing up, I listened to my parents tell me how the only thing that can’t be taken away from you is an education. I could understand their perspective. When my mother fled the Cambodian genocide and when my father immigrated from Argentina, they left behind everything they knew. While they never got a higher education, they believed that an education could give anyone a better life. This belief, ingrained in me early on, led me to become a first-generation college student. Next year, I’ll be graduating from Yale.

However, my college experience didn’t start at the Ivy League. It started at Pasadena City College, a community college in California. After graduating high school, I considered college. But a higher education seemed inaccessible. I came from a low-income background. I grew up eating reduced-price meals in school and helping my father transport vending machines around Los Angeles. Until college, I shared a bed with two family members. I knew how a higher education could provide a better life, but I was unsure if I could afford it.

Community college looked like an option, but I was unsure. There was a stigma around community colleges. I decided to visit the campus. Immediately, I realized how wrong this stigma was. Walking around campus, I saw how focused everyone was on their education. How caring the professors were. How this campus gave everyone, dedicated to a better life, the opportunity to reach it. I became certain that community college was the right choice for me.

Community college showed me how anything was possible. I was inspired by my classmates. To my left in class, there would be a veteran, who returned to school after a decade of service. To my right, there would be a single mother, who wakes up at 6 a.m. to take her child to school, goes to work, and attends classes. In front of me, there would be an immigrant, like my parents, who was striving to forge a brighter future.

When I was in high school, Yale was never on my radar. I just wanted to be the first in my family to go to college. Community college gave me that opportunity and more. My community college classmates and their constant perseverance towards achieving a better life inspired me to aim high. The support and mentorship of my community college professors taught me the skills necessary to reach my goals. Two years after I took my first steps onto campus, I graduated from Pasadena City College as valedictorian and as a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation scholar with a full ride to Yale.

Even though I graduated from community college two years ago, I still often think about how much community college gave me. Community college gave me the means to help at home, while pursuing a degree. Community college allowed me to work three jobs, while finishing my general education requirements. Community college gave me a shot. And I wouldn’t be at Yale, or doing well there, if it wasn’t for community college.

Above all, community college made me a better person. It made me strive to give back, after how much community college gave me. That’s why this summer, I’m working on the College Promise Campaign, a national initiative that’s building support for states and localities to provide free community college through “College Promise” programs, which...
waive tuition and fees for hardworking students. New Promise programs are emerging every year. Programs vary in structure and how they’re funded, but they all share the same commitment to provide universal higher education.

In 2014, Gov. Bill Haslam (R) signed the Tennessee Promise, which provided free community college for high school graduates. After the program’s success, the state expanded free community college for every adult this year. In Utah, students can access free community college through the Salt Lake Community College Promise. In my state, California, more than 50 programs are now underway in communities from San Francisco to Barstow. From the hills of Tennessee, to the Great Salt Lake, to the coast of California, and beyond, more and more students are getting the opportunity to change their lives through higher education.

This trend has reached home. A few weeks ago, my alma mater announced its own program: the Pasadena City College Promise, which will make the first year of community college free for high school graduates in the area. I’m excited that more students can now access community college.

Next spring, I’m graduating from Yale. I owe it to my family, classmates, and professors. But, I also owe it to community college. Without community college, I wouldn’t be where I am today. My parents always said that the only thing that can’t be taken away is an education. The best gift we can give to students is a promise that if they work hard, they can have the same opportunity that I had to attain a higher education – and a better life.

“Community college made me a better person. It made me strive to give back, after how much community college gave me.”

Ryan Liu

Ryan Liu graduated from Pasadena City College as valedictorian and earned a full ride to Yale University as a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation scholar.
Growing up, my parents never expected me to go to college, but encouraged me to go because they knew that higher education would provide a better future for me and my family. The problem was paying for it. As a child, I dreamt of playing sports in college. However, when the time came to pick a school, I realized that my childhood dream was no longer feasible. All the universities I applied to would cause me to fall deep in debt. Even community college or junior college seemed unaffordable. I knew that I would have to give up my dream of going to college and playing sports to pursue a part-time job. It was hard to face giving up something I was so passionate about because of finances.

Because of my anticipatory anxiety and fears about how to pay for college, my teacher began to help me look for suitable scholarships. As a first-generation college student, I wasn’t clear about how about how to fill out a college application or how to apply for financial aid. That’s when we came across the Richmond Promise, a community-wide College Scholarship Fund and College Success Program. This great new program is available to all qualified recent high school graduates in my city. The Promise helps students pursue higher education by providing academic, social, and financial support. The goal is to help students secure a high-quality education leading to a meaningful career.

With all of its built-in support systems, the Richmond Promise team gave me a tremendous advantage in school. I was able to navigate my first year in college efficiently because I got so much support from counselors, peers, and a series of workshops.

Through the Summer Success Workshop, I got tips on what classes to take, best places to study, and how to succeed. I was also assigned a mentor, who keeps up on my progress, making sure I am on track to graduate. I was also able to network with my peers — other hardworking, dedicated scholars. Together, we learned a clear concept from the Richmond Promise Team: working hard has its rewards!

As a Richmond Promise student, I feel prepared and confident in my abilities. I plan on completing my Bachelor’s degree and later pursuing a Master’s degree in nursing. Despite the difficulty of my pre-med courses, I am more determined than ever to finish my college education. I am focused on my studies in a way I couldn’t have managed without the Richmond Promise. I can balance school, work, and sports without having to sacrifice one of them. I love the Richmond Promise and hope more free college programs open up around the country so more students can have the opportunity to pursue their college dream.

College Promise programs like the Richmond Promise equip students with the financial support they need helping us to turn our dreams into a reality. I hope more free community college programs are created throughout the country so more students can receive an affordable education.
El Dorado Promise, AR
“Going to college was always my expectation, but the Promise opened more opportunities for me. With the Promise, I was able to go out of state to college and attend Missouri State. Now, I’ve come back as a College and Career Coach and am working with high school students who will receive the Promise. It’s very rewarding to be able to share my perspective with students who are where I was just a few years before.”

Greg Crew, EHS 2012
Missouri State University 2016

Moraine Park Promise Program, WI
“The Promise program means that I will have open opportunities and my family won’t struggle with money like we have in the past so we can look forward in life. It would change my future by saving money and building up to what I want to do. My mom is a single mom so we kind of struggle, but we’re going to get by. To go to school and work at the same time is very hectic especially when you have sports on top of it. You get four hours of sleep and you keep on going.”

Myriah Disterhaft
Moraine Park Technical College
Financial Summary
January 1 - December 31 2016

Grants and Contributions
- 2015 Balance - $614,484.39
- Unrestricted Contributions - $166,520.61
- Restricted Grants - $155,000
- Unrestricted Grants - $125,000

Total Income - $1,061,005

Expenses
- Salary, Consultants - $455,431.98
- Events - $116,187.56
- Operating Expenses - $109,379.71
- Prof Services - $34,537.10
- Outgoing Grants - $27,500
- Donor Relations - $10,370
- Communications - $6,475
- Digital Advertising - $1,176.85

Total Expenses $ 761,058.20
Net Income $ 299,946.80
Looking Ahead
A Year of Momentum for the College Promise Movement

We are grateful to you and each of our partners for the extraordinary year of growth, challenge, and opportunity that our Campaign has harnessed. Across the country, we are witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of free community college programs. From coast to coast, communities and states are funding college costs for hardworking students to start and complete a community college education, and in some cases, the full four years, without assuming burdensome college debt.

Local and state leaders have chosen to enact College Promise programs because they know a high school education is no longer enough to ensure a good job and a decent quality of life. They understand that if we want our nation to prosper, we must prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need for a rapidly changing economy. In the 21st Century, that means completing at least one or two years of education beyond high school, whether that’s an associate degree, a technical certificate, or credits to complete a four-year college or university degree.

Since we launched our Campaign on September 9, 2015, we have seen almost a fourfold increase in the number of College Promise programs to about 200 now established or underway in 42 states. As these initiatives are created, word has spread that College Promise programs provide an affordable pathway for students to start and complete a college certificate or degree. Many more programs are being designed as leaders at the local and state level recognize them as an effective way to build economic prosperity and social equity by giving youth and adults the opportunity to advance in their lives.

Our tremendous progress could not have happened without the bipartisan support we have received from elected officials in communities and states. Joined together from a broad coalition of public and private sector leaders, they are working to make College Promise programs possible. Those leaders represent a wide range of sectors including education, business, labor, nonprofits, students, and government. We are excited to acknowledge the variety of models these dynamic leaders have created to finance sustainable and effective programs that support students along the pipeline to earn their college degrees and certificates.

The early findings are positive: higher levels of college enrollment and persistence rates, especially for first-generation and low-income students. We look forward to sharing the results of College Promise research in the months ahead.

As we enter our third year, we are deeply grateful for the financial support we have received from visionary and generous foundations, companies, individual donors, and for the outstanding leadership and support of our National Advisory Board and partner organizations. Since we launched our Campaign, they have guided us with their expert advice, collegial support, and strategic direction.

We look forward to working with both our founding and new partners as we continue to push as hard as we can to build widespread support for enacting and sustaining College Promise programs in more and more communities and states. We know if we can get more students to start and complete a college education without assuming unmanageable debt, our nation will prosper.

Looking Ahead
As we finish our second year, we are honored to have the vision, guidance, and continued financial support of our initial funders and to welcome new contributors to our Campaign. Our donors and partners have taken bold risks to underwrite a pioneering initiative and they continue to provide us with invaluable strategic advice.

Our supporters represent a diverse range of public and private foundations, corporations, organizations, and individuals. While they come from a variety of sectors, they are united in their commitment to enable thousands more hardworking students to start and complete a community college education without taking on burdensome college debt.

We continue to make a concerted effort to identify diverse organizations and individuals for strategic support and funding. Toward that end, we engage leaders from our key sectors to help us build broad support for the development and expansion of College Promise programs across America.

All over the country — and in a wide range of venues — our supporters have spread the word that a high school education is no longer enough for success in today’s rapidly changing economy. These leaders support us in a myriad of ways; sponsoring events and roundtable discussions, writing for social and traditional media, and investing in research about the College Promise movement. They also spread the word on college campuses, in local and state legislatures, and at conventions and forums.

The Campaign has benefited tremendously from the generosity of our donors who have donated this year and from our founding benefactors. These grants and investments, both for operating support and specific campaign priorities, vary in size, duration, and focus. On behalf of our National Advisory Board and Campaign staff, we are grateful for the new and continuing strategic and financial support of our donors.
What can I do to support the College Promise?

- **Sign Up** to be listed as a supporter of the College Promise Campaign and learn more about opportunities to promote the College Promise in your communities and states.

- **Pledge Support.** We welcome campuses, businesses, nonprofits, philanthropies, labor groups, K-12 groups, and individuals to pledge support.

- **Visit** our website, www.collegepromise.org, to be listed as a partner and to participate in the Campaign’s awareness and outreach efforts. Pledge your support, host an event, and ask your family and friends to join.

- **Follow** news and local developments about College Promise efforts on our Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. Share our posts with your networks. Meet with, call, and send letters of support for the College Promise to administrators, elected officials, and other community leaders.

- **Talk** with local and state officials, labor, and nonprofit leaders. Let them know your community is full of untapped potential because of educational and socioeconomic barriers. Explain that offering two years of affordable college to eligible students will bolster the workforce with a greater supply of diverse and qualified workers.

- **Write** letters and op-eds or give briefings to your local newspaper editors and news producers about the importance of the College Promise.

- **Share your story** describing how free community college would affect your life or transform your community.

Resources We Provide

The College Promise Campaign strives to provide the latest information about the College Promise movement. With our research and policy partners, we keep track of emerging and current College Promise programs to provide stakeholders and the public with information from our College Promise database, descriptions, design characteristics, progress, outcomes, and development plans. Our goal is to help College Promise leaders, practitioners, and researchers study and implement successful and sustainable local and state Promise programs. As existing programs expand and mature, we share their best practices with College Promise programs on the horizon, to convey lessons learned and help them design, optimize, and scale their initiatives.

Our website, www.collegepromise.org, provides comprehensive information about the College Promise movement. This site is a vital resource for anyone wanting to know about our Campaign and its mission. We describe our goals and provide links to more in-depth information. We show where the movement has grown, where there is momentum, and where there is pending legislation. The site provides links to established Promise programs, information about how to launch a Promise, research, news articles, press releases, and the College Promise database. This year, we added a new resource, linking to our CivicVoice College Promise blog at Forbes.com. In addition, we offer toolkits for community and state leaders and stakeholders to use as they design and implement their own College Promise programs.

Photo Credit: Palomar College, West Hills College, Reedley College, Florida State Jacksonville, University of Hawaii Community College, Truckee Meadows Community College, San Francisco State University, Pasadena City College, Office of Governor Gina Raimondo, Office of Governor Bill Haslam, Western Nevada College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, South Bend Tribune, REUTERS/Carlos Barria, Office of Governor Asa Hutchinson, The Boston Globe/Aram Boghosian, West Hills College Coalinga, The Daily Record, Pete Souza, Library of Congress, Palomar College, Gateway Technical, Campbellsville University, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, Moraine Park Technical College, Missouri State University
Moving Forward

As Executive Director of the College Promise Campaign, I marvel at the tremendous growth in and quality of the nation’s many College Promise programs since we launched our Campaign only two years ago. The annual report captures our great strides to make a community college education as accessible, free, and universal as the American high school has been for the last century. Our work has supported a rapidly growing national movement in communities and states to make college affordable for all hardworking students.

As we move ahead into our third year, we will keep engaging and supporting leaders as they work toward building College Promise programs in their regions. We will continue supporting new policy initiatives and research into what makes Promise programs effective and sustainable. The Campaign will continue sharing Promise results with a broad audience as we build our nationwide drive for communities and states to keep higher education within reach for all eligible students. No hardworking student should be denied the opportunity to pursue and complete a community college or university degree or certificate because she or he lacks the financial means to pay for it.

Thank you for your leadership and support of our mission, goals, and continuing efforts as we move forward into the third year of our Campaign!

Contact Us:

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Visit www.collegepromise.org to learn more about the College Promise Campaign for contact information to join the movement.

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