

Green Lights and Red Tape - Improving Access to Financial Aid at California's Community Colleges

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Abstract

Financial aid can encourage students to enroll in college and increase their odds of academic success. While the California community colleges (CCCs) have very low fees, which are waived for most low-income students, the additional expenses of books, supplies, transportation, housing, food and childcare can create significant financial barriers to attending and staying in school. Federal and state grants, work-study funds, and loans can help community college students cover essential costs and focus on their studies. However, only 34 percent of CCC students apply for these valuable forms of aid, compared to 45 percent of community college students in the rest of the country. The report points out findings and recommendations based on visits to 21 colleges representing a broad cross-section of the CCC system, a review of the most recent available research, and interviews with experts on community colleges, financial aid and related fields. This report focuses on policies and practices that vary widely from college to college and can have a particularly significant effect on students' access to financial aid.

Keywords

Student loan programs, College completion, Student financial aid, Graduation rates, Low-income students

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