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**Expanding Federal Work-Study
Opportunities for California
Community College Students**



Attending college without working is a luxury most California community college students do not have. In fact, nationally, 80 percent of today's community college students work while going to class (39 percent of them work full-time)¹, with many balancing their role as a primary source of income for their family and caring for young children. Jobs provide experience that prepare college students for their professional careers, but in many cases, work is an absolute necessity for students. And while working a moderate number of hours while in school has been associated with higher achievement, working too many hours can threaten degree completion.

The US Department of Education notes that, "Work-study is a way for students to earn money to pay for school through part-time on- (and sometimes off-) campus jobs. The program gives students an opportunity to gain valuable work experience while pursuing a college degree."² This is good news for students able to access federal work-study, but not all community colleges participate in the Federal work-study (FWS) program. Community colleges that do participate may find they have limited dollars they can use to hire eligible students because not all students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a requirement to determine FWS eligibility.

Expanding the FWS program could provide much-needed financial aid to California's community college students while also providing a formative role in career development. The FWS program, jointly funded by the federal government and colleges and universities, provides approximately \$1 billion to fund 700,000 student job placements annually across the nation,³ but far too few community college students are able to participate in the program. Nationally, only two percent of community college students receive any FWS aid, compared with 14 percent of undergraduates at private nonprofit four-year colleges.

In California, FWS comprises only \$88 million (less than one percent) of \$9 billion in total federal and state financial aid programs for undergraduate students at public colleges and universities in the state.⁴ The California community colleges serve roughly 2.1 million students on 116 college campuses (including CalBright, the state's online community college). **Only 10,530 of the almost 2.1 million students in the California community colleges receive FWS aid (Less than one percent)** (Table 1).

This brief provides an overview of the federal work-study opportunities and challenges in California's community colleges. FWS can be beneficial in meeting the needs of today's students, but community college students are disadvantaged when it comes to receiving FWS dollars compared to their peers at other institutions, and there is wide variation in the amount of FWS aid available from college to college (See Table 2).

Federal work-study recipients are almost twice as likely to be women than men, and 77 percent of FWS awards in the community college system go to students who are under 30 years of age.

The majority of FWS awards are distributed to students who are under 30 years of age, with one-third of FWS awards going to those under 19 years of age and another one-third to those under 24 years of age. Female students also take up FWS at higher rates than their male counterparts. Women account for roughly 54 percent of community college students, but they make up almost two-thirds of the FWS population. Despite making up just under six percent of the enrolled population, Black students comprise over 10 percent of FWS recipients, the likely result of greater need and interest in FWS by Black students on campus and racial discrimination in hiring practices that students may face in other employment opportunities.

Table 1. 2017-18 California Community College Federal Work-Study by Student Race, Gender, and Age Group

	Demographic Group	FWS Recipients*	Total FWS Awarded	CCC Student Enrollment	Proportion of CCC FWS Recipients	Proportion of CCC Enrollment
Race						
	Black	1,150	\$3,266,247	141,413	10.9%	5.9%
	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	60	\$159,766	10,216	0.6%	0.4%
	Asian American	1,236	\$3,881,894	277,617	11.7%	11.6%
	Filipino	211	\$638,830	64,426	2.0%	2.7%
	Latinx	4,762	\$13,993,239	1,070,935	45.2%	44.7%
	Multi-Ethnicity	445	\$1,261,070	91,686	4.2%	3.8%
	Pacific Islander	61	\$197,246	9,793	0.6%	0.4%
	White	2,474	\$7,529,083	620,596	23.5%	25.9%
Gender†						
	Female	6,861	\$20,415,502	1,288,623	65.2%	53.8%
	Male	3,624	\$10,817,185	1,075,461	34.4%	44.9%
Age						
	19 or Less	3,404	\$9,355,758	664,456	32.3%	27.7%
	20 to 24	3,439	\$9,997,046	718,660	32.7%	30.0%
	25 to 29	1,312	\$3,996,606	332,990	12.5%	13.9%
	30 to 34	773	\$2,323,173	186,225	7.3%	7.8%
	35 to 39	543	\$1,762,497	127,882	5.2%	5.3%
	40 to 49	665	\$2,435,599	164,267	6.3%	6.9%
	50 +	394	\$1,495,767	199,587	3.7%	8.3%

*A Federal Work-Study Recipient is a student who is both eligible for FWS and has secured a federal work-study job.

†Omits students whose race, age, and/or gender is "unknown", as well as students who are gender nonbinary.

Source: CA Community College Chancellor's Office. (2020). DataMart. [Data portal]. Available from: <https://datamart.cccco.edu/>



The FWS Challenge: Administration and Award Availability

Deborah Santiago, a national expert on higher education and the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Excelencia in Education, elevated some of the biggest challenges for community college participation in FWS as follows:

- **The requirement of a matching amount:** In general, a college must contribute at least 25 percent of a student's wages under the FWS program.⁵ For some institutions, this match is cost prohibitive to participation. However, this match can be waived if the college has low education and general expenses and knows how to apply for a waiver from the US Department of Education.⁶
- **The overall and additional cost incurred by the college to administer the community service requirement of FWS:** A college must use at least 7 percent of its FWS allocation to employ students in community service jobs and have at least one FWS student employed as a reading tutor for children in a reading tutoring project or performing family literacy activities in a family literacy project.⁷ This cost is not funded by the program and data has shown some institutions come in and out of FWS participation year to year because of this requirement.⁸
- **The “grandfather” clause used for funding allocations disproportionately benefits campuses with past participation in FWS:** The formula for allocating FWS to campuses is primarily based on historical funding levels. More than half of FWS funds are allocated on this “legacy” basis while the remaining is allocated based on student need at the campus. Campuses with past participation in FWS are more likely to be in the Northeast of the United States and/or be a 4-year, and private, not-for-profit college. Research by Young Invincibles shows FWS is more concentrated in private institutions and in the mid-Atlantic, although population growth and financial need is more concentrated in community colleges and in the Southwest of the United States.⁹
- **Low FAFSA completion by California community college students:** In order to be eligible for FWS, students must complete a FAFSA. However, far too few community college students complete the FAFSA, meaning California students with the greatest need are leaving federal aid unclaimed that could help them with the costs of attending college.
- **FWS jobs are given on a first-come, first-served basis at most campuses:** Once students file their FAFSAs and are determined eligible for FWS, they must still find a job on campus. FWS jobs are very popular and in high demand. Most campuses do not use a process to match students with the greatest financial need to open positions, but instead require eligible students to secure the job themselves. Many FWS eligible students with great need find themselves without an FWS job because of this first-come, first-served approach.

Despite a student population of about 2.1 million, only **10,530 California community college students received FWS in 2017-18. The average FWS award was just under \$3,000 for the academic year.**¹⁰



There is wide variation in FWS recipients across California

Northern Coastal, Northern Inland, Southern Central Valley and the Inland Empire have the highest proportions of students who receive FWS. These are regions in our state where poverty is higher and educational attainment is generally lower.

The percent of students receiving FWS in the Northern Coastal region of California is almost three times the proportion served across the Bay Area and more than five times the percentage of students receiving federal work-study in the Orange County region. At Lassen Community College (in northern California) and West Hills-Coalinga colleges (in the Central Valley), more than two percent of their students receive FWS, double the statewide proportion.

The following community college campuses have higher numbers of students with FWS opportunities: Chaffey, El Camino, Fresno City, Long Beach City, Merced, Pasadena City, Riverside City, City College of San Francisco, San Joaquin Delta, Santa Barbara City, and Santa Monica.

Long Beach City (\$896,535), American River (\$834,935), Sacramento City (\$766,786) and Fresno City (\$818,892) leveraged the highest total of FWS dollars for their students. **Across California campuses, however, institutions' FWS award sums ranged from \$3,000 to almost \$900,000 per college, a significant variation across the board.**

Additionally, while FWS opportunities could be increased at all community college campuses, **Cypress, Fullerton, Monterey Peninsula, Palo Verde, and Rio Hondo had zero students participate in FWS** during the 2017-18 school year. As students continue to contend with meeting basic needs and face serious affordability barriers to college, it is imperative that we learn more about the challenges and possible opportunities to leverage greater FWS for students across every campus.

Table 2 provides analysis of the number of FWS recipients at every community college in California.

Table 2. Federal Work-Study in the California Community Colleges System 2017-18

College	Enrolled Students	Federal Work-Study Recipients		Total FWS Dollar Amount
		#	% of campus enrollment	
College of Alameda	10,371	59	0.57%	\$196,792
Allan Hancock	20,955	65	0.31%	\$179,003
American River	45,062	193	0.43%	\$834,935
Antelope Valley	18,787	98	0.52%	\$305,439
Bakersfield	33,257	163	0.49%	\$430,592
Barstow Community	4,418	29	0.66%	\$89,944
Berkeley City	11,041	41	0.37%	\$126,409
Butte	15,460	106	0.69%	\$430,345
Cabrillo	17,222	53	0.31%	\$201,925
Cañada	9,564	37	0.39%	\$85,974
College of the Canyons	32,860	104	0.32%	\$338,266
Cerritos	31,382	181	0.58%	\$507,050
Cerro Coso Community	8,162	25	0.31%	\$63,135
Chabot	19,282	45	0.23%	\$129,091
Chaffey	30,344	222	0.73%	\$585,144
Citrus	19,948	76	0.38%	\$208,610
Clovis Community	10,872	50	0.46%	\$125,708
Coastline Community	18,168	40	0.22%	\$150,162
Columbia	4,078	21	0.51%	\$57,511
Compton	12,203	51	0.42%	\$161,170
Contra Costa	10,579	41	0.39%	\$136,541
Copper Mountain	2,810	59	2.10%	\$182,474
Cosumnes River	19,700	132	0.67%	\$390,675
Crafton Hills	8,592	25	0.29%	\$37,616
Cuesta	16,617	39	0.23%	\$88,292
Cuyamaca	13,420	65	0.48%	\$163,190
Cypress	21,003	0	0.00%	0
DeAnza	30,034	101	0.34%	\$185,193

College	Enrolled Students	Federal Work-Study Recipients		Total FWS Dollar Amount
		#	% of campus enrollment	
College of the Desert	16,043	81	0.50%	\$247,902
Diablo Valley	28,562	91	0.32%	\$181,130
East Los Angeles	61,725	160	0.26%	\$512,650
El Camino	33,677	325	0.97%	\$693,838
Evergreen Valley	14,500	96	0.66%	\$335,595
Feather River	3,454	3	0.09%	\$3,060
Folsom Lake	12,086	50	0.41%	\$186,564
Foothill	31,234	47	0.15%	\$118,401
Fresno City	36,030	272	0.75%	\$818,892
Fullerton	32,398	0	0.00%	0
Gavilan	9,587	29	0.30%	\$126,426
Glendale Community	26,454	258	0.98%	\$585,689
Golden West	17,524	78	0.45%	\$281,271
Grossmont	24,877	119	0.48%	\$227,739
Hartnell	18,135	64	0.35%	\$215,675
Imperial Valley	11,140	142	1.27%	\$456,120
Irvine Valley	22,055	48	0.22%	\$329,812
LA City	28,204	86	0.30%	\$353,577
LA Harbor	12,848	64	0.50%	\$228,029
LA Mission	16,616	53	0.32%	\$193,441
LA Pierce	29,055	97	0.33%	\$368,417
LA Southwest	12,047	37	0.31%	\$142,511
LA Trade-Tech	23,565	75	0.32%	\$357,031
LA Valley	26,624	100	0.38%	\$348,810
Lake Tahoe Community	6,747	14	0.21%	\$23,019
Laney	17,915	86	0.48%	\$295,574
Las Positas	12,656	23	0.18%	\$67,694
Lassen	4,141	100	2.41%	\$228,651
Long Beach City	34,738	149	0.43%	\$896,535
Los Medanos	12,956	63	0.49%	\$187,521

College	Enrolled Students	Federal Work-Study Recipients		Total FWS Dollar Amount
		#	% of campus enrollment	
Marin	9,912	50	0.50%	\$191,536
Mendocino	6,628	38	0.57%	\$52,833
Merced	16,349	216	1.32%	\$570,265
Merritt	11,459	52	0.45%	\$163,592
MiraCosta	23,304	130	0.56%	\$354,789
Mission	13,952	47	0.34%	\$115,069
Modesto Junior	24,557	165	0.67%	\$707,660
Monterey Peninsula	12,944	0	0.00%	0
Moorpark	19,751	61	0.31%	\$209,866
Moreno Valley	14,772	186	1.26%	\$489,358
Mt. San Antonio	66,061	151	0.23%	\$477,866
Mt. San Jacinto	23,165	153	0.66%	\$407,627
Napa	8,820	38	0.43%	\$120,045
Norco College	14,624	125	0.85%	\$325,673
Ohlone	15,035	32	0.21%	\$112,044
Orange Coast	28,721	119	0.41%	\$402,505
Oxnard	10,636	53	0.50%	\$166,816
Palo Verde	6,656	0	0.00%	0
Palomar	36,426	85	0.23%	\$294,149
Pasadena City	41,360	184	0.44%	\$564,372
Porterville	5,261	50	0.95%	\$86,083
College of the Redwoods	7,180	99	1.38%	\$128,747
Reedley	16,350	145	0.89%	\$308,181
Rio Hondo	30,792	0	0.00%	0
Riverside City	29,543	270	0.91%	\$562,706
Sacramento City	31,236	167	0.53%	\$766,786
Saddleback	39,226	84	0.21%	\$518,704
San Bernardino Valley	19,290	95	0.49%	\$206,596
San Diego City	23,801	93	0.39%	\$381,454
San Diego Mesa	34,466	81	0.24%	\$223,522

College	Enrolled Students	Federal Work-Study Recipients		Total FWS Dollar Amount
		#	% of campus enrollment	
San Diego Miramar	25,737	44	0.17%	\$167,010
City College of San Francisco	39,222	210	0.54%	\$570,623
San Joaquin Delta	23,628	211	0.89%	\$582,424
San Jose City	14,241	75	0.53%	\$334,232
College of San Mateo	14,000	44	0.31%	\$143,067
Santa Ana	61,123	87	0.14%	\$199,613
Santa Barbara City	23,813	206	0.87%	\$444,963
Santa Monica	44,245	341	0.77%	\$635,826
Santa Rosa Junior	37,925	95	0.25%	\$256,821
Santiago Canyon	28,122	59	0.21%	\$144,841
College of the Sequoias	16,153	80	0.50%	\$296,637
Shasta	13,717	75	0.55%	\$180,042
Sierra	25,395	111	0.44%	\$390,476
College of the Siskiyous	6,334	33	0.52%	\$38,611
Skyline	14,723	61	0.41%	\$252,217
Solano Community	13,640	62	0.45%	\$150,834
Southwestern	27,407	137	0.50%	\$396,762
Taft	9,505	10	0.11%	\$59,715
Ventura	18,862	72	0.38%	\$232,803
Victor Valley	16,380	128	0.78%	\$391,001
West Hills-Coalinga	5,313	110	2.07%	\$179,017
West Hills-Lemoore	6,560	46	0.70%	\$189,377
West Los Angeles	18,877	70	0.37%	\$293,412
West Valley	13,590	76	0.56%	\$200,175
Woodland Community	6,246	76	1.22%	\$184,036
Yuba	8,750	114	1.30%	\$140,307
CA Community College System	2,116,293*	10,530*	0.50%	\$31,366,446

*Total student counts are unduplicated and reflect system-level totals. They do not reflect column sums.

Source: CA Community College Chancellor's Office. (2020). DataMart 2018-2019. [Data portal]. Available from: <https://datamart.cccco.edu/Cal-PASS-Plus>. (2020). Student Success Metrics. [Data Dashboard]. Retrieved from: <https://www.calpassplus.org/LaunchBoard/Student-Success-Metrics>



While the current federal allocation of federal work-study puts community college students at a disadvantage and although FWS is a small portion of the financial aid available to students, community college leaders shared strategies for how to leverage FWS to benefit more students.

Strategies and innovation in FWS at two community colleges in California to meet student needs

Dr. Cynthia Olivo, Assistant Superintendent/Vice President, Student Services at Pasadena City College—a large urban community college in Southern California serving more than 41,000 students annually—shared that campuses can maximize FWS opportunities by spending their campus' entire FWS allocation from the federal government. This enables the college to request a higher FWS allocation in subsequent years. She shared that unused dollars work against a college and keep a college's federal allocation level or, in a worst-case scenario, decreases the allocation in future years. Dr. Olivo also serves as President of the Chief Student Services Officer Association for the California community college system and noted that some college leaders may not prioritize FWS because it reaches a much smaller number of students than larger financial aid programs in the state. Regardless of the limited reach, in her experience it was clear that students who receive FWS benefit from consistent income, job experience, and a job on campus that makes them feel "at home." A sense of belonging and familiarity on campus is a driving factor in retention of students, improving student outcomes and degree/certificate completion.¹¹

Some of the strategies implemented at Pasadena City College included:

- Mid-year review of FWS allocation expenditures to ensure campus is on track to utilize its entire allocation. If not on track, implement strategies that include offering students more hours during winter break, spring break, etc.
- When submitting the annual report to the federal government every October, the campus requests more FWS funds than the previous allocation.
- Providing 50 percent of the salary for a job developer at the Center for Career & Completion to identify and create jobs on and off campus for FWS.
- Creating a federal work-study program for former foster youth students.
- Switching the funds to be distributed to students via the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) for students with exceptional financial need. This is an allowable disbursement practice if a college sees that they are not on track to spend the full FWS allocation and prevents the federal government from reducing the FWS/SEOG amount in subsequent years.



At another large urban community college serving over 34,000 students each year, Long Beach City College, Dr. Mike Muñoz, Vice President, Student Support Services, shared that his college was returning large amounts of unused FWS aid. To better leverage FWS, he implemented the following efforts to spend and leverage FWS while supporting equity goals on his campus:

- Hosting a federal work-study job fair to support the recruitment of students to quality FWS opportunities.
- Maintaining a Peer Navigator program funded through FWS. Students are employed through FWS and their job is to support their peers to increase student success. The Peer Navigator program focuses on the most vulnerable students who experience homelessness, housing insecurity, and/or were formerly incarcerated students.
- Targeting FWS awards to disproportionately impacted student groups, such as Latinx and Black males, formerly incarcerated students, and former foster youth through the creation of federal work-study programs specifically for these groups.
- Developing an equity-focused training for FWS students that supports their understanding of office work expectations and builds on their resiliency and cultural and social capital.

As a result of these strategic interventions, Long Beach City College is on track to spend all its FWS allocation during the current academic year. The attention placed on FWS with an intentional focus on ensuring it is awarded to students makes a critical difference.

Recommendations

Federal work-study is a valuable opportunity for supporting low-income students with non-tuition expenses, but several federal, state, and campus reforms and strategies must take place for it to serve students more effectively. We join national experts and community college leaders in offering key recommendations for better leveraging FWS dollars at our campuses and for pressing congressional leaders to change current practices for disseminating FWS dollars across the country:

- 1 The federal government should revise the funding formula for campus-based programs so that it is better focused on colleges that enroll more students with need.** The existing funding formula favors colleges that have traditionally participated in FWS, versus campuses that serve more students with greater need. Currently, colleges with higher tuition prices benefit more than students attending lower cost community colleges.
- 2 California should require FAFSA completion across the community college system.** Limited finances should never stop a talented student from pursuing their college dreams. Lack of FAFSA completion means that California students with the greatest need are leaving federal money they would otherwise be eligible for unclaimed, which could defray the costs of attending college. FAFSA completion can help provide students eligibility for on-campus employment that can help cover non-tuition expenses.
- 3 Community colleges can be proactive in leveraging greater FWS opportunities.** Campuses can work to ensure their entire FWS allocation is spent in order to maintain the amount of FWS dollars and to increase the amount from one year to the next. This can only be done when a college is intentional about maximizing FWS opportunities for their students, when it conducts outreach and engages students in FWS on campus, when it regularly reviews FWS expenditures and allocations, and when it designates clear responsibility for management of FWS while creatively targeting FWS to students who are the most vulnerable and face great need.
- 4 The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office should track data on FWS by campus and make data available to inform state and federal policy.** On many college campuses, accurate information on the number of students offered federal work-study awards, federal work-study participant demographics, and the nature of their employment is solely maintained by federal work-study coordinators. This limits the ability to explore student success, best practices, and the impact of a multi-million dollar expenditure. As California develops a strong statewide longitudinal data system, all segments should collect and make publicly available data on FWS offers, awards earned, and recipient demographics, including at the University of California and California State University systems.
- 5 State leaders should leverage other employment and financial aid efforts to strengthen FWS programs.** As state leaders develop other career development and financial assistance programs, they should consider partnerships with private employers to develop and expand FWS opportunities for students. Further, as these alternative programs develop, they should ensure that community colleges receive their fair share of opportunities and funds that reflect the unique needs of their student bodies.
- 6 Campus leaders should look to expanding FWS amidst the Coronavirus pandemic.** Many students have lost jobs in the retail and service sectors due to shutdowns caused by the pandemic. Campus leaders can expand FWS to employ students during distance learning when job opportunities may be scarce, when local budgets may be lean, and when services, like peer counseling, can be expanded.



Data Limitations

Both the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators have acknowledged some difficulty working with institutional research offices to collect and analyze FWS data. There is variation in campus practices for reporting FWS offers and implementation, as well as inconsistencies in where FWS data are housed on campus. This limits researchers' ability to study academic outcomes for FWS recipients, outside of data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.

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Michele Siqueiros was the primary author of this report with research from Anna Marie Ramos and Vikash Reddy, PhD.

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