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## **Communities and States Make Rapid Progress for Community College Promise Initiatives April 10, 2017**

Throughout the country, leaders in states and communities are building College Promise programs, which cover tuition and fees for hard-working students to attend a community college, technical school, or university. Over the last 20 months, the growth and development of these programs has been exponential, with nearly 200 in development, underway, or expanding their initiatives in 40 states. Leaders from education, business and government are working together to design and fund innovative, sustainable 'promise' programs for students who live in their cities and towns. Based on results, a variety of Governors and state officials are crafting legislative proposals to make a college education more affordable for students to acquire the knowledge and skills they need for in-demand jobs. Some College Promise programs use public funds, others use private dollars, and many use a combination of both. The number of new programs is increasing month by month, community by community, and state by state.

Legislation for statewide programs is now being considered in Rhode Island, Arkansas, Hawaii, Kentucky, California, and Texas. Initiatives to launch programs in these states that build on the creation of College Promise programs in Tennessee, Oregon and Minnesota. Furthermore, over the past year and a half, College Promise programs have emerged in cities all across the country - in Boston, Los Angeles, Houston, Wichita, and Detroit, to name just a few. College Promise programs are also growing in rural communities In locations like Racine, WI, Barstow, CA, and Vance County, NC.

As momentum for free community college builds, leaders in states, cities, and towns now have many examples of College Promise designs and sustainable funding proposals to consider as they develop their own programs. While local and state leaders address the formidable challenges of making college more affordable, they can now draw inspiration from College Promise programs with results to share from the evidence they have collected.

A few prominent examples of statewide programs include:

### **Tennessee:**

In his State of the State address this January, Governor Bill Haslam (R-TN) announced his intention to extend the nationally renowned Tennessee Promise to state residents of any age. Currently, the performance-based scholarship, mentoring and community service program, launched in 2014, is available to recent high school graduates. Early results from the program demonstrate it is reaching a larger percentage of students who previously would not have entered college; 60 percent of Tennessee Promise recipients are the first in their family to attend college and 70% come from low-income families. To finance the Promise, Tennessee uses a combination of funds from state lottery revenues, foundations, and businesses. This "last dollar scholarship" covers tuition and fees after other sources of federal and state assistance have been awarded. Governor Haslam is now proposing to extend the Tennessee Promise to adults in the state.



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### **Arkansas:**

Governor Asa Hutchinson (R-AR) recently proposed the ArFuture Grant, combining free community college or technical education for in-demand careers and mentoring to guide students toward completing their certificates and degrees. These grants would be funded by repurposing \$8.2 million in general revenue funds. The program would require students to meet with program mentors to increase the likelihood of college and workforce success.

### **New York:**

In January, Governor Andrew Cuomo (D-NY) proposed the “Excelsior Scholarship,” which would be available to college students with family incomes of less than \$125,000 following their acceptance to any CUNY or SUNY campus. The proposal has now passed the state’s legislature. Nearly a million families will qualify for the scholarship, to be rolled out this coming fall with full implementation in 2019.

### **Hawaii:**

The state Legislature is considering a free community college program that would fund tuition, fees, books, supplies, and transportation for students with financial need to attend any community college within the University of Hawaii system. Proponents of the bill want to enable community college students to start and complete their education without having to take out excessive loans. The “last dollar” scholarship would cover any fees not met by other forms of institutional, state or federal financial aid or private grants.

### **Rhode Island:**

Governor Gina Raimondo (D-RI) has proposed the Rhode Island Promise, which would allow her state’s high school graduates to receive two years of free college tuition at the state’s public colleges and universities: Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. RI Promise funds would either be used to cover the first two years at a community college or the last two years at a four-year college or university.

### **California:**

The California Legislature is considering proposals to make the first year of community college free for full-time students. The goal is to open the door for more lower income students to get an education beyond high school and to provide funds for state Cal Grant recipients to cover living expenses and other college costs. These proposals have evolved during a year of dramatic growth in local College Promise programs at community colleges and state universities throughout California. The California legislature already passed and the State Chancellor awarded 14 regional College Promise Innovation Grants for community colleges to partner with K-12 and the California State Universities. Free community college programs have emerged in cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, Oakland, and San Francisco. Promise programs are also spreading in rural and suburban communities, including Barstow, San Luis Obispo, Siskiyou, and San Marcos.”



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At the local level, leaders throughout the country are implementing innovative plans to make community college tuition free. Here are a few local examples:

### **Long Beach Promise, Long Beach, CA**

Since 2008, the **Long Beach College Promise** has offered the opportunity of a college education to every student in the Long Beach Unified School District. Using an innovative approach, the program creates a culture of college-going expectations by providing academic support and guidance for students from the moment they begin elementary school. Once they complete high school, any student from the district is eligible to receive one year of free tuition at Long Beach City College and, for those who meet the eligibility requirements, guaranteed admission to California State University at Long Beach. The program is a collaborative effort between the City of Long Beach, the Long Beach Unified School District, and Long Beach City College. A decade ago, this coalition formed the Long Beach College Promise as a way to combat low high school graduation rates in the diverse Long Beach community, to address its high rates of poverty and large numbers of first-generation students.

### **Wabash County Promise, Wabash, IN**

The Wabash County Promise in Wabash, Indiana is a county-wide program designed to help students and families save money for post-secondary education and to help them realize that an affordable college education is within reach. With financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Community Foundation of Wabash County administers the early distribution scholarship program, which targets students in the 4th, 6th and 8th grade. The program uses children's savings accounts as an incentive for students and families to save and plan for college and to promote a college-going identity aspiring to academic success in high school and beyond. Students receive eligibility for Promise scholarships in three ways: by reaching academic benchmarks, by undertaking college readiness activities, and by working with their families to meet college savings goals that are matched by philanthropic and business partners. This program represents a unique College Promise model for communities to consider; one that shows how foundations, businesses, education and nonprofit partners can leverage children's savings accounts for college.

### **Gateway Technical College Promise, Kenosha, WI**

Starting in Fall of 2017, Wisconsin's Gateway Technical College will provide free community college tuition to eligible graduating high school seniors in Kenosha, Racine and Walworth Counties. The program is targeted to serve low income students who finish high school on time and meet certain academic requirements. To qualify for funds, students must first apply for other federal and state aid and must enroll full-time. The innovative program is designed to ensure that students complete their course of study and work toward building careers in high-demand fields. Therefore, students must participate in a summer bridge program before their first semester and attend academic success, career planning, and job readiness workshops while they are in school. In addition, students are required to fulfill community service requirements. To finance the Promise, the community established



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the Gateway Promise Fund which received a tremendous amount of privately financed support, including substantial contributions from philanthropists S.C. Johnson and H. Fisk Johnson.

### **Vance Guarantee Promise, Henderson, NC**

Starting in fall of 2016, Van Guarantee, the 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 financial 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 throughout their course of study. Many older residents are taking advantage of the program to retrain for careers in new and evolving industries. The Van Guarantee is financed through a \$1.6 million bequest to the college from the estate of Wilbert A. Edwards. The gift, announced in 2015, is the second largest in the history of the college.

### **Florida State College at Jacksonville Promise, Jacksonville FL**

This fall, students in Florida's Nassau and Duval counties will benefit 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 will cover tuition, fees, and books for recent high school graduates who finish high school with at least a 2.0 GPA. The new FSCJ Promise closes the gap that traditional financial aid does not cover, enabling these hard-working students to take advantage of a free two-year community college education without assuming burdensome college debt.

For a comprehensive database of existing College Promise programs, proposals and legislation, please visit [www.ahead-penn.org](http://www.ahead-penn.org). You may also contact the College Promise Campaign, which tracks these programs nationwide at [CollegePromise@civcnation.org](mailto:CollegePromise@civcnation.org).

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#### **About CPC:**

The College Promise Campaign (CPC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit higher education initiative that builds widespread support for funding the first two years of a community college education for all hardworking students. Chaired by Dr. Jill Biden and Wyoming's former Governor Jim Geringer (R-WY), the Campaign works to build broad public support that a community college education is an investment in America's future and a necessary continuation of K-12 education. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a high school diploma is no longer enough to lead Americans to a good job and decent quality of life. CPC is an initiative of Civic Nation, a 501(c)(3) organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes. Learn more about the College Promise and the Campaign at [College Promise.org](http://College Promise.org). Join the movement at [HeadsUpAmerica.us](http://HeadsUpAmerica.us).