



Responding to COVID-19

There is no playbook for how to best respond to a global pandemic, and while it is challenging to predict the full impact that COVID-19 will have on our students and our state, I wanted to update you on how the Campaign for College Opportunity is pivoting and adjusting our work to ensure student equity remains front and center. As one of the state's leading racial equity advocates in higher education, we want to ensure vulnerable students do not fall off their college pathways and we need to make sure state leaders understand that investing in higher education is critical, especially in times of crisis.

We still do not know when this pandemic will end or how severe the economic fall-out might be, but history has shown that during a recession, enrollment demand at colleges and universities skyrockets, just as the need for financial aid increases. Our community colleges and public universities also produce the health workforce that is essential in responding to this pandemic. We also know that those who weather the storm best are college graduates.

The Campaign continues to work tirelessly towards efforts that ensure greater racial equity in higher education by pressing education leaders to close the gaps in college preparation, access, and success for all students. If anyone doubted the inequality of opportunity that exists in our nation, this pandemic has spotlighted it. For many students, especially low-income, first generation, and students of color, the abrupt move to online distance learning is impossible without access to basic technology, educational software and broadband internet service. This crisis makes it clear that **all students in the 21st Century must have access to a laptop and broadband internet.**

Lack of food and housing insecurity are other serious concerns as students are forced to move off campus, and find themselves isolated from tutoring, counseling, and other valuable resources they would otherwise have access to. Losing on-campus employment and work-study opportunities has dire ramifications for students, many of whom are part of families that are impacted by the largest disruption our economy has faced.

Therefore, our work and advocacy are more important than ever. As California faces a likely recession, we will be needed to **champion higher education funding and protect financial aid** for our students. We will continue to identify policies and practices that **remove systemic barriers** to college access and completion for California students and provide supports in this environment. We will be ready to leverage the opportunity for significant change and reform that would not be possible under normal circumstances. And while we applaud colleges and universities for rapidly moving to online instruction, **we will ensure they are offering quality online courses, quality support services, and have a keen understanding of new barriers students are facing such as financial stress, technology access, and less than ideal learning environments.**

We will also highlight **the needs of future college students** so that they can enroll in their college of choice come Fall 2020 and 2021. The move to online learning has left many high school seniors with great uncertainty on course grading, without access to counselors to guide them in deciphering and comparing financial aid packages and ultimately deciding which college or university to attend. Rising seniors will not be able to take the SAT or ACT, the standardized tests required for admission to many universities, so we are thrilled that the University of California has announced the suspension of SAT/ACT requirements for Fall 2021 admissions, a decision recently joined by the California State University which we urged and strongly approve of.

For the past few weeks, we have talked directly to students, college presidents, trustees, system leaders, and close partners in our work to better understand the challenges facing both students and colleges. We have hosted conversations to elevate student leaders and galvanized our coalition partners in support of undocumented students. We have hosted briefings for our regional and statewide college access partners on the changing landscape of higher education admission and graduation requirements. These efforts are being shared with the media, policy staff, interested funders and will inform our priorities moving forward. We are also in close contact with policymakers to relay these real time conversations and encourage the state level dialogue necessary to address the void in intersegmental coordination and collaboration.

So far, higher education leaders have elevated immediate needs such as access to Wi-Fi and technology for all students, scaling online learning, professional development and support for faculty, and ensuring access to increased financial aid and emergency grants to help address food and housing for California's most vulnerable students. Longer term concerns on the possible decline in student enrollment, ability to offer strong student services, and the possibility of serious state budget cuts, will require a systemic response and underscore the need for a central higher education coordinating body or agency to ensure alignment from K-12 to college.

We are fortunate to live in a state with one of the best community college and public university systems in the entire world. As the nation's number one driver of economic growth, California has a duty to fortify college opportunity to ensure our residents, the state, and the country continue to innovate and thrive, especially in times of crisis.

On a more personal note, I hope that you and your families are healthy and safe and adjusting to this new way of life caused by COVID-19. We are incredibly lucky to have the technology and resources to continue to work on behalf of California's students during these unprecedented times. Thank you for your support of our work, we need it now more than ever. We cannot champion higher education and protect college opportunity without you! Please let me know if you have any questions and/or want to connect to discuss this update further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michele Siqueiros". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michele" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Siqueiros".

Michele Siqueiros
President



During this pandemic we will continue to identify challenges facing our students and our campuses. Below is a listing of key priorities that we will continue to urge policymakers and college leaders to focus on:

INVEST IN STUDENTS EMERGENCY AND BASIC NEEDS

- Invest in emergency grant aid and coordinate with social service providers to address basic needs such as food, transportation, housing, and health care;
- Allow students with extenuating circumstances to access campus food pantries and housing to the greatest extent possible; and,
- Target additional aid for our lowest income students, undocumented students, and formerly incarcerated students.

ENSURE STUDENTS CAN LEARN AND SUCCEED

- Ensure students have access to basic technology such as broadband internet and a laptop to participate in online learning;
- Regularly monitor quality and effectiveness of online instruction, student success outcomes by race/ethnicity, and develop appropriate interventions;
- Invest in moving supplemental supports such as tutoring services and mental health counseling online so that students can continue to connect with essential resources outside of their courses;
- Communicate frequently with students and families, keeping them informed of instructional changes and supports while collecting feedback on their experiences and challenges;
- Provide flexible options for students to meet financial obligations including tuition/fees, deposits, loan repayment, fines, etc.;
- Offer a single platform for delivering online learning so that students do not have to use multiple services; and,
- Invest in equity-minded professional development for faculty to ensure they are delivering high quality online coursework.

GUARD COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY FOR FUTURE STUDENTS

- Hold the line on financial aid for our neediest students as the Governor shifts budgetary allocations to address the impact of COVID-19;
- Maintain and strengthen transfer pathways for students transitioning to four-year universities;
- Extend the Statement of Intent to Register deadline for all California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campuses to June 1st so students have more time and support to make informed decisions amidst this global pandemic;
- Applaud the UC and CSU action to employ a standardized test-optional policy for the Fall 2021 freshman application cycle given limited testing opportunities for students; and,
- Prepare to reevaluate financial aid awards and eligibility given the rapid loss of income that students and their families may be experiencing.

SUPPORT OUR PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Press for state budget investments to increase enrollment funding to serve more California students in order to meet growing demand;
- Advocate for greater investments in federal aid for colleges and universities to support the additional costs campuses have had to absorb as a result of this pandemic;
- Ensure that financial aid remains available to low-income students whose education was disrupted by the pandemic by providing flexibility in the implementation of eligibility criteria;
- Call on the federal government to support states seeking to maintain their budgetary commitments to higher education and students;
- Extend federal subsidy programs for broadband access to postsecondary education to help bridge the digital divide and make distance learning feasible for low-income students.

Visit Us at www.collegecampaign.org | Email Us at info@collegecampaign.org

Los Angeles Office: 1149 S. Hill St. Ste. 925 Los Angeles, CA 90015 | P: (213) 744-9434 | F: (877) 207-3560