



California Policy Agenda

California has made significant investments in public higher education over the past decade, but challenges still keep students from obtaining degrees, pushing the state further from its goal of educating 1.1 million more college graduates by 2030 to meet its workforce needs. Informed by the experiences of the high school and college students in our advising programs, uAspire recommends the following actions that California can take to remove financial barriers and invest in the postsecondary success of BIPOC, first-generation, and low-income students.

Ensure all students submit a financial aid application

California students leave over \$550 million in aid on the table every year by not filling out financial aid applications. uAspire is facilitating a coalition to implement the historic effort of requiring school districts to ensure all graduating high school students fill out the FAFSA or the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) unless opted out.

Reform Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies

Federal law requires students to maintain a GPA and credit accumulation standard to receive financial aid, but how colleges implement this creates barriers for students. Nearly 1 in 4 California community college Pell Grant recipients do not make SAP their first year, of whom just 13 percent continue to receive aid and stay enrolled. Colleges must standardize the implementation of SAP to be more student-centered and better communicate SAP policies to students.

Increase access to basic needs resources and benefits

Basic needs programs and benefits such as CalFresh and CalWORKS play a critical role in helping first-gen and low-income students achieve their educational goals, but earning a scholarship can reduce these benefits and unfair tax students. Exempting scholarships, grants, emergency aid, or awards from counting as income for students will help students maintain their maximum eligible benefits and basic needs resources and focus their attention on excelling in their academic track.

Expand Cal Grant to asylum seekers

Currently, more than 129,000 immigrants await asylum in California, with an average of over 4.5 years for cases to be heard in court. Extending the Cal Grant to asylum seekers, who would have otherwise qualified but for their immigration status allows them to afford and pursue higher education and afford college while awaiting their cases.