



**For Immediate Release**

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**As President Bush Begins Second Term, Educational and Economic Opportunity Closely Tied to Future of America's Community Colleges**

*-- Community College Research Center Looks to Strengthened Federal Role in Promoting Success for all Students at Community Colleges --*

New York, NY – While on the campaign trail, President Bush delivered stump speeches from the campuses of community colleges, reinforcing the key role that these vital institutions play in providing educational and economic opportunity for all. Now that Bush is preparing policy for a second term, many are asking how the federal government can support community colleges to deliver these opportunities.

“With federal legislation in limbo that would directly impact student financial aid, grants for low-income students and workforce training programs, we see a crucial role for the Bush Administration,” said CCRC director Thomas Bailey.

**Pell Grants**

Students from low-income households are still much less likely to enroll in college, and when they do, are much less likely to finish, than students from higher income families. For low-income students to pursue higher education successfully, Pell grants need to be expanded to meet tremendous demand. The buying power of Pell grants, which are aimed at helping low-income students obtain higher education, has declined over a quarter century because they have not kept pace with the rising costs of college tuition. According to a yearly survey by the College Board, community college tuition rose nearly 9 percent in fall 2004 over the previous year. Even though President Bush promised \$33 million to increase Pell grants for college tuition, much more needs to be invested in this program as it faces a budget shortfall.

**Workforce Investment Act (WIA)**

WIA offers workforce development activities in local communities to promote and increase employment and strengthen the quality of the workforce. In 2003, the Bush administration eliminated more than \$160 million from the program and changed the funding formula to reduce the aid given to local centers that help laid-off, unemployed workers at a time when workers needed them most. CCRC encourages the federal government to reinstate funding for this program. Additionally, CCRC recommends that more emphasis is placed upon degree completion efforts, as opposed to short-term training in the WIA systems. WIA regulations and accountability measures discourage community colleges from serving low-income and educationally at-risk students. Policy should be changed to create incentives for colleges to serve these populations.

### **TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)**

Designed to help move welfare recipients into jobs and assist needy families so that children can be cared for at home, TANF requires that participants become active members of the workforce. While most states support linking access to education and TANF, CCRC calls on the government to allow higher education courses to fulfill the work requirement. Research shows the economic value of education leading to degree completion. Short-term training is much less likely to pay off, leading, at best, to very low paying jobs. For TANF to be truly effective in assisting low-income workers find employment that can sustain a family, it must help clients gain access to mainstream credit college programs that lead to credentials and degrees that have value in the labor market.

### **Educational pipeline**

CCRC sees a critical need to connect diverse institutions with the country's neediest students in order to provide improved support for those who face multiple barriers to educational success. The diversity of our educational system offers varied opportunities, but such students often have trouble making transitions between institutions and programs—between high school and college; between non-credit training programs such as Adult Basic Education, ESL, or developmental education and credit programs; and between community college and four-year college.

The Department of Education has already increased its emphasis on linking high schools and community colleges, and the President has promised \$125 million to assist low-income students taking college courses while still in high school. Work to test, improve, and spread this model should continue. Counseling and student support services, are crucial to help community college students succeed and progress. The Student Support Services TRIO program is a promising model but can only reach a fraction of the students who need it. Transfer from community college to four-year college remains difficult. The federal government should provide incentives and encouragement to states to strengthen this transition.

“As independent researchers with deep experience in higher education policy and labor economics, we see a unique role for the federal government to create an educational pipeline that can bridge the gaps that limit both student success and economic opportunity,” added Bailey.

For more information on CCRC, please visit [www.tc.columbia.edu/ccrc](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/ccrc). To schedule interviews, please contact Ivette Zamora at 914-833-7093 or [izamora@douglasgould.com](mailto:izamora@douglasgould.com).

*The Community College Research Center, housed at the Institute on Education and the Economy (IEE) at Teachers College, Columbia University, is the leading independent authority on the nation's more than 1,200 two-year schools. Since our inception in 1996, CCRC's consortium of independent researchers strategically assesses the problems and performances of community colleges. Our mission is to conduct research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States and to contribute to the development of practice and policy that expands access to higher education and ensures success for all students.*