

You Can Afford College

By: Assemblymember Jose Medina; Chair, Assembly Committee on Higher Education

There is help for you today to make your college dreams come true.

Study after study has shown that the biggest factor for securing and keeping a well-paying job is education. The California Community Colleges, one of the largest systems of higher education in the world, provides millions of Californians annually with the opportunity to earn a college degree or receive job training in the hope that our state's students can realize their fullest potential and secure their futures. In fact, many students who earn a degree or certificate from a California community college nearly double their earnings within three years.

As a state Assembly member, former community college trustee and long-time educator, I've always been a strong supporter of and advocate for California community colleges. I know first-hand how they have helped millions of Californians reach their higher education goals and I've supported additional funding for this critical system.

But affordability is still one of the biggest barriers to those seeking a college education. Because even though the California Community Colleges is the most affordable system of higher education in the nation – at \$46/unit – for some that's still out of reach, and simply not affordable.

That's the reality. But there is another side to this coin – in fact, there is very good news for all those looking to enroll in a community college: financial help is available, right now, for many, many students.

Resources like the California Community Colleges "I Can Afford College" website (www.icanaffordcollege.com) – available in English and Spanish – provides a one-stop shop for all financial aid needs – and can connect students year-round with local professionals to help them get the maximum amount of aid for which they are eligible.

And, there's more good news. Financial aid doesn't just cover enrollment fees. In many instances it can also be used for books, supplies, and help with the rent! Everyone who needs help should apply for the wide variety of financial aid opportunities that are available – the application itself is free, so students should apply whether they think they will qualify or not.

Recent facts speak for themselves. Right now, more than 1.7 million students, at the 112 community college campuses throughout the state, are getting more than \$2.7 billion annually in financial aid to help cover the costs of their education.

During the last 10 years, the number of community college students receiving some type of financial aid has increased by nearly 70 percent. Not only does that mean there is a great need for financial aid, but it also means that more and more students are learning about the assistance available and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

So what are you waiting for?

Community colleges not only offer an affordable way to complete an associate degree or career training certificate but they also provide students with general education courses that allow them to transfer to a four-year university. And, short-term job training programs are available that give Californians the skills needed for in-demand career paths. In fact, community colleges train 80 percent of the state's firefighters, law enforcement personnel, and emergency medical technicians and 70 percent of the state's nurses – making the California Community Colleges system the nation's largest provider of workforce training.

Your future is attainable with the help of financial aid.

You CAN afford college. Visit the "I Can Afford College" website today. See if you qualify. Let our public higher education system prepare you for the jobs of today – and tomorrow – with financial aid to get there. You'll never be sorry you took that first step.

Assemblymember Medina proudly represents California's 61st Assembly District, which consists of Riverside, Moreno Valley, and Perris.