

American Graduation Initiative

President Obama's Community College Initiative

On **July 14, 2009**, President Obama announced that he was initiating a **10 year, \$12 Billion** plan to invest in community colleges. He stated that **“jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience”** in coming years.

He also announced a goal of **5 million additional community college graduates by 2020**.

Prior to this initiative, the U.S. Department of Education announced a **new grant competition to retrain displaced workers** program on June 3, 2009. This program provides **\$7 million to establish innovative and sustainable community college programs**.

The highlights of the American Graduation Initiative are as follows:

1. **Community College challenge grants, to help underfunded colleges that are dealing with limited capacity and to build partnerships with schools and businesses.**

This is patterned after the U.S. Department's *Race to the Top* initiative. It will reward tested initiatives that produce results. The range is anything from business partnerships to child care services. The White House announced some areas of interest such as:

- a. **Business partnerships that allow community colleges to coordinate with employers to determine what students need to know for jobs**
- b. **Develop internships or other job placement options**
- c. **Career pathway programs that allow workers to earn interim credentials and step-by-step go back and earn additional credentials and degrees and get promotions at work for doing so**
- d. **The relationship between high schools and other colleges to make sure graduation requirements at one level are aligned with entry requirements at the next**
- e. **Ensure that academic credit transfers seamlessly among higher education institutions**
- f. **Create opportunities where students can get credit at both high school and community college or at both a community college and a university.**

*Please note the articulation and dual enrollment possibilities

2. **The Access and Completion Fund, to provide performance-based scholarships and give colleges the tools to design more programs around work schedules.**

This has been in the works for a while according to the White House. It is like the above grant but focuses on promising ideas that lead to higher completion rates. There are two prongs to this portion of the initiative:

- a. Test the promising ideas and reward those that show results; and
- b. Help states develop data systems to track student progress, graduation rates, and employment outcomes in a way that brings light to what works.

The Challenge Fund and Completion Funds (1 and 2 here) would cost \$9 Billion over 10 years.

3. **Modernization of community college facilities, with \$2.5 Billion to help renovate facilities and keep up with maintenance costs. The renovations will create jobs.**

The federal government would invest \$2.5 billion in order to spark \$10 billion in funding for renovation and **construction** of community colleges nationwide. The resources can be used to pay interest on bonds or other debt, to seek capital campaigns, or for states to create revolving loan funds.

4. **Open online courses, to create options online as a tool that some think can be more effective than classroom instruction alone.**

It is called the *Online Skills Laboratory*. The proposal would provide seed money to develop 20-25 open, web-based high school and college courses that would be free to students and others who want to use it, modify it, share it. The initial priority is on career-oriented classes. Courses would be available through community colleges and the Department of Defense Advanced Distributed Learning Network. The cost is **\$50 million per year over 10 years.**