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Understanding California's New Promise to Community Colleges

In 2017, Governor Brown signed AB 19 (Santiago), establishing the California College Promise, which provides state funding to community colleges to improve college readiness, increase completion rates, and close achievement gaps. The 2018-19 state budget funded the Promise, allocating \$46 million to the program.

Promise programs are place-based programs that seek to increase college graduation rates by incentivizing college attainment and rewarding students who satisfy specified criteria. These programs vary in eligibility requirements, funding, and overall structure. Some Promise programs offer guaranteed admission to a university, while others provide financial support based on need or merit.

The California College Promise is a voluntary program administered by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. The program provides funding to community colleges that advance the program's goals and implement the following program strategies:

- Partner with one or more K-12 schools to establish an Early Commitment to College Program.
- Partner with one or more K-12 schools to support and improve high school student preparation for college and reduce postsecondary remediation.
- Utilize evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for underprepared students.
- Participate in the Guided Pathways Grant Program, which helps students stay on track from entry to graduation.
- Maximize student access to need-based financial aid programs, including by participating in the Federal Direct Student Loan Program as well as ensuring students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Dream Act application.

The Promise program allocates funding to districts using a formula based on factors such as number of units taken in the past by first-time, full-time students, and number of Pell grant recipients. The \$46 million allocated in the state budget reflects the estimated cost for districts to cover the fees of first-time, full-time students based off 2016-17 data; however, colleges have discretion in how to use the funding they receive. While some colleges may elect to waive tuition for all or some first-time, full-time students (including undocumented students), others may choose to provide child care resources, or help financially needy students cover their non-tuition costs of college (such as textbooks and transportation).