

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY  
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC  
APRIL 20-23, 2026**

**PREPARING A HIGHLY EDUCATED AND SKILLED WORKFORCE**

**ISSUE:** The Inland Southern California region (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties), home to 4.5 million residents, continues to face higher-than-average unemployment and historically low college-going rates, creating persistent gaps in the skilled workforce needed to sustain regional economic growth.

**ACTION:** The Monday Morning Group urges Congress to expand access to higher education and workforce training—particularly for low-income and first-generation students—by strengthening Pell Grants and other proven federal programs. Specifically, the Monday Morning Group supports:

- Double the maximum Pell Grant (current maximum award \$7,395, requested maximum award of \$14,790) and index it to inflation to restore purchasing power and ensure affordability for low-income students.
- Maintain year-round Pell Grant eligibility so students can finish credentials faster and with less debt;
- Restore eligibility pathways such as completing six degree-applicable units or passing an Ability-to-Benefit test (eliminated for new students in 2012) to expand access for nontraditional learners;
- Protect in-school interest subsidies on undergraduate student loans as well as the borrowing cap for graduate students, which would put graduate and professional studies (including medical school) out of reach for many low-income students.
- Sustain funding for Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and Federal Work-Study to support students' basic needs and improve retention.

**BACKGROUND:** The Inland Southern California region has the lowest postsecondary attainment among the 25 largest U.S. metro areas, with only 32.8% of adults holding a postsecondary degree.<sup>1</sup> Although the region is the fastest growing in California, a large share of the population will not have the higher education or technical skills required in the coming years. Investments in programs that advance affordable access to 2-year, and 4-year degrees are imperative. Additionally, continued limited state resources means federal programs and resources are vital to the economies of the state and nation.

Inland Southern California needs to increase the number of people obtaining degrees and certificates (career and technical education) to match the needs of the job growth sectors for our region. According to the California Community Colleges, in FY 2018-19, California's Community Colleges added \$128.2 billion in income to the California economy, a value equal to 4.2% of the state's total gross state product. Expressed in terms of jobs, California's Community Colleges' impact supported 1.5 million jobs.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are only further enhanced when applied to four-year institutions.

The specific programs of interest include doubling Pell Grants and maintaining year-round Pell Grants, supporting Gear Up, TRIO, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, as well as workforce development funding such as the Department of Labor's Community College and Career Training Grants Program. Many students at regional colleges and universities are eligible for Pell Grants. Without these grants, or with a reduced Pell Grant amount, many students, the majority of whom are first-generation college attendees, will no longer have access to education and training.

Pell Grants are the federal government's main tool for helping low-income students afford college. In 1980, Pell Grants covered more than 75% of the cost to attend a 4-year public university. Today the maximum award is just 28%. The financial instability brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the eroding value of Pell Grants even more problematic for millions of college students and their families. This means that many students are taking on more debt to attend college during already-challenging financial times.

Doubling the maximum Pell Grant award and indexing it to inflation ensures that all students who wish to attend higher education can afford to do so and protects the Pell Grant from inflationary pressures that have eroded the grant's purchasing power over time. This increase would contribute to students' overall aid packages and will help sustain students' basic needs, including housing and food security, health care and access to childcare and promote on-time graduation among the most vulnerable student population.

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<sup>1</sup> Lumina Foundation. (2025). *A Strong Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American Talent*, p. 5. Retrieved from [Higher Education attainment data | Stronger Nation](#)

<sup>2</sup> California Community Colleges. (2022). *The Economic Value of the California Community College System*, p. 4. Retrieved from [The Economic Value of the California Community College System](#)

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Regional colleges enroll tens of thousands of Pell-eligible students, demonstrating the program’s vital role in expanding opportunity across Inland Southern California.

**Inland Empire University Students Receiving Pell Grants (For 2024/2025)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b># of Students</b>	<b>% of Students</b>	<b>Total \$ Dollars</b>	<b>Average \$</b>
University of California, Riverside	11,736	48%	\$77,602,176	\$6,612
California State University, San Bernardino	10,812	54%	\$64,713,316	\$5,985
California Baptist University	4,438	45%	\$26,444,480	\$5,959
La Sierra University	624	32%	\$3,582,033	\$5,740
Riverside Community College District	17,326	31%	\$76,105,309	\$4,393
Mt. San Jacinto College	9,485	42%	\$37,388,969	\$3,942
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,421</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>\$285,836,283</b>	<b>\$5,439</b>

These figures illustrate the scale of regional reliance on Pell Grants and underscore the need to strengthen—not diminish—this critical investment in the future workforce.