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CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES GET \$100 MILLION GIFT FOR FINANCIAL AID

Jay Pritzker Foundation's record donation to cover scholarships, emergency assistance for students.

By Melissa Korn
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The family foundation of Hyatt Hotels founder Jay Pritzker has pledged \$100 million to California's community colleges, the largest gift so far in that sector of higher education.

The money, which is to be spent over 20 years, is for scholarships and emergency financial aid for students who are nearing the completion of their programs and need some extra support to get to the finish line.

"People are falling all over themselves to give to the large research universities. And that's great," said Dan Pritzker, president of the Jay Pritzker Foundation. "But we chose to do this to try and have impact and try to shine a light on community colleges and the huge opportunity that students have."

The gift will go to the Foundation for California Community Colleges, the system's nonprofit auxiliary arm, and then be disbursed to individual campuses around the state. California has the nation's largest community-college system, serving 2.1 million students at 116 colleges and providing a pipeline to the University of California and California State University systems.

Enrollment in the state's community colleges is about triple the combined enrollment at UC and Cal State.

The foundation will start with grants to 34 community colleges in three parts of the state that have low rates of college graduates, awarding as much as \$150,000 a campus during the first year. The first round of funds is being readied for distribution in coming weeks and can be put toward financial needs related to the coronavirus pandemic, including aid that helps students cover the cost of food, gasoline and child care so they can remain on track to graduate or transfer to universities.

Tuition at the state's community colleges runs \$46 a credit, or \$552 for a 12-credit semester, for California residents. But nontuition expenses such as books, supplies and parking, as well as food and housing, raise the cost of attending community college significantly. Recipients can receive scholarships of as much as \$18,500 under the new program.

Individual colleges will set eligibility guidelines, but recipients must be at least halfway toward finishing their certificate, degree or transfer requirements, take a full-time course load and already receive a California College Promise Grant, which covers enrollment fees. Some also might need to meet grade-point-average and other academic requirements.

"This historic gift changes the landscape for community-college philanthropy," said Geoff Green, president of the Network of California Community College Foundations and chief executive of Santa Barbara City College Foundation.

He said the gift could "serve as a signal to donors across the country that community colleges are perhaps the best tools we have for increasing social and economic mobility, addressing economic barriers to higher education, and tackling equity issues in our communities."