



February 24, 2022

**TO:** THE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF VALENCIA COLLEGE

**FROM:** DR. KATHLEEN PLINSKE  
President

**RE:** DISBURSEMENT OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID GRANTS UNDER THE HIGHER EDUCATION EMERGENCY RELIEF FUNDS (HEERF III) AUTHORIZED BY THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARP); SPRING 2022

On March 11, 2021, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP). Under ARP and through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF III), the United States Department of Education (ED) made available \$39.6 billion to distribute to institutions of higher education to ensure learning continues for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Valencia College will receive a total of \$102,448,723 in ARP/HEERF III funds from ED. Of this amount, at least \$52,935,148 must be used for student aid.

ARP differs from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) relative to the student aid portion. Unlike the guidance issued with the CARES Act and CRRSAA, which outlined a number of characteristics that would make a student ineligible for a financial aid grant under the respective programs, the May 11, 2021 HEERF III Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document from ED clarifies that all students who are or were enrolled in an institution of higher education during the COVID-19 national emergency are eligible for emergency financial aid grants from HEERF.

Similar to CRRSAA/HEERF II, HEERF III *requires* that institutions prioritize students with exceptional need in awarding financial aid grants. ED encourages institutions to carefully document how they prioritize students with exceptional need in distributing student grants because the Department intends to establish reporting requirements regarding the distribution of aid. Valencia plans to classify students who have completed a 2021-22 FAFSA and have an estimated family contribution (EFC) of zero as having exceptional need. EFC is an index number used to calculate how much financial aid students are eligible to receive; an EFC of zero reflects maximum aid eligibility. In addition, ED encourages prioritizing domestic students in allocating this funding, and Valencia will.

On or about April 4, 2022, Valencia will identify students potentially eligible to receive a HEERF III financial aid grant as those who are 1) degree- or certificate-seeking and enrolled in at least one course in Spring 2022; 2) enrolled in an Accelerated Skills Training program between January 10-April 1, 2022; or 3) enrolled in a continuing education English language program (Intensive English or English for Speakers of Other Languages) between January 10-April 1, 2022.

Shortly after April 4, 2022, the College will send an email to all HEERF III aid-eligible students with information about how to access the HEERF III aid application. The application will be available only to students eligible to receive HEERF III aid and will be visible to students only after they have logged in to Atlas (Valencia's student information portal). The HEERF III aid application will ask students to confirm that they have financial need related to the cost of attendance or emergency costs related to COVID-19 (such as tuition, food, housing, health care [including mental health], or childcare). Applications will be due by April 19. Expected grant awards for eligible students who complete the HEERF III aid application are as follows:

- Degree- or certificate-seeking students with exceptional need: \$2,000
- All other eligible degree- or certificate-seeking students: \$1,250
- Students enrolled in an Accelerated Skills Training program: \$750
- Students enrolled in a continuing education English language program: \$500

In designing the disbursement plan and in actually distributing these funds, Valencia will continue to follow the requirements of HEERF III as well as the requirements, instructions, and guidance provided by ED. The College's plan as presented has been drafted in consultation with outside counsel expert in federal funding matters such as presented here. The consulting attorneys will provide Valencia with a formal written legal opinion expressing their agreement that the College's plan is compliant with the requirements of the law and related official guidance.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The President recommends that the District Board of Trustees of Valencia College authorize the College to disburse HEERF III student financial aid funds for the Spring 2022 semester in accordance with the plan as presented, and that the Board further authorize the College to adjust the disbursement plan in a compliant manner as necessary or appropriate in the event new official guidance is issued with respect to HEERF III disbursements, and/or to maximize the efficient and effective disbursement of these funds to students in compliance with the applicable requirements.



President