

IHEP Priorities for Higher Education Act Reauthorization

At the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), we believe all people, regardless of background or circumstance, can reach their full potential by participating and succeeding in higher education. But too many hardworking students still struggle to gain access to and pay for a college education. This is especially true for low-income students and students of color. The next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) must maintain a laser focus on equity, narrowing longstanding disparities in college access, success and affordability for underserved students. We urge federal policymakers to include these equity-driven priorities in the next reauthorization.

1

Use high-quality data to improve student outcomes and promote equity



Our existing federal postsecondary data infrastructure is duplicative, inefficient, and doesn't capture the diversity of today's students. It fails to count all students and answer critical questions about college enrollment, completion, costs and outcomes. Without answers to these questions, students can't make fully-informed college decisions, lawmakers can't develop responsive policies aimed at improving student success or advancing educational equity, and inequities facing students of color and low-income students remain hidden. We urge policymakers to pursue solutions that promote transparency, remove existing regulatory barriers, reduce institutional burden and provide better data to inform decisions.

- ▶ Create a secure, privacy-protected student-level data network to inform students, families, policymakers, and institutions and help them make evidence-based decisions, by including the College Transparency Act in HEA.
- ▶ Increase transparency for students through a standard financial aid award letter, such as the one proposed in the Understanding the True Cost of College Act. A standard letter should clearly communicate aid packages, including providing total cost of attendance and comparable calculations of what students will owe, using consistent terminology that makes explicit distinctions between grants, loans to students, parent loans, and work-study.

2

Strengthen need-based financial aid



The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of federal student aid and provides essential assistance to students with financial need. We urge policymakers to help more low- and moderate-income students afford a college education by restoring the purchasing power of the Pell Grant through investment in vitally important need-based aid. Creating equitable college opportunities requires solid investments in the students who have the fewest financial resources.

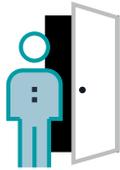
- ▶ Significantly increase the maximum Pell Grant award amount to reverse its declining purchasing power, permanently index the grant to inflation to prevent future decline, and make the program funding mandatory, not discretionary, to reduce annual uncertainty.

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- ▶ Protect funding for need-based aid programs, including the Pell Grant, the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and federal loan subsidies, to help more students afford college and incur less student loan debt.
- ▶ Allow a negative expected family contribution (EFC), which would reflect the substantial financial need of the lowest income students and target need-based aid toward them.
- ▶ Raise the income threshold for an automatic-zero EFC, to \$35,000 and index it to inflation, to simplify the aid process for low- and moderate-income students.

3

Allow justice-involved students to access federal financial aid



Barriers to college access for students—like the 1994 ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals—reinforce cycles of poverty and mass-incarceration that disproportionately impact communities of color while costing the nation more in the long term. When incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students participate in postsecondary education, they are less likely to recidivate, and they reenter society better-equipped to secure employment and provide for themselves and their families.

We urge policymakers to improve college access and affordability for justice-involved students seeking to reach their full potential.

- ▶ Lift the ban on the use of Pell Grants by individuals who are incarcerated in federal and state penal institutions to enroll in high-quality higher education programs.
- ▶ Eliminate consideration of drug offenses for federal student aid eligibility, leading to the removal of Question 23 on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which asks applicants about drug convictions for an offense that occurred while receiving federal student aid.

4

Foster increased college access and degree completion for all students, especially underrepresented students and students who stop-out



To close equity gaps for underrepresented students—especially students of color, low-income students, and adult learners—we urge policymakers to pursue targeted strategies that encourage institutions to expand access, increase graduation rates, and help students who have stopped-out or paused their studies get back on track and complete their degrees.

- ▶ Enable more seamless institution-to-institution reverse credit transfers that award students who pause their studies the credentials they have earned—only after obtaining their full consent—by including the Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act in HEA.
- ▶ Incent colleges and universities to expand access and degree completion for students of color and low-income students, by including proposals such as those offered in the Access, Success, and Persistence in Reshaping Education (ASPIRE) Act in HEA.

To learn more, visit www.ihep.org/hea or contact Mamie Voight at mvoight@ihep.org. Follow us at [@IHEPTweets](https://twitter.com/IHEPTweets).