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IHEP FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is committed to improving college access and success in higher education for all students — with a special focus on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and other historically marginalized populations — by providing timely research to inform public policy decisions.

To ensure everyone can reap the economic and non-economic benefits that higher education can provide, we promote evidenced-based policy reform to eliminate inequities in postsecondary attainment and outcomes for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and underserved Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students and students from low-income backgrounds.

Higher education holds enormous potential to transform individual lives, strengthen our communities, build a more robust workforce, catalyze economic mobility, and address persistent inequities in our society. Realizing opportunity—particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic that has upended our higher education system—will require a deliberate focus on promoting equitable postsecondary value for students regardless of race, income, or background. We urge Congress and the Department of Education to advance these evidence-based, equity-driven federal policy priorities.



DATA & TRANSPARENCY

Our existing federal postsecondary data infrastructure is duplicative, inefficient, and doesn't capture the diverse experiences, pathways, and realities of today's students. It fails to count all students or answer critical questions about college enrollment, completion, costs, outcomes, and equity. To promote strong outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, we urge policymakers to pursue solutions that enhance transparency and provide better data to inform decisions.

- **Create a secure, privacy-protected student-level data network** to inform students, policymakers, and institutions, as proposed by the *College Transparency Act*.
- **Empower student choices by improving the utility and clarity of consumer-facing tools**, including the College Scorecard, Net Price Calculators, and financial aid award letters.
- **Promote data-informed decision-making throughout our postsecondary system** through disaggregated reporting requirements, thoughtful evaluation processes, and investment in the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant program and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).
- **Strengthen data transparency** by publishing data on the disbursement, use, and impact of Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) dollars; increasing transparency of Federal Student Aid (FSA) data; and continuously improving data collections to better capture the changing experiences and demographics of today's students.



AFFORDABILITY & NEED-BASED AID

Need-based financial aid makes college possible for millions of students, but has failed to keep pace with rising college costs. We urge policymakers to help more students from low- and moderate-income backgrounds afford tuition and non-tuition expenses by strengthening need-based aid and by encouraging stable and sustained financial support for higher education.

- **Restore the purchasing power of the federal Pell Grant by doubling the maximum award amount**, permanently indexing the grant to inflation to prevent future decline, and making the program funding mandatory, not discretionary, to reduce annual uncertainty.
- **Ensure that emergency relief — including aid distributed through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) — is being targeted** toward students most in need of financial support and the institutions that overwhelmingly serve them.
- **Increase funding for important campus-based aid programs**, like the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and Federal Work Study (FWS), to remove financial barriers to success for students from low-income backgrounds.
- **Consider a federal-state partnership approach to building a comprehensive affordability plan** to encourage sustained investment in higher education and reduce unmet financial need, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds.



ACCESS & SUCCESS

Research shows that there are measurable differences across institutions and programs in access, completion, and career, earnings, and life outcomes—especially across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. To tackle these inequities and promote equitable postsecondary value, we urge policymakers to pursue targeted strategies to encourage and support institutions to expand access, increase graduation rates, and strengthen post-college outcomes.

- **Invest in and scale equity-driven, evidence-based programs** that reflect the diversity of the student body and are tailored to eliminate financial and non-financial barriers to postsecondary access, completion, and value for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.
- **Better resource institutions that serve large proportions of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds**, including Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and community colleges, and encourage all institutions to increase college access and strengthen outcomes for these students.
- **Remove key barriers to college access, financial aid eligibility, credit recognition, and degree completion** for returning adult students and transfer students, through solutions like the *Reverse Transfer Efficiency Act*.
- **Provide federal grant funding to encourage institutions and states to conduct and report on an equity audit**, capturing the impact of their policies and practices on access, completion, and post-college outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, through proposals like the *College Equity Act*.



BARRIERS IN JUSTICE & EDUCATION

We strongly believe in the importance of eliminating barriers to college access for students impacted by the justice system and we celebrate the restoration of Pell Grant eligibility for students in prison and elimination of drug-related questions on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021*. We urge policymakers to continue to expand college access for justice-impacted students, including through prompt and equitable access to Pell Grants.

- **Prioritize the implementation of Pell Grant eligibility and robust evaluation of high-quality higher education in prison (HEP) programs**, including those participating in the Second Chance Pell experiment.
- **Encourage institutions to end consideration of criminal justice information in admissions**, as set forth in proposals like the *Beyond the Box for Higher Education Act*.

To learn more about IHEP's federal policy priorities, please contact:

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