

November 23, 2020

Dear President-Elect Biden,

Today's postsecondary students are nothing like the common college trope portrayed in movies and pop culture. For the past decade, adults, parents, veterans, workers, financially independent, first-generation, low-income, and minority students have fundamentally shifted our country's college demographics. They are today's students. And for the better—a more diverse student body holds high potential for a greater American workforce and future.

But never before have these students faced the historic challenges brought before them today. As the COVID-19 pandemic has raged across the country, postsecondary students have suffered unthinkable setbacks. When campuses closed this spring, they lost more than in-person lectures. They lost access to stable housing and food, lost jobs and wages, and eight months later, still face uncertainty about their academic futures. Today's students have shown resilience and openness to change throughout these struggles, but the same cannot be said for the policymakers whose decisions determine their college experiences. The road to change starts with your choice for the next U.S. Secretary of Education and senior-level staff members at the U.S. Department of Education.

Selecting a secretary and other senior officials who will understand key higher education policies and the needs of today's students is essential, particularly at this moment in history. Our country faces an economic downturn, but postsecondary education can and should be a key driver of economic growth and opportunity in our nation. Americans should be able to expect that postsecondary education is accessible, affordable, and equals opportunities in order to turn around the enrollment declines we are currently seeing. We must ensure that financial aid is accessible and understandable, provide the supports that students need in and out of the classroom, and recommit to updating old rules to create a system focused on continuous learning and multiple pathways to and through higher education and the workforce.

Today's college students—including the more than 16 million Americans currently enrolled as undergraduates—are at the center of a higher education system that is supported by an annual \$120 billion expenditure of federal funds. Institutions of higher education, state authorizing agencies, accreditors, and federal regulations make up a dizzying, outdated puzzle, making decisions that affect students' daily lives. Congress has not yet updated the statutes that dictate how our higher education system, which is supported by federal student aid, should exist. The time has come for meaningful policy changes to an updated system so it can truly work for all of today's students.

For these reasons, we ask you to please consider nominating an individual who holds both classroom experience and higher education experience as the next secretary of education and commit to filling senior positions around the secretary with those who also have experience in our higher education system and an understanding of the needs of today's students. Thank you

for your consideration; the organizations represented here stand ready to support you and your incoming administration however possible in the support of today's postsecondary students.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Advocates
Association of Big Ten Students
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Campaign for College Opportunity
Center for First-generation Student Success
College Forward
College to Congress
Cornell University Student Assembly
ED2WORK
Generation Hope
Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
LeadMN - College Students Connecting for Change
Lumina Foundation
Modern Military Association of America
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Skills Coalition
New England Commission of Higher Education
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
Northwestern Health Sciences University
Students United
Swipe Out Hunger
The Graduate! Network Inc
uAspire
UPCEA
Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges
Young Invincibles

Cc: The Biden-Harris Transition Department of Education Agency Review Team