

THE PLAYBOOK FOR TODAY'S STUDENTS



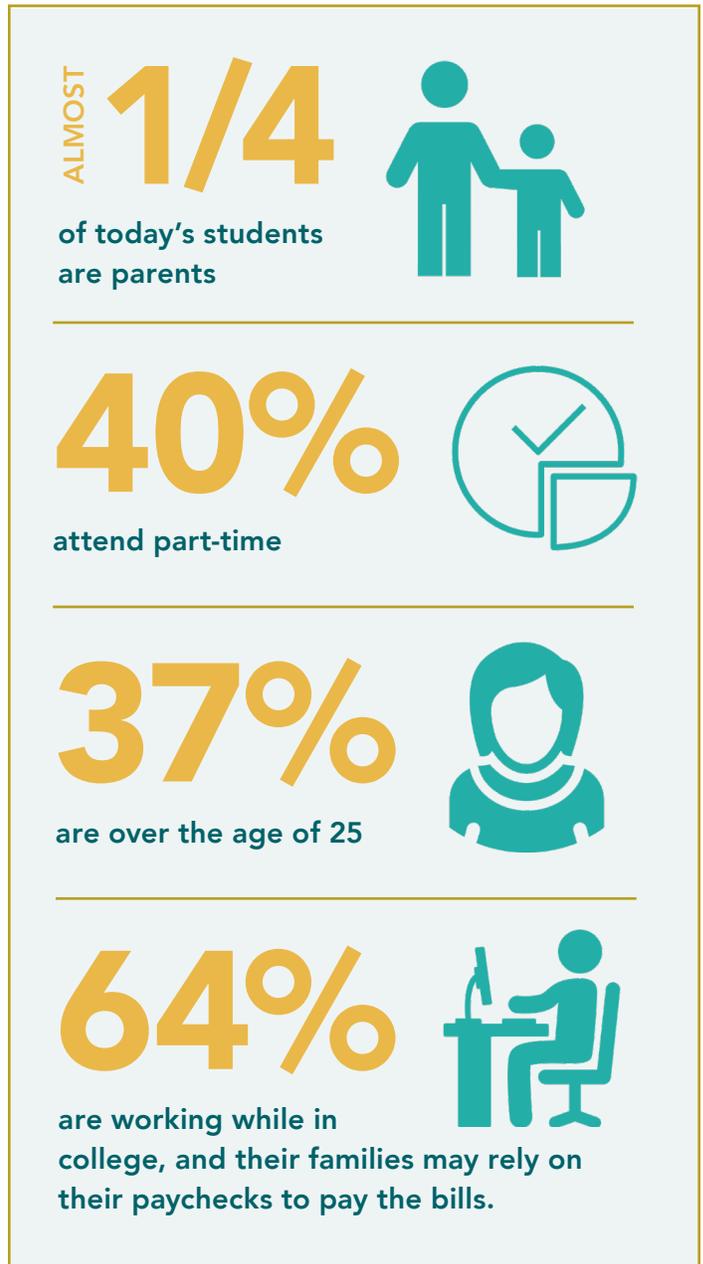
December 2020

Higher learning is the ticket to economic opportunity in America. But we are failing too many of today's students. Fewer than **67 percent of Americans** enter a higher education program, and of those, only **60 percent finish** with a credential.

Higher learning is the foundation for rebuilding our economy—it will allow thousands of Americans to return to work, increase their salaries, and support their families. But today's students face a system that prevents them from returning to school, completing, and reentering the workforce. Beyond the cost of tuition or textbooks, ensuring that all students have affordable access to WiFi and are not facing barriers when connecting to basic needs programs is essential to college success. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges of student parents and working students are even more urgent. Today's students are the drivers of our recovery and growth, and supporting them today will lead to our success tomorrow.

While a large-scale overhaul of higher education policy is sorely needed, today's students do not have the time to wait. Solutions exist, and can be accomplished on a quick timeline. By providing for students' basic needs, supporting student parents, ensuring equitable access to education, connecting higher education and the workforce, and improving accountability, the nation's system of higher learning will work better for students, employers, and the country as a whole.

This document presents existing legislation focused on key topics that the incoming Congress could advance quickly to support students and jumpstart our economy.



SUPPORT STUDENTS' BASIC NEEDS

The majority of today's students work while they are enrolled in higher education, and the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in job loss for hundreds of thousands of Americans. Further, over a half million students relied on now-vanishing on-campus work study jobs to make ends meet. Instead of earning degrees and credentials that lead to economic stability, today's students are stumbling through a postsecondary pipeline riddled with cracks and widening fault lines.

HOW POLICY CAN HELP:

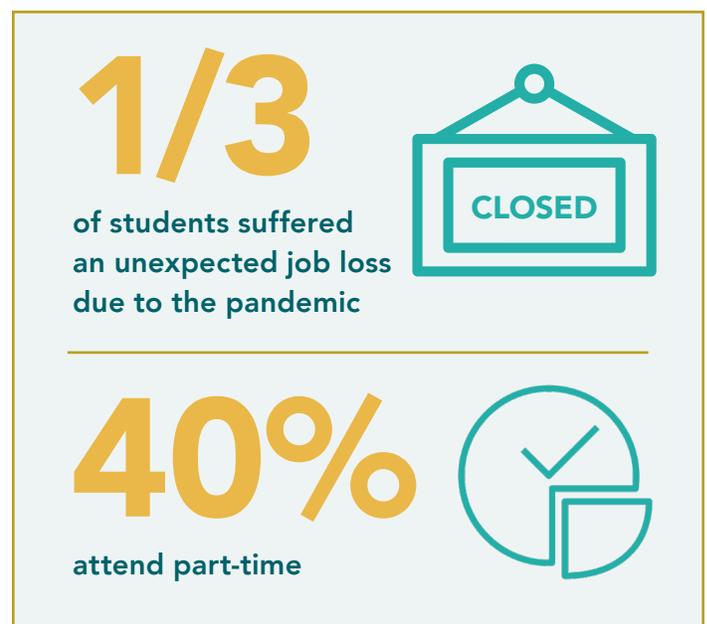
Expand access to emergency aid. The pandemic abruptly cut off today's students' access to the food, housing, and wages their college campuses provided. Without these supports, students may struggle to persist and complete their degree or credential—with potentially dramatic impact to rebuilding the economy. Today's students need access to grants to cover emergency costs of basic needs such as food, housing, transportation, and child care.

- **(S.4465) Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act of 2020.** This act would provide emergency assistance grants to students facing unexpected financial hardships and emergencies.
- **(S.3489) Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act of 2020.** This act would allow the U.S. Department of Education to give grants to institutions of higher education for creating and expanding financial aid to cover student's basic needs during emergencies. The act would also allow the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to waive certain requirements of financial aid when students are affected by qualifying emergencies.

Streamline SNAP benefits for eligible students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity for Americans while simultaneously overwhelming food banks across the country. Even before the pandemic, **a third of students faced food insecurity**. Now, recent reports reveal that up to **38 percent of students may be food insecure**. Many of these students may be eligible for existing support, such as SNAP benefits, but inefficiencies in the system prevent them from accessing the benefits to which they are entitled. Expanding and streamlining SNAP benefits for students enrolled in postsecondary institutions and creating a seamless connection between the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and SNAP will allow more students to access these critical benefits.

- **(H.R.3718/S.2110) Closing the College Hunger Gap Act of 2019.** This act would require ED to collect data on food and housing insecurity for college students, including data on SNAP eligibility.



Provide flexibility through financial aid professional judgement. The pandemic has thrown many students' financial realities into flux. As it did after the 2008 recession, ED should provide institutions with the flexibility to use professional judgement in certain cases to change data items related to a student's income to \$0. ED should also adjust its risk model to account for the increased use of professional judgement during this time.

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SUPPORT STUDENT PARENTS

Almost one in four students today is also a parent. Even before the pandemic, some student parents struggled to cover basic needs like food, transportation, housing, and child care. Now, many face the impossible choice between following through on their commitment to a degree or credential and caring for themselves and their families' immediate needs, all while surviving the pandemic. When student parents are forced to drop out of college to care for their children, it jeopardizes not only their futures but also the nation's economic recovery. The increased income a student parent can expect when they graduate and join the workforce has a multi-generational impact—on both parents and children. In fact, even a small boost in a student parent's income can result in a **17 percent increase in their children's lifetime earnings.**

parents through local child care providers. In addition, the Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) should be amended to allow such partnerships with child care providers as an allowable use of funds. Finally, we must continue to support the Child Care Access Means Parents In Schools (CCAMPIS) program. In order to provide child care support to only two percent of student parents with children ages 0-5 who are eligible for the Pell Grant, CCAMPIS funding would need to reach \$150 million annually.

- **(H.R.4253) Empower Parents in College Act of 2019.** This act would allow for certain grant funds to be used to partner with child care providers in order to provide child care services to student parents.
- **(H.R.2632) CCAMPIS Reauthorization Act of 2019.** This act would reauthorize the CCAMPIS grant program and increase funding to \$200 million annually through 2025.
- **(H.R. 5222) Helping Student Parents Succeed Act of 2019.** The Helping Student Parents Succeed Act would require institutions to develop and publicize a statement of policies for expectant and parenting students. This statement must address policies such as information on financial aid, parental leave, student housing, and student support services.

HOW POLICY CAN HELP:

Expand access to child care providers. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how vital access to child care is, especially for student parents. Earlier this year, on- and off-campus child care centers closed along with P-12 schools, leaving student parents to simultaneously manage the roles of student, caretaker, and homeschool online learning facilitator on their own. Institutions of higher education should be allowed to set aside a portion of funds under the SEOG program to form relationships to provide care for student

ENSURE STUDENTS HAVE CRITICAL RESOURCES FOR THEIR EDUCATION

Higher learning looks very different this year for today's students, with colleges making necessary shifts to online learning to protect the health and safety of students and employees. But this unexpected shift is leaving many students behind—particularly those who do not have the resources necessary to access their education in this new environment. This includes the nearly 162.8 million Americans who don't have broadband internet. We need to make sure that today's students have the resources they need to continue their education online.

HOW POLICY CAN HELP:

Expand broadband connectivity for today's students in college. Sixty-five percent of colleges started the fall semester of 2020 either entirely or primarily online. As the pandemic continues to necessitate limited in-person instruction, a stable connection to high-speed internet is essential for today's students. However, millions of Americans lack access to broadband internet—this digital divide poses an additional hurdle to students completing their degrees and credentials.

And although not having a laptop or living in a broadband desert are challenges, the most common reason given for not having high-speed access is the cost of services. Expanding programs to cover today's students with the greatest need will help smooth the inequitably rough transition to online learning that has left students reeling.

- **(H.R. 6814/S. 3701) Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act of 2020.** The bill would appropriate \$1 billion to establish an Emergency Higher Education Connectivity fund at the National Telecommunications Information Administration to help ensure that college and university students at historically Black colleges

and universities, Tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions, as well as rural-serving institutions, have adequate home internet connectivity during the coronavirus pandemic.

- **(S.4095) Emergency Broadband Connections Act of 2020.** The bill provides 50 dollars per month to eligible households to pay for broadband internet services. The benefit would be separate from the Lifeline program (which provides a discount for phone and internet services to low-income consumers) and would include students who are eligible for the Pell Grant.

Expand access to free Open Educational Resources (OER). The COVID-19 pandemic cut off today's students' physical access to bookstores and libraries at a time when students were already facing high prices for course textbooks and materials. Many students may have left their materials on campus not knowing that they would not return. Institutions have dramatically decreased expenses for their students—and improved retention, engagement, and completion rates—by adopting OER courses or programs and making use of the digital media and textbooks available to the public free of charge. Boosting appropriations for the Open Textbooks Pilot program at ED would help institutions develop free educational resources for students. By reducing student costs, open textbooks give students better access to the educational materials they need to succeed in postsecondary education.

- **(S. 1059) Fund for Innovation and Success in Higher Education (FINISH) Act of 2018.** The act would create a tiered-evidence innovation fund that would test, replicate, and scale up successful approaches to improving access to and completion in higher education and encourage institutions of higher education to create open educational resources.

IMPROVE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

As our economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, getting unemployed Americans back to work will be priority number one. Postsecondary education has a strong role to play, but certificate programs linked to in-demand career fields will be especially important. Research shows that approximately 94 percent of certificates awarded are in career-oriented fields. Additionally, research indicates that short-term certificate programs can lead to significant wage gains.

HOW POLICY CAN HELP:

Allow students to use Pell Grants for high-quality short-term programs. Postsecondary certificate programs can reskill adults to allow them to reenter the workforce with significant wage gains, but certificate programs do not always qualify for federal financial aid because they do not meet the 600-hour minimum requirement. Allowing today's students to use the Pell Grant for high-quality, short-term programs that are more than 300 hours and lead to an industry recognized postsecondary credential

would get Americans back to school, back to work, and on a path to a career.

- **(H.R. 3497/S.839) Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act.** This act would allow for Pell Grants to be used for short-term, high-quality, industry-based training.

Create a new competency-based demonstration program to certify quality competency-based education programs. With COVID-19 forcing most students into online learning settings, the need for flexibility in education delivery is more important than ever. Competency-based education is a personalized learning strategy that can allow students to quickly gain the skills that they need to launch their careers in a new field.

- **(H.R.4706/S.2608) Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2019.** This act would create a competency-based demonstration program, giving students flexibility and preparing students for their future careers.

IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Each year, \$120 billion in federal student aid flows through eligible institutions of higher education to help students pay for college. While the COVID-19 crisis has required the temporary relaxation of some accreditation and accountability rules, we cannot allow this to become the new normal. Today's students and taxpayers should be able to trust institutions to deliver a quality education that leaves students better off after completion. And as we

provide millions of additional dollars in emergency aid to students, it is even more crucial that we hold institutions accountable for providing good outcomes for their students. To ensure this, we need to improve our higher learning accountability system by refocusing accreditation standards to prioritize student outcomes and increasing data transparency so we can track the return on investment for higher learning programs.

HOW POLICY CAN HELP:

Allow accreditors to prioritize student outcomes

over institutional compliance to encourage a greater focus on metrics such as completion rates, default rates and loan repayment rates.

- **(H.R.4579) Quality Higher Education Act of 2019.** This act would revise accreditation standards for institutions of higher learning to measure student achievement against at least one standard for completion, workforce participation, and progress towards these goals. It would also require ED to establish procedures for when institutions of higher education do not meet these standards and would ask for the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) to evaluate the effectiveness of the revised standards.

- **(S.800/H.R.1766) College Transparency Act of 2019.** This act would work to ensure accurate and available reporting of student outcomes such as enrollment, completion, and post-college success.

Require accreditors to be more transparent

by posting standards, reports, information on students' outcome, and criteria that triggers sanctions, via an easily accessible online site, to increase transparency in the accreditation process.

- **(H.R.5768) Accreditation Reform Act of 2020.** This act would require transparency in accreditation with the U.S. Department of Education making a wide variety of information on accreditation and various investigations on their website.