



Strengthening the Transition from High School to College Priorities for the Higher Education Act

Eighty percent of good paying jobs require postsecondary education, and 56 percent require a bachelor's degree or higher.¹ In fact, all but one of the fastest-growing jobs that pay more than \$50,000 per year require postsecondary education.²

Despite the level of education required by the job market, students are insufficiently prepared for, and have inequitable access to, higher education. The United States has reached its highest high school graduation rate on record—84.6 percent. Nonetheless, 70 percent of beginning students at public two-year colleges require remediation in college to master academic content they should have learned in high school, including nearly 80 percent of Black college students and 75 percent of Latino college students.³ Students who come from privilege—the top socioeconomic quintile—have a 50 percentage-point advantage in college enrollment compared to their peers in the lowest quintile.⁴ Overall, only 60 percent of first-time college freshmen graduate within six years—with major completion gaps between White students (64 percent) and students who historically have been underserved (21 percent for Black students and 32 percent for Latino students).⁵

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) provides a critical opportunity to eliminate race- and income-based disparities in college preparation, enrollment, persistence, and completion. The Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed) believes that these disparities are caused, at least in part, by inequities at the high school level that lead to inadequate preparation for higher education. To address these inequities, a reauthorized HEA must

1. strengthen high school education and **reduce the need for postsecondary remediation**;
2. provide more intensive early postsecondary course opportunities and **accelerate time to degree** for students who demonstrate college readiness in high school;
3. **expand access to advanced course work** like dual or concurrent enrollment and early college high schools (ECHSs) for students from low-income families; and

4. empower families to navigate the college process for their child and **improve affordability via college savings accounts** for students from low-income families.

As Congress develops its proposal to reauthorize HEA, All4Ed urges it to include the pieces of legislation described in the remainder of this document.

Reduce the Need for Postsecondary Remediation: PREPARE Act (S. 1516)

Poor preparation for postsecondary education costs students extra time and money to earn a degree and, in many cases, inhibits students' chances of earning a degree at all. Research shows that first-year students seeking bachelor's degrees who take remedial course work are 74 percent more likely to drop out of college than students who do not need remedial course work. Of those students who do take remedial course work, and ultimately earn their degrees, they take nearly one year longer to do so.⁶

The [Promoting Readiness in Education to Prevent Additional Remediation and Expense \(PREPARE\) Act](#), introduced by Senators Doug Jones (D-AL), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Maggie Hassan (D-NH), authorizes grants to states to align high school and postsecondary education and reduce the need for postsecondary remediation. States receiving grants are required, among other things, to

- align high school graduation requirements with entrance requirements for credit-bearing course work in state institutions of higher education (IHEs);
- develop statewide standards for placement in remedial college course work based on multiple measures; and
- develop statewide articulation agreements between high schools and public IHEs, and among public IHEs in the state.

States must reserve at least 80 percent of PREPARE Act funds to make competitive subgrants to eligible entities that consist of a partnership between at least one local education agency (LEA) and an IHE or higher education system operating in the state. Eligible entities that include a high-need LEA, an LEA that serves a high-need high school, or a high-need IHE, among other things, receive priority consideration. Eligible entities must implement innovative, evidenced-based practices to improve high school education and college preparation and to strengthen remedial education at the postsecondary level.

Accelerate Time to Degree: Fast Track To and Through College Act

While it is critical to improve college remediation for students who are underprepared, research shows that one-quarter of students are academically ready for college before twelfth grade begins. Of the estimated 850,000 students who are college ready early, 30 percent are from low-income families; among these students from low-income families, one-quarter are students of color.⁷ Instead of relegating high-achieving students to a traditional high school course sequence, students should be able to enroll in college-level course work as soon as they demonstrate college readiness.

The [Fast Track To and Through College Act](#) aims to increase college completion and reduce college costs by rethinking senior year of high school and accelerating time to degree. It authorizes competitive grants to states that will provide all college-ready students in all school districts access to two new “Fast Track” pathway options:

1. an early college “Fast Track” pathway consisting of a full-time load of introductory college-level course work equivalent to the freshman year of college offered during senior year of high school free of charge through Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual-enrollment, or online programs such as edX; or
2. an early high school graduation “Fast Track” pathway where students receive an early high school graduation scholarship to use at any in-state public college when they graduate high school in three years instead of four.

Grant funds will be awarded to partnerships of state K–12 education agencies, public higher education systems, and school districts to implement programs and activities that improve student preparation for, and participation in, accelerated academic work. Funds will enable states to adopt statewide policies for identifying eligible college-ready high school students based on multiple indicators and to develop credit-transfer agreements and AP/IB exam policies to ensure that college-level courses offered in “Fast Track” pathways follow students from high school to higher education and result in usable credits at all in-state public colleges and universities.

In addition, states can use funds to

- expand access to AP, IB, and dual-enrollment courses for “Fast Track” and non-“Fast Track” students;
- offset fees for AP, IB, and similar tests for all “Fast Track” students;
- provide professional development for AP, IB, and dual-enrollment instructors; and
- reach out to students, particularly historically underrepresented students, and parents to build awareness of “Fast Track” pathways.

Finally, to make “Fast Track” participation widely available for students from low-income families and help expand access to early postsecondary course work, federal Pell grants could cover dual- and concurrent-enrollment costs for eligible students without affecting their twelve-semester lifetime eligibility to receive a Pell grant.

Expand Access to Advanced Course Work: Go to High School, Go to College Act (S. 1888, H.R. 3268)

The benefits of taking college-level course work in high school extend to all students, not just those who are college ready. Research finds that students who experience rigorous course work in high school demonstrate readiness for college-level work and complete postsecondary credentials at substantially higher rates than their peers experiencing less-rigorous preparatory course work. Programs such as [dual enrollment](#) and [ECHSs](#) provide students with rigorous course work experiences, with striking outcomes for historically underserved students. Students who attend ECHSs are three times more likely to obtain an associate’s degree within six years of graduating from high school than those who attend traditional high schools.⁸

The Go to High School, Go to College Act introduced by Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Mark Warner (D-VA) and by Representatives Marcia Fudge (D-OH) and Elise Stefanik (R-NY) creates the College in High School Federal Pell Grant Pilot Program to allow students from low-income families to earn college credits while still in high school at no cost. The bill authorizes a pilot program for 250 IHEs to allow high school students participating in dual-enrollment programs offered by the IHEs the opportunity to apply for Pell grant funding to pay for those courses. The pilot program is modeled after the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED’s) Experimental Site for Dual Enrollment and builds upon the experimental site in two key ways:

1. participating students have the opportunity to earn up to two semesters worth of college credit before drawing down from their twelve-semester Pell grant limit; and
2. the pilot program includes a robust evaluation, whereas the current experimental site does not.



Improve Affordability via College Savings Accounts: American Dream Accounts Act

The [rising cost of college attendance](#) prevents many students from earning postsecondary degrees. Even for students with financial assistance, college costs can be unmanageable. Research from the National College Access Network finds that just 48 percent of community colleges and 27 percent of four-year public institutions are affordable for the average Pell grant recipient.⁹ To assist in financing postsecondary education, college savings account programs are emerging as a promising practice to help students save for college, develop a college-bound identity, and succeed in college.¹⁰

The American Dream Accounts Act has been introduced by Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) since the 113th Congress, but it has yet to be introduced in the 116th Congress. The bill authorizes ED to award competitive grants to state and local partnerships to create American Dream Accounts, which are personal online accounts for students from low-income families that monitor postsecondary readiness and include a college savings account. Grantees would be required to open American Dream Accounts for participating students no later than ninth grade.

Each American Dream Account would do the following:

- Include a college savings account for each student. Partnerships that provide the largest initial deposit, match funds deposited into the account, and provide deposits when participating students reach academic milestones, among other things, would receive priority consideration.
- Support postsecondary readiness by securely monitoring students' progress online. Academic and behavioral information, such as grades, course selections, and attendance and disciplinary records, would be available for review in an American Dream Account. The account also would provide opportunities to gain financial literacy, prepare for college enrollment, and identify skills and career interests. Parents could grant counselors, teachers, coaches, mentors, and others access to the American Dream Account (excluding the college savings account portion) to update student information, monitor progress, and provide college-preparatory support.

Endnotes

- 1 A. P. Carnevale et al., *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs: High School, Middle Skills, and Bachelor's Degree* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2018), <https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/3ways-FR.pdf>. A "good job" is defined as paying a minimum of \$35,000 for workers between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four years and at least \$45,000 for workers between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four years. This results in 2016 median earnings of \$56,000 for workers with less than a bachelor's degree or \$65,000 for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher.
- 2 Unpublished analysis conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education of data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections program, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/ind-occ-matrix/occupation.xlsx> (accessed September 27, 2019).
- 3 X. Chen, *Remedial Coursetaking at U.S. Public 2- and 4-Year Institutions: Scope, Experiences, and Outcomes* (NCES 2016–405) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016405.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019–144) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2019), https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tbe.asp.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 M. N. Barry and M. Dannenberg, *Out of Pocket: The High Cost of Inadequate High Schools and High School Student Achievement on College Affordability* (Washington, DC: Education Reform Now, 2016), <http://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/EdReformNow-O-O-P-Embargoed-Final.pdf>.
- 7 M. Dannenberg and A. Hyslop, *Building a Fast Track to College* (Washington, DC: Education Reform Now and Alliance for Excellent Education, 2019), <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ERN-AEE-Fast-Track-FINAL.pdf>.
- 8 M. Song and K. Zeiser, *Early College, Continued Success: Longer-Term Impact of Early College High Schools* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2019), <https://www.air.org/system/files/Early-College--Continued-Success-Longer-Term-Impact-of-ECHS-September-2019.pdf>.
- 9 B. DeBaun and C. Warick, *The Growing Gap: Public Higher Education's Declining Affordability for Low-Income Students* (Washington, DC: National College Access Network, 2019), <https://collegeaccess.org/page/affordability>.
- 10 M. Clancy, M. Sherraden, and S. G. Beverly, "SEED for Oklahoma Kids Wave 3: Extending Rigorous Research and a Successful Policy Model" (St. Louis, MO: Center for Social Development, Washington University in St. Louis, 2019), <https://csd.wustl.edu/19-06/>.



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