CLASP
CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

Statement Prepared for the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance

Community College Symposium

By Amy-Ellen Duke
Senior Policy Analyst

December 10, 2007

The Center for Law and Social Policy is a nonprofit organization engaged in research, analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues affecting low- and moderate-income individuals and families. We approach higher education issues from the perspective of low-income working adults and older youth, based on our long experience at the federal, state and local levels in workforce development and welfare reform. I appreciate the opportunity to comment to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, which has helped elevate the needs of low-income adult learners through "The Student Aid Gauntlet" and other hearings through the years.

Community colleges play a critical role in increasing economic opportunity for adults by helping individuals move out of dead-end, low-wage jobs into careers that can support a family. They also contribute to the economic competitiveness of our nation by educating workers for in high-demand occupations. Yet current higher education policies often fail to support the educational and career aspirations of low- and moderate-income working adults and older youth who must support themselves and often, their families too, while in school. I'd like to focus my comments today on two areas integral to the success of low-income adults at community colleges, where we believe the federal government should invest more resources: first, supporting student success, and second, making developmental education more efficient and effective. A larger federal investment in both of these areas, if structured thoughtfully, could build a body of knowledge about what works that would enable more nontraditional students to successfully complete postsecondary credentials. While some states and a number of local community colleges have embarked on exciting innovations to promote postsecondary access and success for low-income adults, the federal government has been largely absent from this area. We also support increased financial aid for these students but in the interests of time, will not go into much detail on that issue today (see the following CLASP recommendations and analyses: "Recommendations to the House Education and Labor Committee," April 13, 2007; "Congress Expands Access to Postsecondary Education and Training for Adults," September, 18, 2007 and "New Student Aid Changes Help Nontraditional Students," May 8, 2006).[1] Further, increased aid alone is not a panacea for the issues that too often stand in the way of nontraditional students being successful in college.

Before speaking about specific policy issues regarding student supports and developmental education, I first want to briefly address a concern often voiced in the higher education community: is it really worth investing federal and state resources in postsecondary education for low-income adults? And if we do, can they succeed?

Why should the federal and state governments invest in postsecondary education for low-income adults?

The first reason to invest in low-income adults and other nontraditional students is that, given our demographic and economic realities as a nation, we cannot afford not to. Employers in many sectors and regions of the country either face skill shortages currently, or will in the near future. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 2004 and 2014, 24 of the 30 fastest-growing occupations are expected to be filled by people with postsecondary education or training

(either an occupational certificate or degree). Yet nearly half of the U.S. workforce has only a high school education or less.[2]

While K-12 reform is often identified as the solution to skill shortages, school reform alone cannot meet the demand for skilled workers. About two-thirds of our 2020 workforce is already beyond the reach of our elementary and secondary schools.[3] Even if that were not true, the education trends of youth entering the workforce are going in the wrong direction, with reading and math skills of teenagers flat over the last 15 years and younger adults (aged 25-34) less educated than the previous generation (aged 45-54).[4] If we are to overcome increasing inequality in skills and income and meet the employer demand for skilled workers, we must make providing adults with postsecondary education and training tied to marketable credentials a priority. The current potential pool of skilled workers among prime-age adults—defined here as the nearly 50 million people aged 18 to 44 with a high school diploma or less—is equal to the next 17 years of high school classes.[5] In other words, we can't afford not to invest in our current workforce as a means of building a future skilled workforce.

A second reason to invest in postsecondary education for low- to moderate-income adults is that research suggests that they can be as successful as other community college students when given some additional support. Studies of various innovations in the community colleges in Washington, Louisiana, and Kentucky show that low-income adults can succeed in college when provided targeted supports designed to promote persistence and completion.

- Kentucky: The Ready to Work program, which is designed to support low-income student parents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), provides work-study jobs and peer support groups, along with intensive case management offered by the Ready to Work coordinator at each community college. To date, Ready to Work students have achieved higher grade point averages (GPA) and program retention and completion rates than the average Kentucky community college student. For instance, the retention rate from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007 was 84 percent for Ready to Work students and 75 percent for the remainder of community college students.[6] In addition, the percentage of Ready to Work students who were in school in Fall 2005 and returned in Fall 2006 was 65 percent compared to the college-wide average of 52 percent. The average GPA for Ready to Work students was 2.73 compared to the average college GPA of 2.66. The system attributes the higher retention rates of Ready to Work students to "aggressive academic and student support in such areas as mentoring, tutoring, advising, counseling, advocacy, and referrals to community and campus services."[7]

- Louisiana: A recent community college demonstration project that provided low-income parents $1,000 scholarships for each of two semesters if they maintained at least half-time enrollment and a 2.0 (or C) GPA showed investments in adults pay off. The student parents in the Opening Doors demonstration project, who were also provided additional counseling and advising, were more likely to enroll in college full time, passed more courses and earned more credits, and had higher rates of registration in college in the second and third semesters after random assignment than those who did not participate in the project.[8]

- Washington: Using student record information from the Washington State Community and Technical College System, the state tracked the progress of two cohorts of adult students 25 or older with, at most, a high school education who entered one of the state's community or technical colleges for the first time between 1996-97 or 1997-98. The cohorts included adults who enrolled in adult basic skills programs, such as Adult Basic Education (ABE) or English as a Second Language (ESL), along with those who enrolled in for-credit coursework.[9] The study found that students who started in ESL or ABE/GED and went onto enroll in college-level courses and earned a credential or completed a year of college were more likely to do so if they received financial aid and/or took developmental education.

Promoting student success

Currently the bulk of the federal investment in postsecondary education is directed at increasing access. For example, the federal government spends about 55 times as much on grant aid as on student success services.[10] While affordability remains a major challenge, and financial aid does increase completion, students need more than financial help. Not investing in success is penny-wise and pound foolish, as research shows that the biggest economic payoff from college is to those who complete credentials. Too many students fail to achieve this—for example, six years after enrolling at community colleges, nearly half (44 percent) of Pell Grant recipients do not have a credential and are no longer enrolled.[11]

Low-income adults often need help navigating postsecondary education and training offerings, setting career goals, gaining college success skills, and obtaining personal support from staff and other students. But community colleges typically have few resources for supporting student success or for investing in program innovation and replication. Most states do not have dedicated funding streams for student support services at community colleges. Support services are typically underfunded and usually the first to be cut when budgets are tight. In addition, colleges are funded based on enrollment rather than completion, providing little incentive to invest scarce resources in services that support student success. Given very high student-to-counselor ratios (they can exceed 1,000 to 1 at some community colleges), lower-income adults are often on their own when registering for classes, applying for financial aid, or in receiving academic support, such as tutoring and counseling. In this environment, a lack of support results in lower rates of persistence and completion.

To help low-income adults succeed in postsecondary education, colleges must provide comprehensive supports that promote student success. Supports which research suggests can increase persistence and completion among adults include individualized, proactive advising and counseling; enrolling students in cohorts or learning communities; college and career success courses; instructional support, such as tutoring; providing work-study jobs with private employers in the area of the student's studies; tying small material incentives or scholarships to participation in student services and to college performance; and offering financial assistance with child care and transportation. A handful of states provide dedicated funding for such essential supports.

- Washington: In 2006, the Washington state legislature established the Opportunity Grant pilot program at 11 community colleges, which it expanded in 2007 into a permanent program with $23 million in appropriations with the goal of establishing a statewide program. Opportunity Grants are designed to increase low-income adults' access to and success in achieving postsecondary credentials at the associate degree level or below; the level at which Washington state has determined it needs to target in order to meet skill shortages. Each grant covers tuition (filling in where the Pell Grant falls short or is unavailable) plus $1,000 for books, fees, tools, and support services. Students attending college less than half time are eligible. For 2007 and 2008, the program is limited to students with earnings less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The most unique and important feature is that each college that enrolls a student receiving an Opportunity Grant also receives $1,500 to provide individualized support services and counseling to that student.

- Illinois: The Student Success Grant is targeted funding from the Illinois Higher Education Board budget allocated to each community college, which provides student services based on that campus' student needs. The grants are used for services such as personal, academic, or career counseling; assessment and testing; mentoring; and persistence and completion programs. The grants are geared toward students who are academically at-risk, low-income, or disabled. In FY 2002, $13.3 million in Student Support Grants helped 305,000 students at Illinois community colleges persist, nearly doubling the federal investment of $7 million in student services funding for the state. Last year, $3 million was appropriated for the program. Supporters hope to see a sizeable increase in appropriations next year.

- California: Through the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) programs, California provides dedicated state general fund dollars to colleges to provide low-income students with supports, including academic and personal counseling and child care and transportation assistance. In addition, in an effort to support the educational aspirations of TANF clients, campus-based CalWORKSs coordinators provide counseling and connect students to more traditional support services. The state also funds work study jobs so TANF recipients can meet the federal work requirements while attending school.

The federal government could follow these innovative states by investing more money in targeted support services. One important step would be to attach a Student Success Grant to every Pell Grant, which the college would use to provide student support services to Pell recipients. This summer, Rep. John Yarmuth introduced The College Student Success Act (H.R. 3450), which would fund a Student Success Grant demonstration project. Federal funding for access and success would be coupled to ensure the investment results in more credentials completed, not just more students enrolled. The Student Success Grants pilot program would help at-risk students stay in college and complete key required courses, especially during their first year of college.

Selected colleges would receive $1,500 for every Pell Grant enrolled student for intensive counseling, academic planning, college success courses, and other assistance aimed at helping students acclimate and become a part of the educational community. A Student Success Coordinator would be assigned to every SSG student to provide intensive career and academic advising and ongoing personal help in navigating through college and career planning and in connecting to community resources that can help students overcome family and personal challenges to success. Each college would provide data on student success and undergo a rigorous evaluation to determine benefits of establishing a larger scale program in future reauthorizations.

Increasing the effectiveness of developmental education

Adult students, many of whom have been out of school for years, are often ill prepared for college-level courses, failing to achieve college assessment cut-off scores for entry into their certificate or degree program courses. If we want to increase the number of adults in community colleges who complete credentials—individuals who will help ensure our workforce remains competitive and be able to earn family-sustaining wages—our colleges must increase the number of students who transition successfully from developmental education to for-credit courses.

Developmental or remedial education is defined as courses in reading, writing, or math for college-level students lacking those skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the school. In any given year, roughly four in ten adult students take at least one developmental education course in college, with even higher rates at community colleges. And it should be noted that lack of preparedness for college is not limited to adults. Each year at community colleges, about 42 percent of entering freshmen on average enroll in developmental courses with considerably higher percentages in low income communities.[12] As high as these numbers are, they are just "snapshots" of developmental education enrollments at a single point in time and longitudinal research reveals that they underestimate the true extent of remediation needs. Research that tracked a cohort of first-time community college students through their twenties found that ultimately over 61 percent enrolled in at least one remedial course.[13] This longitudinal research also showed an inverse relationship between the extent of student's need for developmental education and eventual completion of degree. Deficiencies in reading also negatively impact completion. Just 30 percent of first-time undergraduates enrolling in remedial reading courses completed a certificate or degree within eight years of leaving high school, compared with 69 percent of those not needing any remediation.[14]

Lengthy participation in remediation poses a number of problems. For working adults who need to complete coursework quickly because of competing family and work demands, developmental education can take too long and seem disconnected from their career goals. Although developmental education clearly benefits students, those who enroll in these classes are still much less likely to persist and earn credentials.

If the Advisory Committee is going to address enrollment and persistence in community colleges, then it must explore the escalating number of students—traditional and

nontraditional—who need developmental education and for whom it serves as a barrier, rather than a contributor, to persistence. A number of institutions and states are addressing the rising demand for developmental education through innovative solutions, but they are at a small scale, with private foundations and a limited number of states taking the lead. Promising best practices being implemented include accelerating developmental education by enabling students to move through the equivalent of two courses in a single semester class, blending developmental education with college-level curricula and instruction, providing intensive counseling and advising, using learning communities or cohorts, and wrapping career counseling and elements of college success courses into remedial courses, along with investing more resources in professional development of instructors.

- The Shifting Gears initiative is a $10 million, three year Joyce Foundation effort to reform adult and postsecondary education policies in order to increase the skills and job prospects of low-income working adults. Grants have been given to Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Illinois Community College Board is focusing its resources on pilot programs that integrate adult basic education and college developmental education with occupational training to create "bridges" to postsecondary workforce education. Indiana's Ivy Tech Community College system is embedding literacy and other basic skills directly into vocational training and creating accelerated associate degree programs through its new College for Working Adults.

- Breaking Through, another multi-year, foundation-funded demonstration project, is promoting and strengthening community college efforts to help low-skilled adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs. Twenty-six community colleges across the country are implementing innovative strategies to ensure adult education and developmental education are not "black holes" for adult students, through a variety of innovative approaches such as accelerating developmental education, contextualizing developmental education to occupational coursework, and providing comprehensive supports, such as individualized advising, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and study skills training.[15]

- Kentucky: Several years ago, Kentucky set the goal of doubling the number of graduates with baccalaureate degrees by 2020. But more than one half of first-time freshman entering Kentucky's colleges in 2004 required remediation in at least one area and the dropout rate for this population was twice that of prepared students. The rates of remediation for African-American and students over 25 are even higher—77 percent and 90 percent, respectively. Therefore, the state identified the high rate of remediation as one of the principal barriers to achieving their goal of doubling the number of college graduates. In 2006, the state established a developmental education task force to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen preparedness and improve outcomes for those students requiring remediation. One of their conclusions is that well-designed remediation programs require extra funding to provide enhanced services, such as supplemental instruction and blended remediation. The task force recommended that the state provide infrastructure funding to institutions to implement best practices in

remediation and more heavily weight the institutional allocation for underprepared students.[16]

- California: The state recently embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process to improve community college student access and success and identified the lack of basic skills and need for developmental education as a major barrier to student success and an inadequately funded area of the colleges. The California Community College System Office has made replicating best practices around developmental education a priority and developed a self-assessment tool for colleges to determine how their current practices fit with and reflect state-identified best practices. For the first time, the 2006-07 state budget included categorical local funding to address the developmental needs of students.[17]

Despite these strides being made to improve developmental education at the state and local level, Congress and the federal government have not been active partners in this work. Both express concern about low graduation rates but fail to provide leadership and incentives that will help states and institutions seed and take to scale innovative developmental education initiatives that will ensure our country achieves the graduation outcomes needed in order to remain globally competitive.

The Higher Education Act reauthorization legislation recently passed by the House Education and Labor Committee included a proposal by Reps. Lynn Woolsey and Jason Altmire (H.R. 4067) to create "Bridges from Jobs to Careers" grants to colleges for innovation in college developmental education that would increase access and success in workforce programs. This proposal would provide grants to colleges serving especially high numbers of students needing developmental education for purposes of creating bridge programs that customize developmental education curricula, including English language instruction, to the content of the certificate or degree programs or clusters of programs in which developmental education students seek to enroll. In addition, they will provide funding to colleges interested in implementing innovations in developmental education including many of those mentioned above.

Increasing access to financial aid

The federal government has made important progress in ensuring more low-income adults are eligible for financial aid and that those who receive aid see larger awards. Recent increases in the Pell Grant and the Income Protection Allowance for independent students--policies promoted by this Committee—will help increase access for this population, but more financial aid is necessary. In addition, financial aid should be more responsive to the needs of nontraditional students. Working adults frequently find it difficult to attend college in traditional schedule formats because of competing demands of work and family. Accordingly, many postsecondary institutions are responding to these students' needs by breaking longer college programs into shorter modules or compressing longer programs into shorter, more intensive formats that can be completed as students have time. A pilot project should be undertaken to provide federal financial aid to undergraduate students pursuing postsecondary education in compressed or

modular formats. Also, students should be allowed to receive a second Pell Grant if they attend school year around so they can finish school more quickly.

Research shows that persistence and completion are related to attendance patterns, which can be influenced by financial aid. For working adults—who often attend part time while trying to balance work, family, and school—additional financial aid allows them to cut down on their work hours and attend school more often, leading to faster completion. Access to increased grant aid, rather than student loans, is important for this population because low-income adults are more likely to achieve occupational credentials than higher-paying two- or four-year degrees. Therefore, it is hard to justify that low-income adults accumulate educational debt in their attempts to increase their earnings.

Conclusion

In closing, increased financial aid is only one part of the postsecondary access and success equation for low-income adults. Once low-income adults enter community colleges, we have to ensure they persist and exit with a credential or degree. In order to ensure that happens, the federal government needs to increase its investments in supports that promote student success and innovations that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of developmental education. We hope the Advisory Committee with consider our recommendations in its future work. Thank you for providing the Center for Law and Social Policy with the opportunity to present our views on access and success to community colleges for low-income adults.

---

[1]The analyses by Amy-Ellen Duke and Julie Strawn can be found at: http://www.clasp.org/publications/student_aid_9.07.pdf and http://www.clasp.org/publications/dra_studentaid.pdf For legislative recommendations see: http://www.clasp.org/publications/hea_recs_0407.pdf

[2] Crosley, Adair and Brandon Roberts. *Strengthening State Policies to Increase the Education and Skills of Low-Wage Workers*. Working Poor Families Project. Spring 2007.

[3] Aspen Institute. *Sector Initiatives and Community Colleges: Working Together to Provide Education for Low-Wage Working Adults*, Workforce Strategies Initiative Update, Issue 4, April 2007.

[4] Sum, Andrew. *Forces Changing Our Nation's Future: The Comparative Performance of U.S. Adults and Youth on International Literacy Assessments, the Importance of Literacy/Numeracy Proficiencies for Labor Market Success, and the Projected Outlook for Literacy Proficiencies of U.S. Adults.* Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (for the National Commission on Adult Literacy). June 2007; Jones, Dennis and Patrick Kelly. *Mounting Pressures Facing the U.S. Workforce and The Increasing Need For Adult Education And Literacy.* Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (for the National Commission on Adult Literacy). May 2007.

[5] CLASP calculation from Census Bureau data from the March 2006 Current Population Survey and from: Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education. *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates 1998 to 2018.* December 2003.

[6] King-Simms, Shauna. Summary of the Ready-to-Work End-of Semester Report. Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Spring 2007.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Brock, Thomas and Lashawn Richburg-Hayes. *Paying for Persistence: Early Results of a Louisiana Scholarship Program for Low-Income Parents Attending Community College.* MDRC. May 2006.

[9] Prince, David and Davis Jenkins. *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study*. Community College Research Center, Columbia University. April 2005.

[10] If one includes in access spending only Pell Grants, Campus-Based Programs, LEAP, and Academic Competitiveness Grants, the total is about $15 billion for FY 2006 compared with $273 million in the TRIO Student Support Services program.
[11] *The Condition of Education 2003*, Indicator 23, U.S. Department of Education. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2003/section3/indicator23.asp
[12] NCES, *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000*. U.S. Department of Education. 2004.
[13] Adelman, C. *Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education, 1972-2000.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. 2004.
[14] U.S. Department of Education. "The Condition of Education, 2004." Indicator 18. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2004/section3/indicator18.asp
[15] For more information about the Breaking Through initiative see: http://www.breakingthroughcc.org/
[16] Kentucky Developmental Education Task Force. *Securing Kentucky's Future: A Plan for Improving College Readiness and Success.* The Final Report of the Kentucky Developmental Education Task Force. February 2007. http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/CBAA5350-E515-42E2-8D8B-B5E61286135C/0/DevEdTaskForce_FullReport_FINALFORWEB.pdf
[17] *The Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges. Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges.* July 2007. http://css.rpgroup.org/uploads/RPBasicSkills2007v2f.pdf