The Honorable John Kline, Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable George Miller, Senior Democratic
Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce
Training
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rubén Hinojosa, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce
Training
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Recommendations for Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in response to the January 28, 2014 House Education and the Workforce Committee, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training Hearing "Keeping College within Reach: Sharing Best Practices for Serving Low-Income and First Generation Students"

January 28, 2014

Dear Representatives Kline, Miller, Foxx, and Hinojosa,

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony regarding the Higher Education Act reauthorization hearing: ***Keeping College within Reach: Sharing Best Practices for Serving Low-Income and First Generation Students***. CLASP respectfully submits this testimony for your consideration and further exploration. CLASP promotes policies, practices, and investments to increase educational outcomes, career advancement, and economic mobility for low-income adults and youth. CLASP's Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success (C-PES) promotes policies, practices, and investments to increase career advancement and economic mobility for low-income adults and youth, including disconnected youth and youth of color. C-PES has in-depth knowledge of federal higher education, workforce, and human services policies and also provides technical assistance to states, colleges, and nonprofit organizations on postsecondary access and completion as well as on career pathways and performance measurement.

Today's students traverse many pathways to a postsecondary degree, and far too many of them face daunting prospects for completion. Only 54 percent of students complete a college degree within six years. These rates are even lower among underprepared students, low-income students, and students at community colleges. Faced with rising college costs; growing levels of responsibilities that include balancing school, work, and family; and complex federal and institutional processes, it is no surprise that many students struggle to persist long enough to earn a degree.

Ensuring Students are Prepared. Far too many low-income and first generation students are completing high school with the desire to go to college but without the preparation that will allow them to succeed. Students with a family income of less than $36,000 are less likely than more affluent peers to take the recommended core curriculum for college readiness.[1] In addition, subject by subject, low-income students were the least likely to meet ACT college readiness benchmarks (see Table 1).[2] In 2013, similar results were found for first generation students (see Table 2).[3] Low-income students are disproportionately more

likely to attend under-resourced secondary schools, which do not adequately prepare them for postsecondary course work. The curricular offerings in these secondary schools are less likely to be aligned with college entry requirements, and tend to offer fewer college preparatory courses and enroll fewer low-income students in those courses. As a result, many fail to meet the academic requirements for enrollment in four-year colleges.

2012 ACT Results for Low-Income Students*	
Subject	Percent Meeting College Readiness Benchmark
English	48
Reading	34
Mathematics	25
Science	15
* *"Low-income" defined as family income below $36,000*	

2013 ACT Results for First Generation Students*	
Subject	Percent Meeting College Readiness Benchmark
English	42
Reading	24
Mathematics	22
Science	17
* *"First Generation" defined as students whose parents who have never attended college*	

In addition, under-resourced schools have insufficient school counseling staff to meet the needs of low-income and potential first generation college students. These students often need additional transition supports, including intentional and early outreach to families regarding postsecondary options, college and career counseling, assistance with application processes, and early exposure to college campuses and postsecondary experiences.

Financial Pressures Can Drive Down College Completion. Though students fail to complete postsecondary programs for a variety of reasons, financial pressures appear to be the single largest factor. Over the last three decades, college costs have increased nearly four times faster than median family income. Financial aid has not filled the growing gap, and "unmet financial need"—the share of college costs not covered by financial aid or what the family is expected to contribute—has risen sharply. Half of community college students had unmet financial need in 2007-08 averaging $4,500, as did 43 percent of students at public four-year colleges, with their unmet need averaging $6,400.[4] Rising unmet need means students must work more or borrow more to stay enrolled. Forty-three percent of undergraduate students work part-time to cover college and family costs; 32 percent work full-time. And while working a modest amount during college can increase performance, working too many hours can negatively affect academic performance.[5] Furthermore, students of color, particularly African Americans, are more likely to depend on financial aid and have less success in postsecondary experiences if financial aid is not adequate.[6] In a study of the educational experience of young men of color, young men cited "money problems" as a chief distraction and roadblock to college success. These men are often heads of households, parents, and caregivers responsible for contributing financially to their families in addition to paying for the cost of their education.[7]

Lack of Adequate Student Supports Can Threaten Student Success and Completion. Since the last reauthorization of HEA, the face of higher education has changed dramatically. The vast majority (75 percent) of students has at least one barrier to student success; they do not fit the "traditional" student profile of a full-time student transitioning directly from high school to a four-year college or university.[8] Forty-seven percent of undergraduates are independent, thirty-six percent of undergraduates are adults age 25 or over; 32 percent work full-time, and 23 percent are parents. Over their college careers, more than half of undergraduates now attend part-time for some semesters. These students bring life experience, which enhances their educational experience and, at some institutions, contributes to higher completion rates as compared to their younger peers. At the same time, they require more flexible schedules and service delivery modes to accommodate their multiple responsibilities. Their needs are

often not met by what many traditional colleges currently offer. For these students, non-financial barriers, such as logistical challenges, poor academic preparation for college, and lack of information on how to navigate college processes can threaten student success and completion.[9] Young men of color, in particular, cite "feeling like an outsider" and having intense pressure to succeed from family members and peers as challenges they need to navigate and overcome in order to achieve success.[10]

What Works to Improve Student Success? Lack of financial resources is—in itself—a significant and often insurmountable barrier. Recent research supports this; low-income students who received "no strings attached" need-based grant aid were found to be more likely than their peers to stay continuously enrolled in college, graduate within six years, and accumulate credits at a quicker pace. Financial student aid should be designed to meet the costs of college while reducing the need for students to work too many hours or take out unmanageable levels of debt. It should also be flexible enough to accommodate the reality that a majority of undergraduates now attend a mix of full- and part-time over the course of their college careers.

Additionally, federal higher education policies should be designed to help students overcome non-financial barriers to student success. Some financial aid programs have coupled grant aid with interventions designed to mitigate these barriers (e.g. innovations in course delivery, curriculum or instruction, learning communities, extra academic support and advising, emergency transportation, or child care assistance). Early research suggests that these more comprehensive strategies may be even more effective than grant aid alone.[11] Lastly, research supports a variety of strategies to impact college access, persistence, and completion among youth of color, including having supportive faculty, campus environments and peers that promote a sense of belonging, culturally-appropriate services and supports that emphasize mentoring and connections with family, and on-campus employment.[12] Minority-serving institutions can play a role in improving college access, building capacity to understand culture and family and creating a supportive environment in which youth of color, particularly young men, can thrive.

Postsecondary institutions play a vital role in a variety of workforce education and training efforts, driven in part by the need to ensure students are prepared for good jobs and have a strong academic foundation. Having a postsecondary education - broadly defined as a credential beyond a high school diploma - continues to be one of the most important factors in getting a good job and advancing in the workforce. Employer demand for workers with at least some postsecondary education is expected to remain high, with nearly 65 percent of jobs requiring a postsecondary education by 2020. Yet, less than 70 percent of students graduate from high school within four years and many drop out completely, with the worst dropout rates found in low-income areas such as the South and Southwest and among African American and Latino young men.[13] Cross-system partnerships are critical among secondary and postsecondary institutions, workforce development, career-technical education, adult education, and other training and human services systems in order to ensure postsecondary success for all students, especially low-income and first generation students.

Our proposals include a range of innovations that will help ensure more low-income and first generation students persist in and complete college. Additional recommendations to the committee, submitted in August 2013, are available at http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/CLASP-Higher-Education-Comments_09-25-13.pdf. If you have any questions about these proposals, please contact Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, Senior Policy Analyst, at aduke@clasp.org, or Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant, Interim Director of Youth Policy, at rbryant@clasp.org.

Sincerely,

Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield   Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant
Senior Policy Analyst   Interim Director of Youth Policy

PROMOTING INNOVATION TO INCREASE STUDENT COMPLETION

1. **Invest in building college readiness for low-income and first generation students.**

   Given the goal of vastly increasing the number of college graduates in the nation, particular attention must be given to the needs of low-income and first generation students who are often less prepared at the start of college. Access to a rigorous high school curriculum is necessary for college success. Currently, one-third of first generation students do not take the recommended core curriculum in high school.[14] Of those who take less than the core curriculum, very few are deemed college ready in the content areas of English, reading, mathematics or science, based on ACT test scores.[15] Greater attention must be paid to the alignment of high school practice with postsecondary expectations. The ACT National Curriculum Survey found that there are substantial gaps between what postsecondary institutions required of their entering students and what high school teachers believe is important for college success.[16]

   Preparation includes not only academic content, but also understanding college culture, having strong study habits, analytical ability, and the know-how to access support when necessary. Policies in this area should fund the support of students who are identified as low-income and first generation to have strong college readiness skills, including[17]:

   - **Cognitive strategies** such as intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analytical skills, construction of well-reasoned arguments, evaluation skills, formulating hypotheses, and problem solving strategies.
   - **Content knowledge** in mathematics, science, social studies, world languages, and the arts. In addition, the ability to express oneself clearly when discussing these content areas is critical.
   - **Academic behaviors** such as self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control are critical. Students should be able to demonstrate ownership over their learning process by setting goals, persisting in courses, and communicating with instructors. Time management, organization, and participation in study groups is also key.
   - **Contextual skills and awareness** about the way in which colleges function, what is expected of students, and how to communicate is also needed. The ability to navigate college processes such as registration, financial aid, etc. is essential.

2. **Support the growth of educational models that help low-skilled, working students complete postsecondary credentials and secure good jobs.**

   Considering the projected demand for workers with higher levels of education and the known challenges for basic skill students, the goals, content, and delivery of developmental and adult education services need to be rethought. More than 60 percent of community college students are referred to at least one developmental education course upon enrolling in college, with many students being referred to a full sequence of three to five courses.[18] Yet recent research shows that prescribing long sequences of developmental education may actually be hindering student progress rather than successfully preparing students to transition to college-level work.

   Policies should promote the creation of pathways that enable students to move into postsecondary education and training programs more quickly, complete credentials, and transition into careers or to four-year colleges. For students in college occupational programs, evidence from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) points to promising models that "bridge" directly to specific

occupational certificates and degree programs through contextualized curriculum and intensive counseling and advising for students. Students in these programs are able to begin their credit-bearing course of study while simultaneously brushing up on basic reading, writing, and math skills. The use of these "bridge" models has also grown in the adult education system. Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training model, I-BEST, has received national acclaim, with evaluation results finding that that I-BEST students are 56 percent more likely to earn college credit than regular adult education students and 26 percent more likely to earn a certificate or degree.

Similarly, a study showed that students in the Community College of Denver's FastStart program performed better than the college's general remedial education students. FastStart, an accelerated developmental education program, condensed two levels of developmental education into one semester by using contextualized instruction and wraparound support services. A replication of this model for out-of-school youth through the Colorado SUN project showed similar results: even students who scored very low on basic skills assessments passed at least one level of developmental education within eight weeks, a remarkably short period for showing such results. In addition, more than 80 percent of the Colorado SUN students who met specific criteria for age and attendance enrolled in college-level courses during the program or after completing it. [19]

Congress should advance policies that foster an environment that encourages institutions of higher education to:

- Create "bridge" programs that ease the transition to postsecondary education by integrating basic skills instruction (or English language instruction) with higher-level academic content or technical skills training.
- Dually enroll basic skills students in occupational or academic coursework and their developmental or adult education courses.
- Contextualize basic skills instruction with occupational skills training or other college-level academic content.
- Require that college academic assessment be coupled with personalized academic and career guidance so that students can find the best fit for their skills and goals among developmental and adult education options connected to college and career pathways.
- Promote college-going aspirations for lower-skilled adults and youth by developing pathways, with achievable milestones, from adult education and GED to college enrollment.
- Set goals and performance measures that give developmental education and adult education programs incentives to prepare students to enroll in and succeed in college.

We recommend requiring the Department of Education provide technical assistance and grants to institutions to encourage wider experimentation with these innovative models designed specifically to transition low-skilled students to postsecondary education and help them complete certificates and degrees.

3. **Support the implementation of career pathways approaches to delivering education and training for students at all skill levels.**

Today's postsecondary education and workforce development systems were designed for different times when credentials were not required by nearly two-thirds of the workforce,[20] and lifelong learning was more avocational than a key ingredient to sustained individual economic security and global competitiveness. As such, these systems have not been designed to provide all students with a seamless path to earning credentials and, despite all good intentions, have shortcomings and disconnects that can block the road to educational and economic success. A lack of coordination

among K-12 education, higher education, and workforce education services—as well as a disconnect between traditional programs and employers' workforce needs—often results in students failing to access postsecondary options, complete postsecondary credentials and obtain good jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. The career pathways approach deepens collaboration and coordination among agencies, institutions, and organizations at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure education, training, and employment services are aligned to meet the unique needs of each participant. This approach maximizes public and private dollars to create a stronger workforce and economy. CLASP's state-led initiative, the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways, seeks to provide a common understanding of high-quality career pathways systems and programs.

CLASP's Alliance has identified three key features of career pathways:

1. Well-connected education, training, and support service offerings informed by employers and focused on specific industry sectors or occupations
2. Multiple entry points/on-ramps including for those students with limited education, skills, English and work experience (such as "bridge" programs)
3. Multiple exit points at successively higher levels of family supporting employment and aligned with subsequent entry points

Best practice programs within such career pathways have four key elements:

1. Participant-focused instruction and training that optimizes student progress and success, i.e., contextualizing academic courses to specific industries, accelerating courses, modularizing courses, and offering courses at times and locations most convenient for students, especially those who are juggling school, work, and family.
2. Appropriate and meaningful assessment of student's entering education and skill levels, competencies and skills gained in the program, and supportive service needs.
3. Supportive services and career navigation, including personal supports, academic supports, career exploration, guidance, etc.
4. Direct connections to employment such as internships, job shadowing, resume help, mock interviews, and job search assistance.

Over a dozen states have implemented some sort of career pathways effort including Arkansas, California, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. And dozens more local institutions within and outside these states have begun to adopt career pathways. The partnerships in these states and communities include postsecondary education institutions, workforce development agencies, adult education providers, and supportive service providers – all coming together to provide seamless pathways for students of all ages, educational levels, and family backgrounds. States and local areas have leveraged funding from various sources including workforce development, adult education, and career and technical education to support these career pathways. Some have leveraged student financial aid; however, much more needs to be done to fully maximize student aid support for these programs and the students in them.

Congress should direct the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to issue guidance clarifying that career pathway programs and students are eligible for federal student aid. The Department of Education should test expanding student aid eligibility to competency-based credential programs, to prior-learning assessment activities in which students can earn credit for prior education and training, and to cover the cost of credential and licensing tests. In addition, Congress should encourage the postsecondary education units within ED to work more closely with the Department's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services to better coordinate federal higher education and student financial aid polices with ongoing career pathways activities in those departments. Additionally, Congress should reinstate federal student aid for students who lack a high school diploma or equivalent but can prove their "ability to benefit" from college (for more details, see final recommendation below).

4. **Create culturally appropriate programs that provide wraparound services and other supports to increase college access and completion for young men of color.**

   Findings from higher education literature suggest a wide range of factors that impede college access, participation, and achievement of young men of color. For example, African Americans often lack of teacher and counselor encouragement to enroll in college. And across African-American, Native American, and Latino student groups, issues of overpopulation in special education and low academic achievement negatively impact postsecondary participation. While there is limited higher education research on Asian American student experiences, emerging literature suggests perceptions of campus climate affect mental health and depression and Asian American males are more likely than women to be depressed and the least likely to seek help.[21] There are several successful state and campus-based innovations underway that have demonstrated signs of progress toward post-secondary access and achievement for communities of color, including young men. Federal higher education policy should encourage and fund the expansion of these types of approaches to address racial and gender inequality in higher education. (See examples of model programs in Appendix A.)

5. **Pilot a national, voluntary *Compact for College Completion* for students and colleges.**

   An ever-growing body of research has found that need-based grant aid increases access and persistence among undergraduate students. But financial aid combined with other interventions—such as innovations in course delivery, curriculum or instruction, learning communities, financial incentives, extra academic support and advising, emergency transportation or child care aid, and others—may have an even larger effect.[22]

   Congress should support a national, voluntary pilot program, *The Compact for College Completion,* designed to maximize the impact of these promising strategies that have been shown to contribute to higher completion rates. The Compact would provide additional funds and national recognition to students and colleges that agree to partner with the federal government on increasing completion. While the scope of the initiative would depend on available funding, the intent is to pilot the Compact for College Completion with a large number of students within selected colleges to increase the impact on each institution as a whole. Only students at Compact colleges would be eligible. Compact partner roles and responsibilities would be as follows:

   - The **federal government** would provide grants to students—Compact Scholars—and funding to colleges. It would also facilitate technical assistance to share research and promising practices among Compact colleges. The Department of Education would monitor the success of Compact institutions and explore the feasibility of a rigorous evaluation of the program design.

   - **Students** (College Compact Scholars) would receive national recognition and a $500 per semester Compact Scholarship, as long as they remained continuously enrolled in college (whether full-time or part-time and excluding summers) and meet satisfactory standards for academic progress. Students who make progress in a program of study within the first two years of college could receive an additional Success Bonus of $500. Scholars must be enrolled in a Compact college, be income-eligible for Pell Grants, and have unmet financial need.

- **Colleges** that join the Compact would receive $500 each semester for every Compact Scholar enrolled at the institution and an additional $500 completion bonus for every Scholar who ultimately completes. As a condition of receiving funds, colleges would implement evidence-based approaches to improving completion for Scholars. This funding structure rewards colleges for keeping Scholars continuously enrolled, for their progress, and for their completions.

Funding for the Compact could be found in revenue savings that result from simplifying existing tax-based student aid, as proposed in CLASP's 2013 report *Reforming Student Aid* and the scope of the pilot could be adjusted to fit available funding. For more information on *The Compact for College Completion*, see *Reforming Student Aid: How to Simplify Tax Aid and Use Performance Metrics to Improve College Choices and Completion.*

INCREASE COLLEGE ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY FOR LOW-INCOME DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

6. **Restore eligibility for federal student aid for students who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency but are able to demonstrate their "ability to benefit" from postsecondary education by passing a federally-approved assessment or completing at least 6 credit hours that are applicable toward a degree or certificate.**

   As of July 1, 2012, newly-enrolled college students without a high school diploma or secondary school equivalent are no longer eligible for federal student aid, due to the elimination of the "Ability to Benefit" (ATB) options by Congress through the passage of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2012*. Previously, students without a high school diploma or secondary school equivalent could become eligible for federal financial aid by demonstrating their readiness for postsecondary education by either passing a skills test or successfully completing six college credits. Students who qualified under either of these options were eligible to receive student financial aid (depending on their further income eligibility) for the remainder of their college certificate or degree program.

   The loss of ATB has threatened the economic mobility of low-skilled adults and youth seeking postsecondary credentials to improve their job prospects. Forcing students who can benefit from college now to sequentially earn a high school equivalency and only then, a postsecondary credential, drags out their educational pathway, prolonging their time to degree and access to good wages to support their families. Furthermore, it is disproportionately harmful to low-income, first generation, and minority students. An estimated 31 percent of ATB students are Hispanic and 19 percent are Black–compared to 14 percent of all undergraduates who are Hispanic or Black.[23] And finally, it also inhibits college innovations aimed at accelerating the path to completion, such as career pathway and basic skills bridge strategies.[24]

   Congress should swiftly and fully restore ATB through HEA reauthorization, while exploring opportunities to partially or fully restore ATB provisions for select students or programs of study prior to reauthorization. Efforts have already been made in the Senate to re-instate ATB for students in eligible "career pathways programs."

Appendix A

- *University System of Georgia's African-American Male Initiative* (AAMI) – After data revealed the college-going rates for African American males was far below white counterparts and African American females, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) launched the AAMI in 2002. A statewide model for enhancing the matriculation and graduation of African American males, the AAMI has 36 programs on 26 of the USG's 35 campuses, engaging and supporting young black men in college life. Since its inception, the USG has seen the African-American male enrollment climb by over 80 percent. Significant improvements have also been made in college graduation rates and the number of bachelor's degrees conferred annually to black males at USG institutions.[25]

- *Todd A. Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male at Ohio State University (OSU)[26]* – Established in 2005 as an outgrowth of a campus initiative to improve retention rates among black men, the Center helps to create a sense of community and connectedness for OSU's African American male students, offering opportunities for leadership and civic engagement, mentorship, rites of passage experiences to engage with peers and gain positive recognition. Significant improvements in student satisfaction, performance and retention are seen as contributors of the recent increase in graduation rates among the university's black male students – which rose 24 percentage points to 67 percent in the past five years.[27]

- *The Puente Project[28]* – Employing both college preparatory, transition and campus support strategies, the Puente Project has motivating and supported thousands of students (primarily Latino) in Californian to thrive academically in high schools and on community college campuses. While not exclusively focused on males, its tenets support recognized approaches to positively impact Latino male postsecondary success – including a focus on multicultural and Latino culture and literature; preparing academic plans and professional goals; and mentoring and leadership development. Evaluations findings of the project reveal positive impacts on Puente participants' college-going rates and persistence in school.[29]

- *Tribal Colleges Breaking Through Initiative* - A partnership of Jobs for the Future, the National Council for Workforce Education, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, was an 18-month initiative focused on piloting workforce and education strategies to better serve low-skilled students at tribal colleges and universities. The initiative integrated widely-used accelerated and contextualized learning approaches (i.e. I-BEST, bridge programs, stackable credentials) with recognized culturally appropriate methods. These methods included utilizing tribal members as faculty and mentors and understanding implications and challenges of off-reservation employment. [30]

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