

Connecting Low-Income Students to Good Jobs and Careers

Introduction

In today's globally competitive economy, low-income students, students of color, opportunity youth, and adult learners need education and training to secure family-sustaining jobs and careers. Since the Great Recession, the economy has added 11.6 million jobs. Ninety-nine percent of them have gone to workers with at least some college education.¹ People without postsecondary credentials will have greater difficulty accessing good jobs in the future.

Millions of college students do not fit the "traditional" student profile of a full-time student transitioning directly from high school to a four-year college or university. Fifty-one percent of undergraduates are independent, 40 percent are adults age 25 or older, 27 percent work full time, and 26 percent are parents.² These students are often juggling work and/or family obligations and need flexible schedules and high-quality education delivery systems that meet their needs.

Given these national trends, the Higher Education Act (HEA) can promote connections to work by supporting linkages to career pathways that help youth and adults with barriers to employment obtain postsecondary credentials that lead to family-sustaining jobs with the potential for career advancement. HEA also has the potential to support partnerships between higher education, the workforce system, and industry. This would help them develop training programs that teach skills and competencies demanded by employers.

CLASP Principles for Connections to Work and Career Opportunities

- Create incentives for states and institutions to promote career pathways, dual enrollment approaches, recognized postsecondary credentials, and strong employment outcomes for low-income students, adult learners, and young adults who have been disconnected from school and work.
- Ensure quality and accountability standards for apprenticeships, short-term education and training programs, competency-based education, and online instruction at public, private, and for-profit institutions.
- Expand Pell eligibility to high-quality short-term training programs that lead to family-sustaining jobs and career pathways.
- HEA must recognize the role of higher education institutions in workforce development and occupational skills.

Fund state and institutional investments in workforce development

Provide funding to states and institutions to adopt frameworks that incentivize career pathways, dual enrollment approaches, and recognized postsecondary credentials and employment outcomes. Models to consider are the Grants to Eligible States for Community Colleges program, which was included in the introduced Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act in 2009.

Expand Pell grant eligibility for short-term training programs

Expand Pell eligibility for students enrolled in high-quality short-term training programs that are at least 150 clock hours of instruction time over a period of at least 8 weeks. Ensure these programs are recognized as valuable by employers and/or industry partnerships; meet standards established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA); equip students with licenses, certifications, or credentials that meet the hiring requirements of multiple employers; and encourage institutions to align these programs with broader career pathways. CLASP supports S. 206, the bipartisan Jumpstart Our Businesses By Supporting Students (JOBS) Act.

Modernize and upgrade data collection

Expand data collection and disaggregation by creating a student-level collection system to build a more complete picture of students who receive Pell grants, are in developmental or competency-based education, or who mix their enrollment. A modernized system can provide data on labor market outcomes for programs of study. These steps would greatly expand our understanding of experiences and market outcomes for students of color, low-income students, and underprepared students. CLASP Supports the College Transparency Act of 2017 (H.R. 2434 and S.1121).

Aid States and institutions in codifying programs for underprepared youth and adults

Given the projected demand for skilled workers with higher levels of education and the challenges of underprepared students, Congress must support high-quality programs and best practices designed to serve low-skilled students, such as the Business Workforce Partnerships (Section 803) and Bridges from Jobs to Careers (Section 851).

Clarify the minimum program length financial aid eligibility requirement

Many higher education institutions are unclear about current minimum program length durations, particularly what they mean for programs of study that are part of a career pathway and award an interim credential before these thresholds are met. Congress must clarify how these programs can be made eligible for financial aid.

Endnotes

¹ Anthony P. Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gullish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Americas-Divided-Recovery-web.pdf>

² "College Students Aren't Who You Think They Are," Center for Law and Social Policy, June 2017. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/fact-sheet/college-students-arent-who-you-think-they-are>