



## **New Democrat Coalition Higher Education Priorities**

A top-quality education is one of the most powerful tools for upward mobility. Today, 65% of all U.S. jobs require some form of education and training beyond high school, which is why we need to strengthen our higher education system to ensure that every student has access to and is able to complete some form of postsecondary education. While we must find ways to make college more affordable and reduce loan debt, we must also make sure students are able to earn a degree that equips them with the skills they need to make competitive wages and pay off their loans. This means providing better information to students about which institutions will best serve their needs and help them succeed. We also need innovative solutions that make postsecondary education more attainable, more affordable, and more attuned to the needs of today's students, who balance multiple responsibilities and are older and more diverse than previous generations. When a person enrolls in college and does their best to succeed there should be a reasonable expectation that they will graduate, gain valuable skills, be safe, financially whole, and leave prepared to start a career. For the U.S. to maintain its competitive edge internationally and remain the top destination for talent from other countries, we must double down on investments in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at all levels of the education system, expand opportunities for those who face barriers to full participation in higher education, and ensure educators have the tools they need to prepare students to succeed. Our colleges and universities are the envy of the world, and when we fully commit to building and supporting higher education institutions that work for all Americans, we can ensure they stay that way.

### **Make Higher Education More Accessible and Affordable**

We face a challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As more jobs require a higher level of skills, more and more students cannot access higher education or are faced with an unsustainable load of debt. Seven million of those borrowers are in default and many more are behind on their payments. Borrowers face crushing financial obligations and student loan debt has surpassed credit card debt as one of the largest sources of household debt. In particular, low- and middle-income students face the greatest obstacles to attaining an affordable education and sustainably repaying loans. The Department of Education has noted that by 2020, nearly two-thirds of job openings will require some form of higher education, illustrating how critical it is that we craft policies that make it easier for every person, no matter their economic background or whether their parents attended college, to pursue and complete a post-secondary degree. Policies that will help address these needs include:

#### **Improving Accessibility and Affordability**

- Increase the buying power of the Pell Grant program by enabling year-round funding assistance, expanding funding for low-income students, strengthening long-term funding streams, and increasing Pell awards to cover the cost of attending public institutions.
- Increase Pell eligibility transparency so students can make more informed choices about their postsecondary options.
- Permanently extend the Federal Perkins Loan Program to increase predictability for those receiving low-interest loans.
- Create incentives, such as federal-state-partnerships, for states to invest in higher education and increase student aid.
- Codify initiatives that allow students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) earlier and streamline the application by linking it with IRS data.
- Bolster college and career counseling services that support access and completion, especially for students in underserved schools.
- Help post-secondary institutions provide support services such as transportation and child care services.
- Increase access to Adult Basic Education to put adults on a path to obtain a two or four year degree.
- Make it easier for colleges to offer, and for students to complete, three-year degree programs.

#### **Increasing Opportunities for First Generation Students and Veterans**

- Support dual and concurrent enrollment programs that let students earn college credit in high school, introduce them to rigorous coursework, and make the high school to college transition easier.
- Foster a two-year to four-year institution pipeline through clear articulation agreements to ensure seamless college credit transfer and enrollment.
- Increase access to college and career counselors in high school who can demystify the college application process, including the process of applying for financial aid.
- Expand initiatives for disadvantaged students, such as Federal TRIO Programs, that prepare students for college and support completion through tutoring, cultural enrichment, counseling, work-study programs, and financial literacy.
- Take steps to expand educational opportunities for veterans as they pursue jobs and transition to new careers.
- Encourage states to expand financial support for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)-eligible students.



### **Reducing the Burden of Student Loan Debt**

- Enable students – especially low- and middle-income students - to refinance federal student loans with more affordable interest rates.
- Streamline and simplify the process of enrolling in income-based repayment plans to increase borrower engagement and reduce defaults.
- Support new and existing provisions in the federal tax code that encourage saving for higher education, help students and families pay for education, assist with repayment of student loans, and provide tax relief for forgiven debt.
- Work with post-secondary institutions to find innovative ways to reduce the cost of attendance.
- Reform the Federal Work Study program to allow students to get job experience in their fields of study.
- Incentivize participation in STEM areas through expanding student loan forgiveness for those who commit to public service in a critical technology field.
- Create minimum customer service standards for loan servicers to ensure every student has the information they need to pay back their loans.
- Allow young entrepreneurs who start businesses in distressed communities to defer loan payments on undergraduate debt without accruing interest for up to three years.
- Encourage employers to provide student loan repayment assistance to help employees pay off outstanding debt.

### **Fully Prepare Students for Higher Education and the Workforce**

For many Americans who struggle to make ends meet, earning a postsecondary certificate or degree is the ticket to the middle class. However, we must ensure that students begin their time in post-secondary education fully equipped to take advantage of the opportunities that will allow them to thrive in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. This means we must develop policies that encourage young people to pursue interests in STEM-related fields and other high-growth sectors. A key component of fully preparing the next generation of students must include boosting the teaching profession and reversing the drastic fall in enrollment at teacher preparation schools nationwide. New guidance should focus on supporting programs to be nimble enough to personalize education for their teachers and local communities, rather than over-regulating or taking punitive steps. Steps to improve workforce readiness and better prepare the next generation of teachers include:

### **Aligning Education and Workforce Needs**

- Promote technical training, job-readiness programs, and other career pathways for students by fostering partnerships between educational institutions, small businesses, and industry leaders.
- Increase access to apprenticeship programs that align with courses of study.
- Provide high-quality courses for mid-career workers and veterans looking to hone basic skills so they can succeed in community college or worker training programs.
- Ensure that our manufacturers, high-tech companies, and small businesses have access to the skilled workforce they need to power their companies.

### **Reforming Teacher Preparation**

- Increase mentorship for teachers and principals by creating new opportunities for residencies with experienced educators and administrators while fostering better ongoing support mechanisms for the first two years on the job.
- Robustly support the funding, implementation, and dissemination of teacher advancement tracks that have demonstrated effectiveness in their ability to increase teacher retention and improve teacher professional development.
- Develop and deploy teacher performance assessments that prioritize knowledge of culturally relevant teaching methods, racial and socioeconomic privilege and bias, and English language learner support.
- Incentivize more people to pursue careers in the teaching profession and increase the number of teachers in areas where there are shortages by improving the mobility of teacher licenses between states.
- Increase teacher diversity through recruiting, supporting, and retaining educators from underrepresented backgrounds.
- Reform student loan repayment models to provide clear and tangible incentives for teachers to stay in the classroom.



### **Make Higher Education More Effective, Accountable, and Inclusive**

Higher education is one of the best investments a student can make. That's why families often invest thousands of dollars of their own money in higher education and the federal government spends billions of dollars on higher education every year. While we know higher education is a smart investment, students often know very little about how an individual institution will serve them. Without being overly burdensome, we need to streamline cumbersome and costly regulations, cut red tape, and consider new policies that focus on higher education accountability, transparency, and academics. Likewise, new policies should work outside the box and encourage flexibility and new learning models while providing sufficient oversight to prevent fraud or abuse. Finally, our policies should do more to boost opportunities for today's students, including women and people of color. Women comprise over half of the undergraduate population, while enrollment of people of color has more than doubled since 1990. Studies show that diversity in the classroom and workforce fosters innovation, collaboration, and creativity. Policies to address these priorities include:

#### **Encouraging Innovation**

- Expand models of high-quality competency-based education that allow students to progress through a degree based on demonstrated knowledge rather than class time, and can effectively lower costs and provide more flexibility.
- Give students the freedom to pursue their own best options for learning by promoting alternative forms of higher education that allow individuals to more effectively demonstrate mastery to prospective employers.
- Increase access to high-performing short-term certification programs, such as coding boot camps, to all students, especially women, people of color, and low-income students.
- Support high-quality open textbooks, open education resources, and digital course materials, which can save students thousands of dollars in textbook and associated costs.
- Strengthen and make permanent components of the tax code that incentivize ground-breaking research at universities.

#### **Supporting Accountability**

- Build on the success of the College Scorecard through a comprehensive, user-friendly website that gives consumers more information about student success at an institution and program level, including retention rates, completion rates, and data about a student's ability to find employment and repay their loans after earning a degree.
- Hold accreditors accountable so federal dollars go to institutions and programs with records of success.
- Update and streamline data reporting systems by reforming the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), creating connections across federal data systems, and collecting more reliable, student-level data that maintains a student's privacy by keeping data secure.
- Develop minimum accountability standards for making college more affordable, increasing access for middle and low-income students, and providing value to students.
- Foster the use of data systems that disaggregate student data by Pell, Stafford, and GI benefit status, so families, policymakers, and researchers know which institutions are fully serving these groups.

#### **Expand Opportunity, Promote Diversity, and Support a Positive Campus Climate**

- Implement effective measures to address violence and sexual assault on school campuses, including prevention and response tactics.
- Encourage women and people of color to enter and remain in STEM and other fields in which they are underrepresented.
- Increase funding for Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to promote positive educational outcomes.
- Recognize and reward schools that take in a high concentration of Pell students and help them succeed.