



Republican Priorities for Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act

House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Introduction

America offers the most diverse system of postsecondary education in the world, with more than 6,000 public, private, non-profit, and proprietary institutions of higher education. This diversity affords students from all backgrounds an opportunity to find an institution that meets their unique needs and helps them pursue personal goals of continuing their education. While institutions, states, and the federal government provide innumerable benefits to support students in higher education, the federal government can pursue reforms to further help students attain a postsecondary education and improve the integrity of the education available to maintain America as the most powerful, productive, and prosperous country in the world.

Since the last reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), the higher education landscape has been constantly evolving with the student population rapidly changing and institutions developing more cost-effective modes for delivering academic content. The upcoming reauthorization provides policymakers an opportunity to improve the law and strengthen America's postsecondary system to ensure federal policies are flexible enough to allow future developments and innovations to occur.

In 2013, bipartisan leaders on the Committee on Education and the Workforce (committee) called upon students, parents, college leaders, and other higher education stakeholders to share their views on policies and improvements that should be included in the reauthorization of the HEA. The committee has held 14 hearings and invited dozens of witnesses to discuss a wide variety of issues facing students, families, and institutions of higher education (institutions).

Based on the feedback received from the public and the committee's desire to reform the law in a way that will assist students in obtaining an affordable higher education leading to employment opportunities, the committee will promote reforms that adhere to the following principles:

- Empowering students and families to make informed decisions;
- Simplifying and improving student aid;
- Promoting innovation, access, and completion; and
- Ensuring strong accountability and a limited federal role.

Reform will help more Americans achieve their dreams of a postsecondary education and help secure a more prosperous future for the country.

Empowering Students and Families to Make Informed Decisions

Selecting a college or university is a personal decision for students and their families. As students begin their search for the right institution, they often consider factors unrelated to the actual academic performance of an institution, and instead rely on other factors like how close the school is to home and the recommendations of family and friends. Many students are also unaware of the resources available to help make a fully informed decision.

To further complicate matters, available data does not include a large portion of the current college-going population or capture information students, families, and policymakers need to view the entire landscape of higher education. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) collects a host of required data from institutions. There are numerous federal transparency initiatives currently available that display much of the IPEDS data, such as the College Navigator website and the College Scorecard. However, instead of providing students clarity, these initiatives often add more confusion by presenting conflicting information and providing limited ability to compare different education options.

Access to better information will empower students with the knowledge they need to make smart decisions in the college marketplace. The very nature of federal higher education support – primarily financial assistance students use at the institution of their choice – demands that accountability serve the consumer. A number of basic reforms would help students make a more informed decision. For example, information collected by IPEDS must be improved and the delivery of information streamlined to reduce confusion. Additionally, enhancing financial literacy services would help students better understand the options available to pay for their college education.

Improving IPEDS

In order to be eligible to participate in federal financial aid programs under the HEA, colleges and universities are required to complete the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) IPEDS survey.¹ Currently, IPEDS requires institutions to complete 13 separate surveys capturing over 350 pages of data.² Even with this vast data collection by the federal government, many critical pieces of information are omitted or do not reflect the makeup of the current college-going population.

¹ *The Higher Education Act of 1965*, P.L. 89-329 §487(a)(17).

² *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*, National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/about/>.

The “traditional student” – the first-time, full-time student directly out of high school – is giving way to the “non-traditional,” or contemporary, student as the new majority of students pursuing higher education. Contemporary students tend to be older, have families or jobs, and may be looking to quickly update their skills to reenter the workforce or find new career opportunities. Between 2000 and 2011, the growth of contemporary students over the age of 25 outpaced the growth of total enrollment (41 percent versus 32 percent, respectively).³ Current policies do not reflect these sweeping changes.

Key information for several populations of students, such as the completion rates of Pell Grant recipients, is also missing. As more institutions serve contemporary students, those students deserve information that accurately reflects the student body at each institution. The IPEDS data collection must be updated so it captures more than just first-time, full-time students. It is time to improve our knowledge of all student populations to accurately determine whether the taxpayer investment in student aid is improving access and completion for students.

Streamlining Information for Students

The federal government plays an important role in ensuring students and families have information available to assist in selecting the college or university they determine will meet their unique needs. However, students and families often do not use any of the resources provided by the federal government. If students and families wish to use these federal resources, they are confronted with a deluge of information that is often conflicting, confusing, and redundant. For example, the College Navigator uses data from IPEDS to show the average annual borrowing for all undergraduates, while the College Scorecard and the Shopping Sheet use data from the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) to show median level of indebtedness for undergraduates.

Information becomes useless if it is too complicated or consumers are unable to compare accurate descriptions of different institutions. Streamlining existing transparency efforts at the federal level would reduce confusion for students. Toward that end, federal agencies must coordinate more effectively, avoid duplication, and deliver information to consumers in a way that is easier to understand. Through these efforts, students will have access to better information, institutions will spend less time filling out unnecessary paperwork, and the data collected will more accurately reflect the college-going population.

Enhancing Financial Literacy

After prospective students choose an institution, they must then determine how they will pay for their education. With tuition prices increasing and economic pressures faced by graduates mounting, responsibly financing a higher education has never been more critical. However, many students are unprepared to navigate the complex maze of loans and grants offered at the federal, state, private-sector, and institutional levels. Many also struggle to manage the repayment of the loans they used to pay for their education. Student financial literacy is vital to reversing this trend, yet current efforts are falling short.

For example, current law requires only those students receiving federal student loans to complete entrance and exit counseling regarding the terms and conditions of their loans. Students who receive only a Pell Grant do not. Additionally, counseling is often provided to

³ “Fast Facts: Postsecondary and Beyond,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>.

students after they arrive on campus, rather than before they sign up for college loans. More robust and timely financial literacy support must be available.

Enhanced financial literacy will help students understand the obligations they can expect after graduation. To achieve this goal, financial counseling should be more readily available, more inclusive of additional student populations, and more comprehensive by including consumer-tested financial management information.

Preventing a Federal Government Rating System

Members of the committee are deeply concerned about the Postsecondary Institution Ratings System (PIRS) being developed by the Department of Education. This is an attempt by the administration to rate institutions based on access, affordability, and student outcomes. The administration is then expected to tie these ratings to an institution's eligibility to participate in federal financial aid programs. While we must increase transparency, it is not the role of the federal government to impose a one-size-fits-all formula that arbitrarily rates institutions, especially when we know that selecting a college or university is a uniquely personal decision for each student and family. The PIRS will unfairly judge our nation's diverse colleges and universities, restrict consumer choice, confuse families, and limit postsecondary options for low- and middle-income students. Rather than implementing an arbitrary ratings scheme that attempts to dictate students' needs, the federal government should provide useful information so students can make the best possible decision.

Simplifying and Improving Student Aid

The federal government offers students and families various forms of financial aid, such as Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, PLUS loans, and campus-based programs. In the 2012-2013 academic year, the federal government disbursed roughly \$135 billion in various grants and loans.⁴ Despite this substantial taxpayer investment, it is unclear whether these aid programs are helping students complete their postsecondary education. These programs were first implemented to provide access to college for low-income individuals. We remain committed to achieving this fundamental goal, but it is time to reform these programs to encourage more completion for these students and better results for taxpayers.

The confusing maze of federal student grant and loan programs is difficult to navigate for many low-income and first-generation students. These programs need to be streamlined and simplified so students can easily understand the options available to responsibly finance their college careers, while also being mindful of what their student loan obligations will be after graduation. Additionally, contemporary students need flexible programs that accommodate their lifestyles and chosen courses of study.

Policymakers should also work to strengthen the integrity of the federal financial aid programs, making sure taxpayer dollars are supporting students who need help the most and that these important programs are sustainable for future generations.

⁴ *Trends in Student Aid*, The CollegeBoard, 2013, available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/student-aid-2013-full-report-140108.pdf>.

One Grant, One Loan, and One Work-Study Program

Over the past 50 years, the federal government has created a confusing amalgam of grant and loan programs that often have duplicative missions or serve similar populations of students. While the goal of each HEA reauthorization has followed the original intent of serving low-income families, this patchwork system of federal student aid has left many students confused about the best options available to responsibly pay for their college education.

For example, from the federal government alone a student can receive a Pell Grant, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (SEOG), subsidized or unsubsidized Stafford Direct Loan, gradPLUS or parentPLUS Direct Loan, Perkins Loan, and Federal Work-Study funds, each with its own set of rules and eligibility requirements. Some programs award aid to a student to attend the institution of his or her choice, while others provide funds directly to institutions that in turn disburse aid to eligible students selected by the institution. On top of all the federal programs, many students are also eligible for state and institutional aid, again with separate sets of rules and eligibility requirements.

Confusion has led many students to doubt they can afford to attend a college or university. Research consistently shows one of the greatest barriers to higher education for low-income students is the perception that a postsecondary degree is unaffordable.⁵ To make matters worse, many students do not have family members equipped to offer advice, since many parents and relatives never went to college.⁶

The financial aid system must be simplified. Converting financial aid to a “one grant and one loan” structure would consolidate existing grant programs into one Pell Grant program and all existing loan programs into one Stafford loan. Simplifying the application and eligibility process for federal student aid, including using income data from two years prior to the date of application, also known as prior-prior year, would provide students more timely information about available aid. Creating a direct link between the online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and the Internal Revenue Service would help students more easily complete their applications for federal financial aid.

The Federal Work-Study program has also made an important contribution toward the postsecondary careers of students. A simplified student aid system, coupled with more robust financial literacy counseling and continued support for the Federal-Work Study program, will help students and families gain a full understanding of the financial implications of their higher education decision.

Streamlining Repayment Options for Students

The federal government administers eight student loan repayment programs.⁷ Four of these programs are based on a borrower’s income, commonly referred to as income-based repayment (IBR), and each program has its own set of confusing eligibility requirements, terms, and conditions. Some IBR plans were created in statute and others were created by

⁵ Hahn, Ryan D., and Dr. Derek Price. “College-Qualified Students Who Don’t Enroll in College.” Institute for Higher Education Policy (2008). <http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/publications/m-r/PromiseLostCollegeQualrpt.pdf>.

⁶ In academic year 2011-2012, almost 42 percent of Pell Grant recipients had parents with only a high school diploma or less, compared to 25 percent of students who did not receive Pell. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:12).

⁷ The repayment plans include the following: standard repayment, graduated repayment, extended repayment, income-based repayment, income-contingent repayment, income-sensitive repayment, Pay As You Earn repayment, and an alternate repayment plan established by the Secretary of Education.

administrative fiat. While repayment options are vital, options can be improved to help borrowers make better decisions about repaying their student debt and to ensure taxpayers are not left with billions in unpaid loans.

Current federal policies often encourage students to take on an irresponsible amount of debt, as documented in a recent report by the New America Foundation.⁸ Even the Obama administration admits the cost of its unilateral repayment schemes are skyrocketing and proposed changes to help rein in costs.⁹

Streamlining repayment plans into two options – a standard repayment plan and a modified income-based repayment plan – will better serve taxpayers and students. The standard repayment plan will remain the same and provide borrowers with a predictable monthly payment for up to 10 years. The modified IBR plan will provide relief to struggling borrowers by capping their monthly payments at a percentage of their discretionary income. This option will also prevent borrowers from defaulting on student loans, an issue that is becoming more and more troubling.¹⁰

Making the Pell Grant Program More Flexible for Today's Students

The Pell Grant program is the cornerstone of all federal student financial aid for low-income students. The program has seen changes over the past 40 years but has never been modernized to address the unique needs of contemporary students. The program must be reformed to allow all students – both traditional and contemporary students – to draw down federal grant aid at their own pace throughout their undergraduate education.

The “Flex Pell Grant” would allow a student to learn of the amount of Pell funds he or she is eligible to receive over a six year period and then be able to draw funds as needed until the student either completes his or her academic program or exhausts the allotted funds. This policy would allow an annual adjustment to the student’s awarded funds if his or her economic situation changes from year to year. The Flex Pell Grant would better address the needs of the contemporary student, who may not be attending classes on the traditional academic schedule; it would incentivize continuous enrollment, as well as higher retention and graduation rates for all students in the Pell Grant program.

Ensuring the Long-Term Stability of the Pell Grant Program

The Pell Grant program is the largest program administered by the Department of Education and its cost has increased by nearly 300 percent over the last eight years (rising from \$12.8 billion in 2006 to \$31.8 billion in 2014). The rapid growth of the program was caused by a perfect storm of factors: the recent economic downturn that led to increased enrollment at institutions and greater demand for Pell Grants; eligibility expansions enacted in recent years;¹¹ and a significant increase in the maximum award.¹² Instead of addressing the cost

⁸ Delisle, Jason and Alex Holt, *Safety Net or Windfall?: Examining Changes to Income-Based Repayment for Federal Student Loans*, New America Foundation, October 2012, available at http://edmoney.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/NAF_Income_Based_Repayment.pdf.

⁹ The income-based repayment plan had an initial estimate of \$1.7 billion but was re-estimated to cost \$7.6 billion – a 347 percent increase. “White House Ups Cost Estimate for Income-Based Repayment,” *EdCentral*, April 16, 2014, available at <http://www.edcentral.org/white-house-ups-cost-estimate-income-based-repayment/#sthash.8hHVxv4e.dpuf>.

¹⁰ The three-year cohort default rate is 14.7 percent. “Three-Year Official Cohort Default Rates for Schools,” *Federal Student Aid*, U.S. Department of Education, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/defaultmanagement/cdr.html>.

¹¹ *College Cost Reduction and Access Act*, P.L. 110-84; *Higher Education Opportunity Act*, P.L. 110-315; and *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (SAFRA Act)*, P.L. 111-152.

drivers of the Pell Grant program, in 2007 Congress further exacerbated the rising cost of the program, and it is now expected to face a funding gap in a just few short years.¹³

Since the Pell Grant program was recklessly expanded, its ability to serve the neediest students is now in jeopardy. The program must be put back on stable footing to ensure it can help low-income students for generations to come.

Promoting Innovation, Access, and Completion

The cost of attending college has risen dramatically over the past decade. In-state tuition and fees at public four-year colleges and universities increased by approximately 51 percent. Tuition and fees at public two-year institutions and private four-year colleges and universities have also increased by approximately 35 percent and 25 percent, respectively. In the last year alone, the annual cost of attending the average private, non-profit institution rose to more than \$30,000.¹⁴

The responsibility for controlling cost rests with the leaders of each institution. It has never been nor should it be the role of the federal government to dictate college costs or set price controls over tuition and fees. However, policymakers must recognize each federal rule and reporting requirement carries its own cost that is ultimately passed along to students. The federal government can help control costs by removing unnecessary and burdensome requirements. Federal impediments that prevent institutions from delivering higher education in more creative, cost-effective ways must be eliminated.

Encouraging innovation will allow more states and institutions to offer less costly, more relevant degrees and limit the burden placed on schools by unnecessary reporting and regulatory requirements. Doing so will open the door to a college education for more Americans, but simply opening the door is not enough. Stronger policies are also needed to encourage all students who start a postsecondary education to complete their experience with a degree.

Encouraging Online Learning

Online education is one innovative method that is bringing postsecondary education to those who would be unable to attend college if they had to adhere to a traditional academic program. Many students today are in the workforce, have families to care for, or live too far from campus to attend class. They require programs that offer flexible schedules that can be delivered in their homes. In 2012, more than 7.1 million students took at least one online course during the fall term, an increase of 412,000 students over the previous year alone.¹⁵ Despite the growing demand for online education, recent regulations would make it more difficult for students across the country to receive such an education from the institution of their choice. Laws and federal regulations should not deny students' access to online education.

¹² The Pell Grant maximum award increased from \$4,050 in 2006 to \$5,730 in 2014.

¹³ The Pell Grant program is expected to face a \$2.25 billion funding gap in FY 2017. *Discretionary Baseline, Cumulative Surplus/Shortfall, and Funding Gap of the Federal Pell Grant Program – CBO's April 2014 Baseline*, Congressional Budget Office, April 2014, available at http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/44199-2014-04-Pell_Grant.pdf.

¹⁴ Trends in College Pricing, The CollegeBoard, 2013, p. 10, available at <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/college-pricing-2013-full-report-140108.pdf>.

¹⁵ Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States, The Sloan Consortium, 2013, available at <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradechange.pdf>.

Encouraging Competency-Based Education

Regulators and institutions of higher education have traditionally used “credit hours” to measure student progress. This made sense when “seat time” was the best proxy for learning. However, the value of measuring time rather than actual learning gains has been called into question as competency-based models of education grow in popularity. Such programs define a collection of skills necessary for a given field of work, create assessments to measure them, and provide students with course materials, instructional mentors and tutors, and proctored exams that are aligned with the competencies.

The idea of competency-based education is not an entirely new concept.¹⁶ In 2005, Congress permitted an instructional program that uses direct assessment of a student’s learning to be eligible to participate in federal student aid programs. While the regulations to implement this new allowance were promulgated seven years ago, the department only began to approve a small group of competency-based programs in 2013.

The federal government should support institutions as they explore new ways of providing education to students. Toward that end, a competency-based education demonstration project will allow the department to waive statutory and regulatory impediments to competency-based education. By requiring evaluations of the various demonstrate projects, the public will know which models of competency-based education work and which ones do not.

Supporting At-Risk and Minority Students

The federal government spends billions of taxpayer dollars helping at-risk students prepare for higher education and manage the costs associated with earning a degree. More must be done at the state, local, and institutional level to ensure every low-income and first-generation student has the support necessary to earn a postsecondary degree.

In recent years, a number of colleges and universities enhanced support services to disadvantaged students. Some schools implemented additional counseling programs to help students manage their coursework and degree costs. Others took steps to better understand students’ needs and capabilities, and then provide necessary tutoring or curricula adjustments. Policies should encourage these efforts to better support these students.

The *Higher Education Act* also authorizes various programs to assist low-income and first-generation students in accessing and completing postsecondary education. Assistance is provided primarily through grants to states, localities, institutions, and community organizations. These programs typically fit into two categories: (1) college access programs that provide early outreach and student services geared towards helping low-income and first-generation students graduate from high school and higher education; and (2) institutional aid programs that provide direct support to community colleges and minority-serving institutions that educate high populations of disadvantaged students.

Organizations and institutions play a unique role in helping at-risk students; however, data about whether these students are being served in the most effective way possible is inconclusive. Improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students is a leading

¹⁶ Kelly, Andrew P. and Frederick M. Hess, *Beyond Retrofitting: Innovation in Higher Education*, Hudson Institute Initiative on Future Innovation, 2013, available at [http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1121/beyond_retrofitting-innovation_in_higher_ed_\(kelly-hess,_june_2013\).pdf](http://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1121/beyond_retrofitting-innovation_in_higher_ed_(kelly-hess,_june_2013).pdf).

national priority. To better serve these vulnerable students, reforms are needed to improve college access programs and maintain vital institutional aid programs.

Ensuring Strong Accountability and a Limited Federal Role

Institutions of higher education are subject to myriad federal data reporting requirements and burdensome regulations. The reporting and compliance burden on institutions has required many schools to hire full-time staff members whose sole responsibility is collecting and submitting data or ensuring compliance with federal mandates.¹⁷

This burden has been exacerbated in recent years as policymakers added new reporting requirements without eliminating those that no longer provide value. Under President Obama's watch, the department has issued new regulations that interfere with the academic freedom of institutions and historical role of the states in ensuring program integrity. These regulations have expanded the federal footprint on campuses with no regard for the cost they impose on colleges and universities.

Policies should provide relief to institutions of higher education by repealing unnecessary data reporting requirements and many of the harmful regulations recently promulgated by the department, while still delivering strong accountability in federal programs.

Eliminating Overly Burdensome Federal Regulations

Beginning in 2010, the Department of Education released several regulations purportedly to improve the integrity of student financial aid programs. Two of these so-called "program integrity" rules expanded federal authority into areas historically reserved for states and institutions. A third regulation would impose federal cost controls on institutions and make it more difficult for disadvantaged students to receive a postsecondary education. Taken together, these regulatory schemes will impede innovation, usurp the authority of decision-makers at the state and institutional levels, and hurt some of the nation's most vulnerable students.

Leaders in the higher education community, the federal court system,¹⁸ and a bipartisan coalition of congressional members have firmly rejected these regulations.¹⁹ The federal government should not be used to unjustly penalize institutions preparing individuals to succeed in the workforce. Furthermore, the right of each student to attend the institution of his or her choice must be protected.

Strengthening Teacher Preparation Programs

Strengthening teacher preparation and effectiveness is an urgent national priority. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) reports the majority of education programs fail

¹⁷ During the 2010-2011 academic year, institutions dedicated 826,632 hours and almost \$29 million to filling out IPEDS surveys. This estimate increased to 850,320 hours and almost \$31 million for the 2012-13 academic year. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. IPEDS 2011-2014 Supporting Statement Part A, OMB Paperwork Reduction Act Submission (OMB No. 1850-0582 v.10). Submitted February 2, 2011.

¹⁸ *Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities v. Duncan*, 870 F. Supp. 2d 133 (D.D.C. 2012), and 930 F. Supp. 2d 210 (D.D.C. 2013).

¹⁹ "Amendment A084 to Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011: Roll Vote No. 92," *Congressional Record – House* 157-27, February 18, 2011, pp. H1234-1235. and "Supporting Academic Freedom through Regulatory Relief Act," U.S. House of Representatives Report 113-205, September 10, 2012, pp. 5-6.

to equip their teachers with the training necessary to success in the classroom and most programs do not recruit high-achieving students or ensure strong clinical experiences for students.²⁰ While policies surrounding teacher preparation and licensing requirements are primarily a state responsibility, there are provisions within the HEA that need to be reformed.

The federal government operates more than 82 programs across 10 agencies related to teacher quality. Most programs overlap with scant coordination across the federal government.²¹ The existing programs fragment taxpayer resources and provide little information to policymakers on what works. These programs must be streamlined and better coordinated so states and school districts can best utilize the resources available to improve teacher quality.

Not only do we need to streamline the maze of programs, we also need to cut through the costly red tape tying the hands of school administrators. The law provides a long list of annual reporting requirements institutions, states, and the secretary must publicly disclose. States must enter data in up to 440 fields and institutions complete 250 fields on a form designed by the Department of Education. Most of the data collected is input-focused rather than output-focused, which means we know how many teacher candidates participate in these programs but we do not know if they actually improve teaching skills and student outcomes.

Provisions in the *Student Success Act* (H.R. 5) move the tenets and focus of the Teacher Quality Partnership program into the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which will help facilitate partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education to reform preparation and better connect pre-service training to in-service practice. In reforming teacher preparation programs, any reporting requirements must yield useful information that measures the effectiveness of these programs without adding an undue administrative burden on states and institutions.

Rebalancing the Responsibility for Program Integrity

The *Higher Education Act* has always promoted a statutory and regulatory structure known as the program integrity “triad,” composed of the federal government, states, and accrediting agencies. Each entity has a shared responsibility to make sure student financial aid flows only to those institutions that provide a quality postsecondary education.

The federal government traditionally has played a very limited role in higher education. To avoid interference in education decision-making, the department has always relied on accrediting agencies and state licensing to determine institutional and program quality standards. Through a series of burdensome regulations, the current administration has upended that balance by overstepping their role and encroaching on the responsibilities of states and accreditors.²²

²⁰ Greenberg, Julie, Kate Walsh, and Arthur McKee, *2014 Teacher Prep Review: A Review of the Nation’s Teacher Preparation Programs*, National Council on Teacher Quality, June 2014, available at http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Teacher_Prep_Review_2014_Report.

²¹ *Teacher Quality: Proliferation of Programs Complicates Federal Efforts to Invest Dollars Effectively*, Government Accountability Office, 2011, available at http://www.gao.gov/modules/ereport/handler.php?1=1&path=/ereport/GAO-11-318SP/data_center/Training,_employment,_and_education/Teacher_quality:_proliferation_of_programs_complicates_federal_efforts_to_invest_dollars_effectively.

²² *The CHEA Initiative: Final Report*, Council for Higher Education Accreditation, November 2012, available at http://www.chea.org/pdf/TheCHEAInitiative_Final_Report8.pdf.

Accreditation plays an important role in promoting quality programs and federal policies should protect the balance of responsibility that has always existed, while also ensuring the accreditation process is rigorous, transparent, and open to new ideas for delivering a postsecondary education. Doing so will empower students, support innovation, and protect the taxpayer investment in higher education.

Conclusion

It has long been a national goal to help students access a college education. As we continue working toward that goal, a number of challenges have emerged. Almost half of all students seeking a degree do not make it to the finish line within six years.²³ College costs are skyrocketing. Meanwhile, we are investing near record amounts of taxpayer dollars helping students finance their higher education. It is estimated that in a few short years nearly half of all jobs available will require some type of college degree.²⁴ The current path we are on means fewer Americans will be equipped to compete and succeed in our modern economy.

The committee will continue its work to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act* in order to help reverse this unsustainable trend. Students from all backgrounds should have access to a quality higher education and taxpayers deserve to know their hard-earned money is being well spent. In the coming weeks and months, the committee intends to introduce a series of bills to reauthorize the law that reflect the core principles developed through more than three years of oversight and public engagement. These principles will strengthen America's higher education system for the good of students, workers, taxpayers, and families.

²³ "Fast Facts: Graduation Rates," *National Center for Education Statistics*, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>.

²⁴ *Doing Better for More Students: Putting Student Outcomes at the Center of Federal Financial Aid*, HCM Strategies, 2013, available at http://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/Technical_report_fnl_embargoed.pdf.