



Federal Issues Committee Joint Position Summary - March 2013

Ability to Benefit (ATB) Additional Information

Section 309(c) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (Pub. L. 112-74) terminated access to Pell Grants and federal financial aid for individuals without a high school diploma or GED as of July 1, 2012. The prior law, which was just strengthened by Congress as recently as 2008, allowed individuals without a high school diploma or GED to qualify for Pell Grants or student loans by: (1) passing an Ability to Benefit (ATB) test or (2) completing at least six credit hours or 225 clock hours at a Title IV eligible postsecondary institution. This choice was made by Congress to save only \$268 million a year, a very small portion of the overall Pell Grant and federal student aid program. Economizing by closing the door on the neediest individuals who stand to gain the most from some career-specific postsecondary training just does not make policy, political or economic sense. These individuals have few other options left to obtain a steady income and become fully productive working citizens. We request full restoration of eligibility for students meeting ATB requirements to access Pell Grants and federal student loans in the Fiscal Year 2013 and Fiscal Year 2014 appropriations processes.

- Data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS)¹ shows that students who enrolled in postsecondary institutions through the ATB or 6-credit options were more likely to be minority, more than twice as likely to be Hispanic/Latino, more likely to be independent, twice as likely to be unmarried with dependents, and more likely to be younger (under 18) or older (over 30) than other students.
- California's Community College Chancellors office reported 14,297 students seeking Federal Aid without a high school diploma in 2009-2010, and 18,784 in 2010-2011.
- In reference to students completing the 6 unit ATB requirement, the 2006-2007 Experimental Sites Analysis reported that "The subset of students made eligible by this experiment even compared favorably to financial aid recipients with high school diplomas. While the experimental group of students attempted and completed slightly fewer credit hours than high school graduates, they completed a nearly identical percentage of units attempted and earned a slightly higher grade point average than aid recipients who had completed high school."²
- Similarly, the 2005-2006 Experimental Sites Analysis reported that "Students in the ATB experiment also compare favorably with the population of all students taking an ATB exam, the subsets of all students who failed the ATB exam, and those who passed."³

¹ <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/>

² <https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/pdf/0607ExSitesReportFINAL.pdf>

³ https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/pdf/0506ExpSitesReport_FINAL.pdf