



*Great Public Schools for Every Student*

## **NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT**

On behalf of our 3 million members, the National Education Association (NEA) believes that higher education is a public good and that America must provide a 21st century education for all our students. Toward that end, any changes to the Higher Education Act during the reauthorization process must protect the interests of students, faculty and staff, and ensure that we are funding the best possible education for our students.

At this point, the biggest threat to the quality of higher education has been the dramatic disinvestment by states in their public colleges and universities. According to the August 2017 report “A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding: State Cuts Have Driven Up Tuition and Reduced Quality” from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state funding for public colleges and universities for the 2016 academic year was \$9 billion less than it was in 2008 after adjusting for inflation.

In the 1970s, state and local governments funded the bulk of core educational expenses in colleges and universities, but state funding cuts have shifted that burden to students and their families. The nation has abandoned the historic commitments made in the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education, and embodied in the Higher Education Act of 1965. This has led to a shrinking of educational support services, which in turn makes it more difficult for students to make appropriate choices among programs and degrees, complete coursework in a timely way, and navigate fiscal and educational challenges to college completion.

At the same time, socio-economic developments are making some form of post-secondary education even more necessary for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to ensure social and individual prosperity. We must reclaim the promise of the Higher Education Act and, once again, make it possible for all students to graduate from high-quality institutions without crippling debt.

As reauthorization of the Higher Education Act gets underway, it is critical to protect the interests of students, as well as faculty and staff. On behalf of our members and the students we serve, we thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on these issues. We look forward to working with Congress to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.



## 2019 Recommendations

### **Access, Affordability, and Quality Education for all Students**

The fundamental goal of the Higher Education Act since its inception has been to expand opportunity for all students to access and succeed in a quality post-secondary experience that best fits their needs. Over the past half century, we have seen huge increases in overall student enrollment, as well as increased participation by lower income students, first generation students, and students of color. Federal financial assistance programs have made it possible for millions of students from diverse backgrounds to obtain higher education, NEA remains committed to furthering these goals.

Unfortunately, the ongoing affordability crisis in higher education threatens the continuation of these trends. Recently, debt levels for student aid borrowers have exceeded \$1.47 trillion, preventing middle and low-income families from even considering many options in post-secondary education. This has led to countless numbers of students either not continuing their education in a college or university, or curtailing their plans.

The availability and purchasing power of grant-based aid is declining while reliance on student loans is rising—an untenable approach that undermines the principle that higher education is a public good. On average, graduates who took out loans were \$34,000 in debt, up from \$20,000 just ten years ago. The impact of the debt burden is not limited to borrowers, colleges, and universities. It is also restraining economic growth. Borrowers cannot afford to buy homes or cars, start businesses, support families, or make investments.

In addition to ensuring access for all students, the Higher Education Act needs to ensure that institutions provide high quality education for those students. Federal aid dollars should finance only institutions that exhibit a basic level of quality and integrity, and offer students the opportunity to receive the educational support they need to succeed.

Finally, institutions of higher education prepare the vast majority of teachers for elementary and secondary schools. Every student deserves a well-prepared, profession-ready teacher. The reauthorization is an opportunity to refine and strengthen teacher preparation programs, improve the diversity of the teaching workforce, and ensure proper training by maintaining the language and funding for Title II.

The threats to access, affordability, and quality education also create serious disruption in the working conditions for faculty and staff, and significant problems for campus environments. Together these problems increasingly lessen the quality of the educational opportunity, and make student success and completion more difficult if not altogether impossible. Continued public disinvestment in the operations of colleges and universities only increases these difficulties.

## **A Safe and Supportive Learning Environment for Students**

Students deserve a safe and supportive learning campus environment. The Higher Education Act should ensure that campuses and law enforcement provide strong protection against sexual assaults and harassment, and vigorously enforce applicable laws. Mental health counseling should be made more accessible for all students (as well as faculty and staff), and steps must be taken to reduce the wave of violence on all campuses.

Discrimination of any kind has no place on any campus, whether it be based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, age, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. In fact, a diversity of populations on campuses is an essential learning opportunity for all students, as well as faculty and staff. Student diversity ensures that all students are exposed to the real world situations in which they will live and work for the rest of their lives. Homogenous populations are no longer be the norm. Faculty diversity ensures that mentors and educators resemble both the diversity of the students they teach, and the world in which the students will live and work. Finally, all campus employees must have access to the appropriate professional development to more effectively engage with students in culturally responsive ways on today's increasingly diverse campuses.

Campuses also should make available to students s space to interact with their peers to discuss academic activities, as well as access to faculty office hours for private academic discussion. In addition, students should be able to meet with academic counselors for advice on course sequencing for more effective educational progress. Finally, students should be exposed to both in-person and technological education modules to secure the optimum learning experience.

## **A Safe and Supportive Working Environment for Faculty and Staff**

We are committed to improving the working conditions of faculty and staff in colleges and universities representing all types of institutions. The working conditions of faculty and staff are also the learning conditions of students, and improving those working conditions will result in improved learning conditions. All the literature regarding education emphasizes the critical role of good teachers in student educational success, and yet all too many colleges and universities today are shortchanging faculty and staff in terms of their professional status, professional learning, and working conditions.

Over 75 percent of college and university faculty are not on the tenure track, and are working mostly without benefits and with very little job security. Of those, about half are part-time faculty. We need to prevent the overuse and exploitation of contingent faculty in order to improve student learning. Faculty work is not simply what takes place in the classroom, but involves preparation, review, research, and service (participating in shared governance and faculty committees.) All of these are critical parts of faculty work, and all faculty must be paid appropriately for these activities. In addition, contingent faculty should be treated no differently than their counterparts and deserve a real path to eligibility in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

In order to provide the education students deserve, not only do all faculty require professional compensation and security, but they also must be provided the support services they need in order to carry out faculty work. Offices, access to technology, libraries, and professional development opportunities are all essential for all faculty.

### **Reinvestment in Post-Secondary Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In the 1970s, state and local governments paid almost 60 percent of the costs of higher education, with students and their families paying less than 40 percent. That proportion has shifted completely since that time and students and their families are now responsible for the majority of the cost. That shift is largely responsible for the increasing burden of student aid debt that has now increased to almost \$1.5 trillion.

The rest of the world funds higher education quite differently, as a valuable public investment in society and individuals. According to OECD's 2018 *Education at a Glance*:

- 31 percent of expenditures on higher education across OECD countries comes from private sources
- 65 percent of expenditures on higher education in the United States comes from private sources

Until this country reinvests in higher education at both the state and federal levels, we will continue to struggle with international competitiveness. At one time, the United States ranked first in the world in the percentage of 25-34 year olds with higher education attainment. According to the 2018 *Education at a Glance*, we are now tied for 11th place with Israel and Norway, and 10 percentage points below Russia. South Korea is in first place, 22 percentage points above the United States. Other countries are passing us by investing directly in their colleges and universities.

## **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REAUTHORIZING HIGHER EDUCATION ACT**

In addition to our broad priorities, we have more specific recommendations in particular issue areas.

### **Access, affordability, diversity**

HEA reauthorization must address all three of these critical issues.

#### *Access and affordability*

A new HEA should:

- Ensure, first and foremost, that the students with the greatest financial need receive sufficient federal aid to attend college
- Help students begin a pathway to a post-secondary degree by making community college free, and reducing or eliminating costs for the first two years at all public higher education institutions, including minority-serving institutions
- Provide incentive programs to spur state reinvestment in the institutional capacity of higher education, including instruction and student support services
- Provide more grant aid to the lowest-income students and restore the lost purchasing power of the Pell Grant to 70 percent of tuition at public four-year colleges and universities
- Make Pell Grant funding mandatory, which would ensure funds are provided to all eligible students and protect the program from the fluctuations of politicized annual funding battles
- Restore federal subsidized loans to graduate students, including Pell Grants
- Expand greater access to high-quality dual enrollment courses, providing students with an accelerated opportunity to receive a postsecondary degree and reducing their student debt
- Effectively address barriers to access for working and non-traditional students, such as by including childcare and other costs in cost-of-attendance calculations to provide a more complete picture of student needs
- Ensure that students in good standing who otherwise qualify for student financial aid are not excluded from programs based on their immigration status, or the status of their parents
- Ensure that students who otherwise qualify for student financial aid are not excluded from programs based on past criminal convictions
- Allow existing federal student loans to be refinanced to give students maximum savings; the government should not profit from student loans
- Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to ease the burden on students and families while maintaining the integrity of the financial aid system and ensuring that federal dollars are targeted to those with the greatest financial needs as well as

improving FAFSA verification procedures to prevent discrimination against low-income students and students of color

- Encourage the Department of Education to exercise its authority to protect students' financial aid from harmful marketing partnerships between colleges and banks
- Ensure that diverse federal student aid programs—grants, loans (including Perkins), work-study, and repayment options—remain accessible, viable, and address the full spectrum of student needs
- Expand the work-study program to include more institutions, especially those serving low- and middle-income students
- Support opportunities for students to acquire real-world work experiences while pursuing their degrees
- Preserve Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Teacher Loan Forgiveness programs, which encourage college graduates to pursue careers in education
- Expand and align Public Service Loan Forgiveness—for example, by broadening them to include educators teaching all subject areas in high-need public schools, all contingent faculty in higher education, and other education job categories, as well as borrowers who have loans other than the Direct Loan program, or have participated in any of the Department's repayment programs
- Reform procedures governing the existing Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to ensure that borrowers are not denied the benefits through loopholes and flawed implementation of the program by the U.S. Department of Education. Include partial forgiveness after 5 years of qualifying employment, with full forgiveness provided for 10 years of qualifying employment

### ***Diversity***

- Increase funding for institutional aid programs currently authorized under Title III and Title V that provide aid to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Asian-Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions
- Ensure that students who face language and other barriers to higher education receive the extra supports they need to succeed
- Strengthen programs that seek to recruit and retain diverse undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty
- Continue to support a wide diversity of high-quality institutions with student-centered missions within the higher education system

## Quality, financial accountability, student support services

A new HEA needs to address these issues, including:

### *Quality*

- Provide incentives for investment in instruction and student support services that lead to greater student success
- Provide incentives for institutions that make progress in reversing harmful employment trends and transition from a majority contingent instructional workforce to a well-supported, predominantly full-time tenure-track faculty
- Support initiatives to improve working conditions for contingent faculty during the transition from contingent to full-time tenure track appointments, through increased compensation, resources, and opportunity for engagement in all aspects of university life including governance, service, and student mentoring
- Continue institutional accreditation as a condition for participation in federal financial aid programs
- Require accrediting agencies to implement rigorous quality standards in the area of distance education, transparent proprietary rights and educational policies that protect the interests of all faculty, contingent and tenure track
- Require accrediting institutions to implement rigorous standards mandating strong systems of shared governance and academic freedom protections, upholding traditional academic practice and ensuring quality education for students
- Oppose direct and indirect federal intervention to promote or impose standardization in curriculum, testing, and academic materials in higher education because it is highly unlikely to expand and improve student learning—in today’s complex and interconnected global economy, narrowing curricula and teaching protocols cannot help but have negative consequences
- Support programs and initiatives that improve persistence and success among nontraditional students—increasing financial aid and support services will help at-risk students complete their education successfully
- Strengthen the accreditation system by supporting reforms that ensure integrity to protect quality; providing intensive reviews at the institutions in greatest danger; maintaining current gradations in accreditation status, without dilution; avoiding the creation of unnecessary and problematic new pathways to taxpayer funding; eliminating conflicts of interest within the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (and accrediting agencies themselves); and demanding appropriate levels of transparency and capacity from accrediting agencies



### ***Financial accountability***

- Provide additional controls to guard against fraud and abuse at for-profit institutions, particularly distance education programs, and additional tools to combat predatory actors in the higher education sector—for example, the “gainful employment” rule, which begins to ensure educational quality in career education
- Develop an efficient system for providing restitution to students who are the victims of fraudulent actions by institutions—for example, by creating a student relief fund financed by increased civil penalties and sanctions for violating federal laws and regulations.
- Restore the 90-10 rule to 85-15, and close the loophole by counting all federal funding—including the GI bill—for eligibility purposes for proprietary institutions, not just Title IV funding
- Allow students’ Pell Grant eligibility to be restored when a school closes or misconduct occurs
- Increase the percentage of non-federal revenue (including veterans’ payments) institutions must attract to ensure that participants in student aid programs have a sound and independent financial base
- Prohibit the use of federal funds for marketing, advertising, or recruiting
- Guard against manipulation of default rates and other accountability metrics
- Support a centralized, inter-departmental complaint resolution and tracking system
- Clarify that students who have been the victims of systemic fraud are eligible for class-wide loan discharge and do not have to apply for loan discharge on an individual, case-by-case basis

### ***Student support services***

- Expand campus-based educational support programs, such as TRIO and GEAR UP, to ensure that financially disadvantaged students and families have the support they need to succeed in post-secondary education
- Increase support for international studies programs in Title VI, including those that provide instruction in foreign languages
- Provide increased support for faculty development by strengthening and supporting increased funding to graduate education programs under Title VII
- Fully support a range of student services, like counseling, that help students persist in—and graduate from—college
- Provide safe, secure, and supportive learning environments on all college and university campuses

## Teacher preparation

A new HEA should:

- Expand opportunities for teacher candidates—including, when applicable, early childhood educators—for access to rigorous, comprehensive teacher preparation programs that include extensive clinical practice as well as theory; an in-depth test of subject and pedagogical knowledge; and a comprehensive pre-service teacher performance assessment to ensure they are prepared in core teaching areas and can demonstrate subject matter knowledge through a relevant academic major and professional and pedagogical skills, knowledge, and abilities
- Ensure that teacher candidates—including, when applicable, early childhood educators—participate in residencies that include supervised clinical practice via internships, student teaching and/or mentoring programs, and induction programs that include mentoring from qualified teachers and other school and university personnel
- Adequately fund teacher preparation programs
- Support effective models in practice teaching, transition to the classroom, and early career support services
- Enhance the role of community colleges as pathways to credentials for teachers and early childhood educators, and for ongoing professional development
- Promote accreditation of an entire school, college, or department of education by entities committed to the profession itself, as well as reviews of individual programs based on professional standards set publicly, with the input of all stakeholders, by practicing professionals
- Support strong, comprehensive approaches to teacher preparation and licensure and discourage “testing-only” approaches that do not include structured clinical experiences, demonstration of pedagogical and content knowledge and skill, and participation in high-quality mentoring programs with experienced teachers for the entire period prior to receiving full state certification
- Ensure that all teacher candidates, regardless of preparation route, meet equally high standards and demonstrate subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, and teaching abilities before receiving an initial license or becoming a teacher of record
- Incentivize efforts to identify and recruit diverse teacher candidates with great potential to succeed, including by supporting initiatives that make teaching an attractive career option for such candidates
- Support efforts to synthesize and streamline preparation, certification, and licensure standards and procedures within states in ways that provide primary responsibility for setting and enforcing professional standards and ensure the quality and coherence of teacher preparation programs in consort with practicing K-12 and higher education professionals

## **Conclusion**

NEA believes a strong and vibrant Higher Education Act is vital for furthering the opportunities for all students, as well as critical to the ongoing strength of our economic future, and ensuring a livable society for all Americans.

Students need affordable access to all levels and types of quality post-secondary education, They also need institutions that support faculty and staff, offer safe and welcoming campus environments, and attract strong public support. State and federal governments must both aggressively reinvest in our institutions of higher education. Campuses also need a more welcoming atmosphere that celebrates increasingly diverse student populations, as well as a more intellectually adventuresome attitude toward new ideas and outlooks.