



Great Public Schools
for Every Student

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United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the NEA who teach and support students in public schools and on public college campuses in 14,000 communities, we urge you to sign on as a co-sponsor of the College Affordability Act (H.R. 4674), which updates the landmark Higher Education Act (HEA) in crucial ways.

When President Johnson signed the HEA in 1965 he said, “This will swing open a new door for the young people of America...the most important door that will ever open—the door to education.” The College Affordability Act will build on the HEA by:

- Reauthorizing and expanding the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program to strengthen teacher and school-leader preparation programs with residency-based models, grow-your-own and induction programs, and other initiatives;
- Providing competitive grant programs to increase the diversity of the educator workforce, improve the cultural competence of new teachers, and increase educators’ knowledge of social and emotional learning competencies and trauma-informed practices;
- Updating the Federal Student Aid office’s performance goals and transforming the ombudsman into a borrower advocate to assist with complaints and concerns, simplifying the financial aid process, providing the FAFSA form in multiple languages, and requiring that financial aid offer letters be standardized;
- Increasing the maximum Pell Grant, extending eligibility to 14 semesters, and repealing the ban prohibiting incarcerated individuals from having access to Pell Grants;
- Investing in programs to improve access for students with disabilities, foster youth, students who are homeless, and student veterans;
- Creating America’s College Promise, a federal-state partnership that encourages states to reinvest in public colleges and universities—cutting the cost of tuition and making community college tuition-free for students in states that participate in the partnership;
- Improving TEACH grants for current and prospective K-12 teachers by instituting an appeals process for grants mistakenly converted to loans, and extending the program to early childhood educators;
- Improving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which is now riddled with administrative problems, and providing earlier debt relief to educators on their pathway to total loan forgiveness;
- Making borrowing less expensive, removing penalties for borrowers, helping borrowers avoid default, and improving loan counseling and servicing;

- Allowing undocumented individuals who entered the U.S. before age 16 to access federal student aid, and providing tuition assistance to students in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa territories;
- Strengthening TRIO and GEAR UP programs for students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Increasing and permanently reauthorizing mandatory funding for HBCUs, TCUs, and other MSIs, and also providing new grant programs to support innovation at these institutions, preserve and revitalize Native American languages, and increase opportunities for graduate and doctoral studies;
- Cracking down on predatory practices of for-profit colleges and universities by restoring the 85-15 rule and closing the 90-10 loophole, which allowed for-profit institutions to rely on funding from other federal programs, such as the GI bill, without penalty; and
- Requiring colleges and universities to develop and disseminate policies on hazing and harassment, adding such acts as reportable offenses under the Clery Act.

The College Affordability Act includes language from the Manager's amendment that expands eligibility for the PSLF program to adjunct and contingent faculty members of institutions of higher education. This recognizes the important role of adjunct faculty, who make up more than 75 percent of the instructional workforce in higher education yet are generally ineligible for unemployment compensation and retirement and health benefits, and have no pathway to tenure.

The Higher Education Act created new opportunities for students when it became law 54 years ago, and the College Affordability Act brings us much closer to fulfilling the HEA's goals.

Sincerely,



Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association