

# Aim Higher Act

**ACCESS | AFFORDABILITY | COMPLETION**

## **H.R. 6543 BILL SUMMARY**

The Aim Higher Act (H.R.6543) is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) introduced by House Democrats. In contrast to H.R. 4508 (the PROSPER Act), the Democratic bill is designed to give every student the opportunity to earn a debt-free degree or credential that leads to a rewarding career. It makes higher education more accessible by creating targeted programs that allow traditionally underrepresented students to enroll in college and strengthening existing access programs, simplifying the financial aid application, and ensuring students have access to a quality program. The Aim Higher Act also makes college more affordable today and addresses the rising cost of college to reduce the burden on students in the future. Recognizing that the best measure of success is completing college, the bill invests in programs and services – like career counseling and campus-based child care – that will help students graduate and put them on a path to success.

The Aim Higher Act consists of proposals introduced through [Aim Higher](#), the House Democratic legislative campaign launched in May 2017, [amendments](#) offered by Committee Democrats during the December 2017 markup of H.R. 4508, and research-based reforms developed in consultation with higher education practitioners and thought leaders.

This summary details how the Aim Higher Act improves access to a quality degree, makes college more affordable, and increases degree completion.

## **IMPROVING ACCESS TO A QUALITY DEGREE**

Although the conversation is slowly shifting to ensure students are completing college, it is important to remember that access to college remains intangible for many student populations. For example, although low-income students who recently completed high school are enrolling in college at higher rates than ever before, these low-income students have a lower college-going rate than their high-income peers did more than 40 years ago.

Further, the quality of institutions and programs that are accessible to low-income students is equally as important. Nearly two-thirds of low-income postsecondary students attend community colleges (which are under-resourced and typically have low graduation rates) and for-

profit institutions (which are more expensive, have poor completion rates, and tend to have lower-quality credentials, as measured by student earnings). Ensuring students have the appropriate data to inform their college enrollment decision is important. However, data in higher education is often limited and doesn't paint the right picture of how different students fare at each institution.

It is important that HEA address access through a multi-prong approach that tackles both enrollment opportunity and institutional quality. The Aim Higher Act does this by:

- supporting high school students to earn postsecondary credits early;
- improving access for vulnerable student populations who have traditionally been excluded from college;
- strengthening long-standing access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP;
- simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- improving available postsecondary data; and
- strengthening institutional accountability while assisting institutions to improve student outcomes.

### **Earning College Credits Early**

Empowering students to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school through dual enrollment and early college high school programs is a powerful tool to improve access to higher education. Particularly for low-income students, these opportunities promote a college-going culture and allow students to earn college credits at little to no cost, improving affordability of a college degree. H.R. 4508 simply funnels already disadvantaged students into low-skill, low-wage jobs through its emphasis on high cost, low quality credentialing paired with a reduction in available grant aid. In stark contrast, the Aim Higher Act creates a matching grant program for institutions to establish partnerships with K-12 school districts to support the development of dual enrollment and early college high schools. The bill also provides states with funding to increase student access to early credit pathways, including dual enrollment, early college high schools, and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. By investing \$250 million in the first year, the bill aims to increase student access to college, improve affordability, and lead to higher degree completion rates.

### **Improving Access for Vulnerable Student Populations**

While H.R. 4508 is silent on improving access, the Aim Higher Act specifically helps foster and homeless students, undocumented youth, and incarcerated individuals enter college.

- *Builds state capacity to serve foster and homeless students:* A new program would be authorized at \$150 million per year to help states, tribes, and territories establish or expand initiatives that help foster and homeless youth successfully transition to college. The grant program would also require states to award funding to institutions wanting to improve financial aid and wrap around services once these students enroll in college.

- *Allows DREAMERs to access Federal aid:* Undocumented students who graduate high school face barriers to college entry due to an inability to access Federal funds. The Aim Higher Act allows undocumented students eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) to access Federal student aid.
- *Enables incarcerated individuals to earn a college degree:* The Aim Higher Act repeals a counterproductive prohibition banning incarcerated individuals from accessing Pell Grants. This ban only encourages recidivism and limits the ability of these individuals to support themselves and their families upon release. Repealing this 1994 provision is also smart policy: for every dollar invested in prison education, four to five dollars are saved on re-incarceration costs.
- *Improves Access to Higher Education for Native American Students:* While many Native American students attend Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), thousands pursue higher education at Native American-Serving Nontribal Colleges and Universities. For these students, access to higher education is greatly enhanced by the Federal mandate that four-year land or facilities grant institutions—with monetary support from the states in which they are located—provide tuition-free education for Native Americans. This vital program is at-risk for termination because the cost of the waivers far exceeds the value of the original grant of land and facilities, and colleges and their States are struggling under severe budget constraints that make it difficult to issue these waivers. The fact that the Federal mandate does not distinguish between students who are in-state residents and those that are out-of-state residents contributes to this financial burden. The Aim Higher Act amends the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act of 1978 to ensure that Federal funding is provided to support and sustain the longstanding Federal mandate requiring colleges and States to waive, in certain circumstances, tuition charges for Native American Indian students pursuing a four-year undergraduate degree, including waiving the cost of tuition for Native American Indian students who are not residents of the State in which the college they are attending is located.
- *Provides tuition assistance for students in U.S. territories:* All students, regardless of whether they reside on the continental U.S. or its territories, should have an opportunity to pursue an affordable four-year college degree. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa have substantially limited academic offerings for students seeking higher education. Each has just a small public college, providing primarily certificates and associate degrees, which hinders many students in these territories from pursuing a college degree beyond two-years. The lack of options forces many students to move great distances away from home and at substantial personal cost to receive a bachelor's degree. To enable affordable access to students in the territories, the Aim Higher Act creates a Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) Program modeled after the program in the District of Columbia (i.e., DC TAG), that authorizes \$5 million dollars to cover the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition costs for students in the aforementioned territories.

### **Strengthening TRIO and GEAR UP**

TRIO and GEAR UP are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and help them enroll in college. While H.R. 4508 cuts funding levels for TRIO by \$50 million and GEAR UP by \$60 million, the Aim Higher Act increases funding for TRIO by \$110 million to a total of \$1.01 billion and level fund GEAR UP. To adjust for higher program costs, the minimum grant amount would also be increased by 20%.

The Aim Higher Act also makes smaller, but important programmatic improvements to TRIO. It would allow TRIO programs to use a student's Free and Reduced Price Lunch participation as proof of meeting TRIO eligibility requirements, require TRIO grantees to teach financial literacy skills, and ensure TRIO grantees help participants through the college application process. The bill would also improve reporting requirements to include measuring FAFSA completion and comparing TRIO participant performance with students who do not participate in TRIO.

### **Simplifying the FAFSA**

Each year, thousands of eligible students fail to apply for financial aid. Simplifying the FAFSA will increase college enrollment and ensure that more working families have access to Federal student aid. The Aim Higher Act reduces the number of questions on the FAFSA by placing the applicant into one of three pathways based on the complexity of a student's finances. Those with the lowest income and who received a means-tested Federal benefit in the previous two years will automatically receive a full Pell Grant without having to answer additional questions. The Aim Higher Act also requires dependent Pell Grant students to file the FAFSA only one time. Additionally, this amendment increases support for working students and provides the FAFSA in multiple languages, among other improvements.

### **Improving Available Postsecondary Data**

The existing Federal postsecondary data infrastructure is messy, duplicative, inefficient, and incomplete. The Aim Higher Act strikes the "student unit record" ban – a provision that prohibits the Secretary of Education from collecting student-level data – and requires the development of a secure system that evaluates student-level data. The bill also requires, for the first time, disaggregation of postsecondary data by race as measured by the American Community Survey. Collecting data at a student-level would reduce institutional reporting burden while allowing students, institutions, and policymakers to have better, more complete data to make informed decisions.

### **Strengthening Institutional Accountability and Quality**

H.R. 4508 erodes important protections for students and taxpayers. It gives for-profit colleges unprecedented access to Federal financial aid with little accountability and opens the door to more waste, fraud, and abuse.

For nearly a year, Committee staff have worked with practitioners and experts to craft provisions that would systematically improve accountability in higher education while providing institutions with the support they need to improve. To that end, the Aim Higher Act strengthens the role of each entity responsible for oversight in higher education (accreditors, states, and the Federal

government), provides institutions with necessary support to meet standards, and fortifies consumer protections.

- *Strengthens and fosters effective collaboration within the “accountability triad” of state authorizers, accreditors, and the Department of Education:* The Aim Higher Act shifts some of the current-law responsibilities between triad members to improve the accountability framework. It tasks the Department with conducting Title IV compliance checks, currently a responsibility of accreditors. The bill heightens state authorizers’ role by making them responsible for keeping track of student complaints, ensuring facilities are safe and adequate, and that programs meet state licensure requirements. These changes free accreditors to focus on academic quality and effectively use the peer review process.
- *Focuses accreditation on academic quality and makes the accreditation process more transparent:* The Aim Higher Act requires accreditors to focus on two new important student achievement outcomes – completion and workforce participation – and gives the Department the power to veto accreditor-set standards it deems are too low. It also requires disclosures that make the accreditation process and institutions’ accreditation status more transparent so that students and parents can make informed decisions about where to enroll. Further, the bill requires the development of a standardized set of consequences that all accreditors must adopt when they determine an institution is not meeting accreditation standards. And it strengthens the guidelines for how the Department reviews accreditor recognition to ensure accreditors have the capacity to effectively serve their role.
- *Strengthens institutional accountability, while supporting institutions to improve student outcomes:* In fulfillment of a recent GAO recommendation, the bill improves the cohort default rate (CDR) metric by adjusting for the number of borrowers at an institution and the number of borrowers who are in long-term forbearance (18 months or longer). This will give a better sense of which institutions have the most impact on the student aid coffers. CDR is essentially a cliff in current law: as long as institutions stay just under certain thresholds, improvement is not required. The Aim Higher Act establishes multiple thresholds that require institutions to take measures to improve their CDR. Institutions with a high adjusted CDR can receive technical and financial support from the Department to improve student outcomes. Only public institutions and private, non-profit institutions that serve a large number of Pell students are eligible for this assistance.
- *Includes robust safeguards for students and taxpayers:* Changes the 90/10 rule to 85/15 and closes loopholes in the current rule that allow for-profit institutions to rely on funding from other Federal programs (such as GI Bill) without penalty. Given the aggressive marketing and recruitment of low-income students who are eligible for Federal aid, the Aim Higher Act prohibits all institutions that spend less than half of their tuition revenue on instruction from using Federal funds for marketing, advertising, recruiting or lobbying. The bill also prohibits institutions from forcing students to sign pre-dispute

arbitration/class action ban agreements so that students can have their day in court if their institution defrauds them. And in response to many for-profit schools attempting to convert into non-profit entities to escape regulation, the bill strengthens the legal definition of a non-profit institution and establishes a transparent process for approving conversions at the Department and maintaining non-profit status. The bill also maintains the requirement that career programs lead to gainful employment and codifies the requirement that students who are defrauded by their colleges are provided full relief.

## **MAKING COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE**

A rise in college costs due largely to state disinvestment has forced students and families to shoulder a greater portion of the cost of college. Although states have slowly started to reinvest in state postsecondary systems in recent years, state funding has yet to reach pre-recession levels (and still lags even pre-2001 levels when the dot-com crash took place). In fact, for the first time ever, most states rely primarily on tuition dollars and not state and local appropriations to fund higher education. This means students are forced to make up for a lack of public postsecondary funding through student loans.

Instead of improving affordability, H.R. 4508 cuts nearly \$15 billion from Federal Student Aid. It does nothing to contain the rising cost of college, while leaving students with less grant money in their pockets and making Federal student loans more expensive to borrow and repay. It also eliminates current aid available to graduate students, further drilling a hole in the educational pipeline, especially for low-income students. H.R. 4508 also removes Public Service Loan Forgiveness, which hurts public sector employees, including our veterans.

A responsible reauthorization of HEA should recognize that states have disinvested in their higher education systems and address the reality that a larger share of the tuition bill now falls on America's working families. The Aim Higher Act improves postsecondary affordability by:

- increasing grant aid for low-income students;
- empowering students to earn while in college;
- improving the Federal student loan system;
- creating a Federal-state partnership to incentivize states to reinvest in higher education and reduce college costs; and
- investing in accessible open educational resources.

### **Increasing Grant Aid**

The Aim Higher Act strengthens and modernizes the Pell Grant program to respond to the rising cost of college and the wide range of four-year, two-year, and short-term programs that can launch graduates into successful careers. It also strengthens the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), a need-based grant for students with exceptional financial need. Further, the bill makes improvements to the TEACH Grant program, which

provides up to \$4,000 per year to students who agree to teach for four years at a school that serves students from low-income families.

- *Improves Pell Grants:* Whereas H.R. 4508 fails to make meaningful improvement to the Pell Grant program, the cornerstone of Federal Student Aid for low-income students, the Aim Higher Act makes significant program improvements. The bill increases the maximum Pell Grant award by \$500 to give students more money to pay for college and extends Pell eligibility to 14 semesters. To incentivize on-time graduation and improve the talent pipeline, the Aim Higher Act allows students to exhaust full Pell eligibility on graduate studies following completion of a bachelor's degree. The bill permanently indexes the Pell award to inflation to maintain the purchasing power of the grant. And to ensure program stability, it makes the majority of Pell Grant funding mandatory. The Aim Higher Act also allows quality short-term programs to access Pell in order to strengthen the workforce.
- *Strengthens FSEOG:* Under the guise of simplification, H.R. 4508 eliminates FSEOG. The Aim Higher Act preserves this important source of grant aid. The bill makes improvements to the FSEOG allocation formula. Currently a school's allocation is largely based on how long it has been a participant in the program. The Aim Higher Act phases out this formula, replacing it with one based on the level of unmet need at an institution, and the percentage of low-income students present on campus. Additionally, schools will have the chance to participate in a pilot program which will allow them to use funding (equal to up to 5% of their FSEOG allocation) to provide emergency grant aid to assist in completion.
- *Preserves TEACH Grants:* H.R. 4508 eliminates the TEACH Grant program, which is designed to ease the financial burden on teachers and combat teacher shortages across the country. The Aim Higher Act instead fortifies the program for current and prospective K-12 teachers and extends its benefits to early childhood educators. In addition, amid thousands of individual grants being mistakenly converted to loans, this amendment protects recipients from inadvertent grant-to-loan conversion and increases the data collection and reporting of the program. The bill also maintains Perkins Teacher Loan Forgiveness and Direct Stafford Loan Cancellation for teachers, both of which are eliminated in H.R. 4508.

### **Empowering Students to Earn While in College**

Although H.R. 4508 nearly doubles the Federal allocation for the FWS program, the bill makes additional changes that could result in increased costs to students. Under H.R. 4508, graduate students are barred from participation in FWS, removing a source of Federal student aid for these students and driving them to the private market to finance their education. H.R. 4508 also requires a larger investment from participating institutions (currently, institutions are required to pay 25% of a student's compensation but H.R. 4508 requires institutions to double their share). H.R. 4508 also allows less FWS money to be used to fund students directly. The bill removes a

25 percent cap on how much Federal money can be spent to operate FWS programs at private companies.

Unlike H.R. 4508, the Aim Higher Act preserves graduate participation in FWS. Moreover, it makes changes to the allocation formula to improve equity among institutions. Currently an institution's share of FWS dollars is directly related to how long it has participated in the program. The Aim Higher Act phases out this formula and replaces it with one that allocates funds based on the number of low-income students at an institution and the unmet need of students. Additionally, the Aim Higher Act includes a bonus allocation for institutions in the 20% in serving and graduating Pell students.

### **Improving the Federal Student Loan System**

Given the reduction in grant aid noted above, students will have to incur more debt to afford college under H.R. 4508. However, with the elimination of subsidized loans, these students would be paying more to borrow. H.R. 4508 also caps Federal parent and graduate student loans, which will push more students and parents to the private loan market. Additionally, H.R. 4508 replaces existing income-based repayment (IBR) plan programs with a less generous version, which will push more low-income students into default. It also eliminates the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program that incentivizes talented individuals, including teachers and veterans, to pursue a career in public service.

In contrast, the Aim Higher Act makes borrowing easier to understand and more affordable for students. By simplifying the repayment process and ensuring borrowers avoid default, the Aim Higher Act helps borrowers manage repayment successfully.

- *Revives the Perkins Loan Program:* H.R. 4508 does nothing to resuscitate the Perkins Loan Program – an important low-interest loan used by financial aid administrators to augment student aid packages – which expired in September 30, 2017. The Aim Higher Act restores the Perkins Loan Program as a source of Federal student aid for undergraduates and graduates by allocating a portion of Direct Loan volume to be distributed to institutions. This would be done under a new more equitable formula based how well the school serves low-income students, not how long the school has participated in the program.
- *Improves loan counseling:* The Aim Higher Act provides students with better up-front and ongoing information about college financing through annual loan counseling. Institutions would be required to annually disclose to students the expected borrowing amount and what their monthly payment could look like during repayment.
- *Makes borrowing less expensive:* Student loan borrowers are forced to pay a hidden origination fee each time they borrow money from the government – up to 4.264% of their loan amount. The Aim Higher Act eliminates the origination fees on all Federal student loans. The bill also allows borrowers to take advantage of lower interest rates by giving them a chance to refinance their old debt at the same rates offered to new borrowers. Moreover, the Aim Higher Act protects and expands the PSLF program to



include individuals who work for Veteran Service Organizations – such as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) – and farmers, who are currently left out of loan forgiveness. The Aim Higher Act also makes it explicit that physicians working at a non-profit hospital or other health care facility in states that prohibit the direct hiring of these individuals, such as California and Texas, can also have their loans forgiven through PSLF. The bill also allows individuals who have consolidated their loans to count qualifying payments prior to consolidation toward eventual loan forgiveness.

- *Simplifies the repayment process:* The Aim Higher Act simplifies the Federal student loan system by replacing the numerous existing repayment plans with one fixed repayment plan and one income-based repayment (IBR) plan that uses more generous repayment terms to improve financial stability for low and middle income borrowers. Unlike H.R. 4508 that bans \$0 payments (with some exceptions), the Aim Higher Act allows individual borrowers earning below \$30,150 (i.e., 250% of the federal poverty line) to repay at \$0 per month until their earnings improve. It also allows for verbal, secure IBR enrollment and automatic recertification of income for borrowers enrolled in IBR. Further, the Aim Higher Act allows Parent PLUS loans and consolidation loans that repay Parent PLUS loans to be eligible for IBR. It also extends disability forgiveness to Parent PLUS loan holders if their student sustains a total and permanent disability.
- *Helps borrowers avoid default:* As of last year, 8.5 million Federal student loan borrowers were in default, with many more having fallen behind on repayment. To protect struggling borrowers from the severe consequences of default, the Aim Higher Act automatically places borrowers who are more than 120 days delinquent into IBR. Additionally, previously defaulted borrowers who have made nine payments required to rehabilitate their loan will be automatically placed into IDR to help smoothly transition from rehabilitation to repayment. The Aim Higher Act would also remove the burdensome paperwork requirements for borrowers who are totally and permanently disabled by requiring the Secretary of Education to establish procedures to obtain income information during the three-year monitoring period without further action by the borrower. And finally, the Aim Higher Act would allow individuals who previously consolidated their student loan debt with their spouse's debt to separate their remaining balance and only be held liable for his/her share.
- *Improves Servicing of Federal Student Loans:* Despite repeated requests for direction from the Department to ensure consistency and quality of practice across agencies that service federal student loans, no such direction has been given. The Aim Higher Act directs the Secretary to produce a common manual for loan servicing to ensure quality of practice and better borrower satisfaction.
- *Maintains State Authority to Protect Consumers:* In recognition of the fact that states have the right to enact, regulate, and enforce consumer protection laws that protect their residents, the Aim Higher Act does not amend current law to remove or upset that state authority.

### **Creating a Federal-State Partnership**

Sustained public investment via a mandatorily funded Federal-state partnership would incentivize states to reinvest in higher education and slow growth in college costs, thereby making higher education more affordable in the future. The Aim Higher Act provides states with grant aid to leverage reforms and rewards states that make tuition at state colleges and universities more affordable. In return, states promise to maintain their investment in higher education, including their investment in state four-year institutions, and make an associate's degree at the state's public two-year colleges free for every student. Additionally, the bill also provides grant aid directly to low-income students who transfer from a community college to a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) for the remainder of their degree.

### **Investing in Open Educational Resources**

Each semester, some students struggle to progress through their courses due to the high cost of college textbooks. The Aim Higher Act creates a grant program to expand the use of open textbooks in order to help students with the cost of college. Additionally, the bill makes updates to recognize the role of technology in providing affordable course materials, including through inclusive access programs.

## **INCREASING COLLEGE COMPLETION**

A college degree provides economic mobility – college graduates experience increased earnings, are less likely to work in unskilled jobs, are more engaged citizens, and have better health outcomes. Unfortunately, too many people are leaving college with no degree. Almost one out of every two students will drop out before ever reaching graduation day.

Rather than investing in programs that support students to complete college, H.R. 4508 decreases support in wraparound services, gives unfettered access to financial aid to any institution using a poorly defined competency-based education (CBE) model, eliminates or reduces grant funding that helps sustain a strong teacher and national security workforce, and takes funding away from institutions that support students of color.

In contrast, the Aim Higher Act supports degree completion by:

- supporting multiple pathways to completion;
- improving remediation;
- investing in student supports;
- supporting innovation with transparency and accountability;
- creating a strong national security workforce;
- strengthening teacher education;
- investing in historically black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions;

- improving campus safety;
- supporting campus diversity and strengthening civil rights enforcement; and
- awarding completion with a degree.

### **Supporting Multiple Pathways to Completion**

Despite new research showing high rates of default for borrowers who complete credentials (due to high cost and low program quality), H.R. 4508 sends Federal student aid dollars short term programs with no assurance for program quality. H.R. 4508 also authorizes nearly \$200 million dollars for low-quality “earn and learn” programs (misleadingly labeled as apprenticeships).

In contrast, the Aim Higher Act recognizes the value in multiple pathways to a degree or credential, while also protecting students and taxpayers from waste, fraud, and abuse. In addition to expanding Pell eligibility to quality short-term programs (see page 7), the Aim Higher Act also authorizes additional funding to support community colleges develop and implement high quality career and technical education programs.

### **Improving Remedial Education**

Each year millions of students enter college without the prerequisite skills necessary to complete college classes. In response, colleges and universities developed remedial education programs to provide the skills needed to succeed and progress toward a degree. Although necessary, remediation makes degrees take longer to complete at a higher cost, lessening the chances completion. This is especially the case at community colleges, where two thirds of students enter needing remediation. In the 2013-2014 school year, remedial education cost students and their families approximately \$1.3 billion in out of pocket expenses. Rather than taking steps to reduce the burden and implement evidence-based measures to update remedial education, H.R. 4508 takes no action to improve remedial education. The Aim Higher Act provides grants to institutions to implement evidence-based remedial education reform strategies that better serve students and reduce drop outs. It also requires evaluation of program effectiveness in order to determine the best systems of support that leads to college degree completion.

### **Investing in Student Supports**

To ensure more students finish college, the Aim Higher Act:

- *Improves completion at community colleges:* Community colleges, which enroll nearly half of all undergraduate students, play a central role in closing our nation’s skills gap. Despite this fact, community college students, a majority of whom are of color, receive less public support than students at four-year institutions. The Aim Higher Act provides funding to public two-year colleges across the country, with priority given to under-resourced institutions with high percentages of low-income and minority students. Such funding will help institutions develop and implement evidence-based programs that boost degree completion through academic and financial advising and other student supports. Programs, which are monitored and measure academic progress toward clearly articulated program goals, will be given flexibility in order to meet their unique needs,

such as financial assistance to alleviate the cost of textbooks, living expenses, childcare, or any other distinct supports that might assist in degree completion.

- *Supports students with disabilities to graduate:* Despite some progress in recent reauthorizations, HEA needs significant improvements to truly align with the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Aim Higher Act includes grants to train faculty to deliver accessible, inclusive instruction; establishes an office of accessibility in every institution to facilitate access; provides grants to expand and implement universal design for learning campus-wide; increases access to accessible instructional materials and technologies (found in Title IX); expands opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities; and improves data collection efforts to gain a better understanding of the success of students with disabilities in higher education.
- *Provides supports for foster and homeless youth:* The Aim Higher Act requires institutions to do their part to improve outcomes for foster and homeless youth by improving outreach, resources, and policies for foster and homeless youth. Institutions would have to provide housing options between terms, designate a single point of contact to assist foster and homeless youth, and work with the Department of Education, when necessary, to streamline the financial aid process. The Aim Higher Act would also encourage states to grant in-state tuition rates for foster and homeless students who have not had stable residency.
- *Improves Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS):* More student parents are going to college and childcare costs are increasing. CCAMPIS helps institutions provide campus-based childcare services for low-income student parents. Although there has been an increase in college enrollment by student parents throughout the years, H.R. 4508 flat funds this vital program's authorization level. The Aim Higher Act would increase funding for CCAMPIS to \$67 million per year – a \$51 million increase. This amount is equal to its original appropriated amount in Fiscal Year 1999 adjusted for inflation. The bill would also require the Department to work with stakeholders in determining how best to collect the reporting data required in statute.
- *Promotes evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to combat substance use disorder:* Current law already requires an institution to certify to the Secretary that it has adopted a drug- and alcohol-abuse prevention program in order to be eligible for Title IV funding. This requirement has been in law for 30 years. H.R. 4508 originally removed the requirement altogether, though it was partially reinstated through an amendment offered by Rep. Shea Porter in December's markup. However, even with that change, H.R. 4508 does not go far enough in preventing and addressing substance misuse on campuses in the midst of an opioid epidemic. The bill builds on the existing requirement by supporting evidence-based programs meant to eliminate illegal substance use, decrease substance misuse, improve public health, and improve campus safety. First, the bill implements a requirement that campus-based substance misuse prevention programs

be “evidence-based” and requires a cooperative agreement between the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services to identify and promote successful programs. This will ensure that institutions have the tools and information they need to implement the program. Further, the bill revitalizes a current grant program to help institutions implement successful programs. These provisions will ensure that students can benefit from a range of initiatives, including early screening education, recovery support services, peer-to-peer support services and counseling for students with a substance use disorder, and re-entry assistance for students.

- *Supports students who are veterans:* To ensure that veterans have tailored supports, the Aim Higher Act authorizes grants to assist institutions that serve a significant number of veterans and their families, to establish, maintain, improve, and operate Veteran Student Centers to serve as an on-campus one-stop center for coordinated benefits, health, academic, and other support services. It also supports development of a national website to better assist institutions in serving students who are veterans through the sharing of best practices to support degree completion.

### **Supporting Innovation with Transparency and Accountability**

Competency Based Education (CBE) is an emerging learning model in which credits are awarded based on a student’s demonstrable knowledge instead of hours spent learning. Although CBE is a promising model that can help students take less time and pay less to complete a degree program, it needs to be further evaluated. H.R. 4508 allows any program using a CBE model to access Federal financial aid with no additional quality checks other than an accreditor review. There is broad-based concern that such an expansion will result in poor outcomes for students and higher risk for waste, fraud, and abuse to taxpayers.

Instead of unregulated access, the Aim Higher Act establishes a demonstration project that allows participating CBE programs to request flexibility from some current statutory and regulatory requirements seen as barriers to implementation. In exchange, the Aim Higher Act requires annual, transparent evaluations of participating programs that allow policymakers to examine program quality. It also requires an institution’s accrediting agency to set standards specific to CBE. This measured approach to expanding innovative models will ensure students benefit before placing billions of Federal student aid dollars at risk.

### **Ensuring a Strong Workforce with Trained Expertise in Foreign Language and Cultural Understanding**

The Aim Higher Act would continue our nation’s investment to support students to obtain expertise in language, cultural, and regional education. It increases authorization levels of Title VI programs to \$125 million – a \$60 million increase. Further, it extends authorization of six currently funded programs that assist undergraduates, post baccalaureate students, and professionals in area study and language mastery. It also modernizes five other programs by consolidating them into two new programs that address the 21st century needs of educational opportunities that promote language, cultural, business, and other professional competencies for students, teachers, and employers. And it codifies an Obama Administration grant process

that allows the Secretary of Education to give priority to qualified minority-serving institutions or institutions that propose significant and sustained collaboration with a minority-serving institution.

### **Strengthening Teacher and School Leader Preparation Programs**

Whereas H.R. 4508 eliminates all Federal programs related to teacher and school leader development at institutes of higher education, the Aim Higher Act would retain and improve Title II of the HEA, which provides Federal supports to recruit, retain, and support teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

The Aim Higher Act retains and expands the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program, which strengthen coordination between school districts, state agencies, and teacher and school leader preparation programs at institutes of higher education. The funds in this program, which are matched at a 100% level by participating institutions, can be used to improve pre-baccalaureate programs of study to ensure teacher candidates are receiving skills based in evidence-based pedagogy and authentic clinical experiences in the localities where they will teach. The funds can also be used to support evidence-based residency programs for prospective teachers, principals, and other school leaders, allowing them to learn and grow under an experienced mentor for a year before entering the profession. Money can also be used to support district-level induction and mentoring programs for new teachers and school leaders during their initial years. Finally, the funds can be used to create and sustain teacher leader development programs, which allow existing teachers to take on a hybrid role that combines formalized leadership and mentoring with dedicated time for classroom instruction. This not only helps incoming teachers, but also allows existing teachers to have career ladders and higher job satisfaction.

The Aim Higher Act also increases the requirements and capacity for effective oversight and intervention for at-risk and low-performing teacher and school leader preparation programs to ensure program improvement.

Further, the bill creates and authorizes funding for competitive grant programs for teacher and school leader preparation programs at institutions. The grant programs can be used to:

- Increase the diversity of the educator workforce through support for improvements to teacher and school leader preparation programs at minority-serving institutions.
- Increase the number of teacher preparation programs that embed dual certification for special education instruction and English-language instruction in general education programs, to ensure new teachers are prepared for diverse learners.
- Improve the ability of teacher preparation programs to offer pedagogy and coursework on social and emotional learning competencies, trauma-informed practices, and strategies to create a positive school climate.
- Allow institutions to offer graduate fellowships to doctoral students pursuing careers to advance high-quality instruction on pedagogy for special education, English-language instruction, and the STEM and computer science, as these are high-needs fields that are consistently cited as shortage areas by states.

### **Investing in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)**

Institutions that serve higher proportions of low-income and minority students are typically under-funded compared to other institutions. Title III of the HEA provides direct Federal aid to these under-resourced MSIs to help improve academic quality, institutional management, fiscal stability and self-sufficiency. Whereas H.R. 4508 requires under-resourced institutions to do more with less by imposing new eligibility requirements and effectually reducing available funding, the Aim Higher Act strengthens the provisions that already exist within statute.

Additionally, the Aim Higher Act authorizes funding for the newly established Native American Language Vitalization and Training Program, which promotes the preservation and revitalization of Native American languages. The bill also strengthens current statute by ensuring that Federal funding is provided to support and sustain the longstanding Federal mandate requiring colleges and States to waive, in certain circumstances, tuition charges for Native American students that participate in an undergraduate college program.

Further, the Aim Higher Act bolsters provisions that support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other MSIs by expanding supports and allowances to reflect current best practice, and by increasing funding authorization levels to reflect inflation and our current economy. The bill also authorizes a robust new funding stream to support innovation at HBCUs and other MSIs.

Finally, the Aim Higher Act ensures Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) can effectively serve this growing student population by reauthorizing and strengthening two grant programs. Program improvements include allowing eligible HSIs to establish or grow an endowment fund and use interest gained on this fund to provide scholarships to Latino students to attend that institution, ensuring funds are available to support HSI activities to promote post-baccalaureate opportunities for Latinos, and increasing authorization levels and length.

### **Improving Campus Safety**

HEA includes the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, which require IHEs receiving funds under Title IV to collect and disseminate campus crime statistics in an annual report to employees and students. These statistics include crimes due to a person's actual or perceived race, gender, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, or disability, and crimes of domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking incidents that were reported to campus security authorities or local police agencies. The report must also include policies regarding campus security and access, procedures for students to report crimes and other campus emergencies, and policies of the institution to respond to such reports, as well as efforts to improve campus safety. To further improve campus safety and transparency surrounding crimes in and around college campuses, the Aim Higher Act adds hazing and harassment as reportable offenses under the Clery Act.

The bill also adds a new subsection to the Clery Act requiring the Secretary, in consultation with the Attorney General and experts in domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and

stalking, to develop a standardized online survey tool regarding student experiences with domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Institutions may add additional survey questions and must administer the survey every two years. Survey results must be published on the institution's website and in the annual security report currently required under the Clery Act. In addition, the Secretary is required to prepare a biennial report on the information gained from the survey to be published on the Department's website and submitted to Congress. Finally, the bill amends Clery to provide greater transparency to students and parents concerning student safety in study-abroad programs.

### **Supporting Campus Diversity and Strengthening Civil Rights Enforcement**

To encourage and support diversity on campuses, the Aim Higher Act requires the Secretary to appoint a Special Assistant for Equity and Inclusion who will promote, coordinate, and evaluate equity and inclusion programs, including the dissemination of information, technical assistance, and coordination of research activities.

Further, to ensure institutional compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Aim Higher Act requires institutions to:

- designate at least one employee to coordinate efforts to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and disclose contact information for such designee;
- notify students and employees of its policies regarding enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, including disclosing reporting procedures and the process for investigating complaints under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act;
- inform students and employees of Title VI violations; and
- collect and publish data related to Title VI violations on its website and report it annually to the Department of Education.

### **Awarding Academic Completion with a Degree**

Amends the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to allow for the reverse transfer of student data, permitting a student's current institution to send enrollment and completion data to an IHE where the student was previously enrolled. The institution would still need to receive consent from the student to confer the degree.

For more information on the Aim Higher Act (H.R. 6543), please visit:  
<http://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/aim-higher>