



National Association of State Directors of Adult Education

Higher Education Act (HEA)

ISSUE BRIEF

Why Care? Today's postsecondary students are increasingly diverse and take many pathways to pursue a postsecondary education. To improve their chances of success, federal policies must be responsive to a students' experiences and offer affordable, equitable, and high-quality postsecondary opportunities. Policies should also be deliberate about linking postsecondary experience to work and future career growth. Because low-income students have faced rising costs and other challenges since the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2008, Congress must work to improve the law to increase students' odds of success. As Members of Congress debate HEA reauthorization, they should focus on principles critical for the success of low-income students: affordability, racial equity, and connecting students to high-wage, high-demand jobs and careersⁱ

Higher Education Act (HEA) The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA; P.L. 89-329) authorizes numerous federal aid programs that provide support to both individuals pursuing a postsecondary education and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Title IV of the HEA authorizes the federal government's major student financial aid programs, which are the primary source of direct federal support to students pursuing postsecondary education. Titles II, III, and V of the HEA provide institutional aid and support. Additionally, the HEA authorizes services and support for less-advantaged students (select Title IV programs), students pursuing international education (Title VI), and students pursuing and institutions offering certain graduate and professional degrees (Title VII). Finally, the most recently added title (Title VIII) authorizes more than two dozen other programs that support higher education; most have never been funded.ⁱⁱ

Important Issues to consider:

- Today's students are more diverse in age, race, and income when compared to the students of 2008, the last time the HEA was reauthorized. The students of today work and raise families, change jobs more frequently and have less job security. They include younger students straight out of high school, adults returning to college with some credits, and working adults who are trying to stay marketable in a fast-changing economy.
- Simplify the FAFSA process (including the Ability to Benefit option) for students applying for financial aid
 - Maintain full eligibility for "Ability-to-Benefit" students
 - Extend Pell Grant eligibility to short-term training programs offered by institutions of higher education
 - Preserve the federal Pell Grant Program and increase the maximum award yearly to keep pace with inflation.
 - Increase the amount of federal Pell Grant funds a student may receive over a lifetime from 12 semesters (6 years) to 14 semesters (7 years).
 - Open Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated students and, until then, preserve the Second Chance Pell program.
 - Support financial aid eligibility policies that respond to the needs of low-income students attending college part-time and less than half-time and give them ample time to earn their degrees
- Support federal programs and policies that promote pathways out of poverty for low-income students, including students of color, student parents, returning citizens and incarcerated adults, adult learners, independent students, Dreamers, and young adults who have experienced disconnection from school and work.

Tips from the Field

- Advocate for adult education to be included in HEA priorities for your agency.
- Share key issues for reauthorization of HEA that are critical to adult education with your agency.
- Consider requesting that your agency include the Ability-to-Benefit option to Pell in agency reauthorization priorities.
- Request that HEA reauthorization clarify and simplify the evidence and process needed to document that an ability-to-benefit pathway is an eligible career pathway.

Questions to Ask

- Does our agency have a list of priorities concerning the reauthorization of HEA?
- Does our agency include adult education students in its advocacy for the reauthorization of HEA?
- How can adult education help support the HEA priorities of our agency?
- Does this vital legislation — meant to help more low-income students go to college — actually meet the needs of today's students?

Resources:

- Congressional Research Service, *The Higher Education Act (HEA): A Primer*: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43351.pdf>
- Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), *Priorities for the Higher Education Act*: <https://www.clasp.org/tags/clasp-priorities-higher-education-act>
- American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)/ Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), *Joint Legislative Agenda for the 116th Congress*: <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LegAgenda18.pdf>

ⁱ Center for Law and Social Policy, *CLASP Priorities for the Higher Education Act*, <https://www.clasp.org/tags/clasp-priorities-higher-education-act>

ⁱⁱ Congressional Research Service, *The Higher Education Act (HEA) A primer*, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43351.pdf>