



# Supporting Affordable and Accessible Postsecondary Education Linked to Labor Market Needs

Through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and outstanding regulatory or executive action, the Trump Administration will have an opportunity to eliminate the roadblocks to higher education for a generation of Americans. Student need to be able to better access, enroll in, pay for and complete postsecondary education credentials that have labor market value. Rethinking our approach to and investment in our postsecondary education system is key to making this a reality.

Students find postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) opportunities to be affordable pathways to industry-recognized credentials, degrees and licenses in high-demand careers—all of which are a way for more Americans to gain entry into or preserve their place in the middle class. The average cost for American public two-year institutions is less than half of tuition and fees for four-year colleges. Additionally, 27 percent of people with less than an associate degree, including licenses and certificates, earn more than the average bachelor's degree recipient. States and communities across the country are also benefiting from strong returns on their investments in postsecondary CTE which help both new entrants into the labor market as well as supporting the reskilling of existing workers. For instance, graduates of Moore Norman Technology Center have grown Oklahoma's economy by more than \$450 million over four years. Taxpayers see a 10 percent return of their investment in the Los Angeles Community College District. And the state of Washington found that increased earnings of their community and technical college students were accompanied by a decrease in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applications as a greater number of its population were able to earn self-sufficiency wages.

The recession highlighted the importance of providing all students with a full range of postsecondary options, which includes two-year college degrees or certifications, or programs preparing students for certifications and licenses at community colleges and other technical institutions. While these choices are growing—the number of students earning certificates or associate degrees in CTE fields rose 71 percent from 2002 to 2012—more needs to be done to prepare all students for success in today's economy.

By promoting policies and committing federal resources to support postsecondary CTE, the Trump Administration can ensure all Americans have access to education and lifelong success, all while ensuring America's economic competitiveness going forward.

## **Ensure Financial Aid is Accessible for High-Quality CTE Programs that Lead to Labor Market Success**

Current financial aid policies and arbitrary rules make it difficult for many students to pursue the types of credentials that are the best fit for them. A reauthorized HEA should expand access to postsecondary CTE opportunities, while eliminating financial aid penalties for working and part-time students, and those seeking technical skills through short-term and non-credit coursework. For example, the Senate Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act (S. 1900/H.R. 3985), would extend Pell Grant eligibility to students enrolled in short-term skills and job training programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials and employment in growing career fields. The Career and Technical Education Opportunity Act (S. 2064/H.R. 3964) seeks also to include those short-term CTE programs in Federal Direct Loan and Federal Perkins Loans programs. Additionally, the Working Students Act (S. 2065/H.R. 4433) would increase the income protection allowance for financial aid programs to support working students.

*ACTION NEEDED: Prioritize reforms to reduce barriers to postsecondary education for all Americans, including increasing access to postsecondary CTE programs through changes to financial aid for short-term education and training programs, and promote other provisions, such as HEA's "ability to benefit" option and the reinstatement of Year-Round Pell, that help students speed up time to postsecondary completion.*

The new law should also build on previous efforts, through experimental sites and demonstration projects, to provide institutions with the flexibility to utilize innovative student-centric programs and services, such as competency-based education, stackable credentials and dual enrollment programs. To that end, the Go to High School, Go to College Act (S. 1106/H.R. 2065) is a bipartisan HEA measure that would allow for the awarding of Pell Grants to students to support their enrollment in, and completion of, postsecondary courses offered through early college high schools, including CTE-focused and theme-based programs.

*ACTION NEEDED: Promote the use of experimental sites authority to test innovation in the Pell Grant program, and where positive results are seen, include such flexibility in priorities for the reauthorization of HEA.*

### **Support CTE Teacher Preparation**

A nationwide shortage of CTE teachers, affecting states like Kentucky, New York, Indiana and South Carolina, has highlighted the need to increase the number of CTE teacher preparation programs. To be sure our nation has a robust, high-quality CTE system, we need quality teachers and faculty in the front of every classroom. The Creating Quality Technical Educators Act (S. 2174/H.R. 4263) would expand eligibility of the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program to postsecondary teacher preparation programs partnering with school districts to train future CTE educators, and provide ongoing mentorship and professional development once they enter the classroom.

*ACTION NEEDED: Focus on CTE teacher development in the Higher Education Act reauthorization and look to promote the legislation currently in Congress that would help to enhance recruitment and training for new CTE educators.*

### **Rethink Accreditation to Support an Innovative and Responsive Postsecondary System**

The process for accrediting institutions should be reformed to allow for innovative models. For instance, area CTE centers—institutions that provide CTE coursework to both high school and postsecondary students—have sought to partner with two-year degree-granting institutions to offer seamless articulated pathways for students, leading to stackable credentials, including an associate degree. Under the existing system, institutions face challenges related to the accreditation of such articulated programs and the transfer of credit from non-degree-granting institutions to degree-granting institutions who are often overseen by different accrediting bodies with different program requirements. This is a program model that should be more fully supported through the accreditation process.

*ACTION NEEDED: Support efforts to create an accreditation process that is simpler, more transparent and flexible enough to provide room to innovate and support new methods of student learning.*

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