

June 22, 2021

Dear Members of Congress:

The undersigned non-profit education policy, and research organizations write to express our strong support for a significant new investment in evidence-based student success initiatives. President Biden's FY22 budget and American Families Plan proposes significant investments in college affordability, but it also recognizes that affordability isn't enough and outlines a \$62 billion evidence-based student success grant program.

Although over the last two decades the U.S. has made demonstrable progress in increasing the college-going rate among students from low-income communities, first-generation college-goers, and students of color, the college completion rate among these populations remains low compared to other students. The six-year graduation rate for Black and Latinx students is almost twenty percentage points lower than that of white students, and student loan default rates are more than 20 percentage points higher among Black students than white ones. These discrepancies are unacceptable.

A large federal investment in evidence-based student success programs has the potential to improve outcomes for students who traditionally are less likely to complete their degree programs. Research is clear that investments in academic supports and other services can help low-income, first-generation, and students of color overcome the range of impediments to college completion that they face. Comprehensive student success initiatives such as CUNY ASAP in New York, Project Quest in San Antonio, and One Million Degrees in Chicago have been shown to increase college persistence, credit accumulation, or student earnings in randomized controlled trials. For example, multiple rigorous evaluations found that CUNY ASAP doubled completion rates. Studies using other methods also suggest promising outcomes. For example, a matched comparison study found that TRIO Student Support Services increased student transfer and completion rates.

Unfortunately, too often institutions serving students with the greatest barriers to completion do not have the financial resources to invest in these initiatives. The institutions of higher education most likely to serve students of color and low-income communities often have the fewest resources to meet student needs. A major investment in student success programs that have been shown through rigorous evaluations to improve key postsecondary outcomes could tackle this disparity, equipping all institutions to adequately support students with advising, mentoring, financial, academic and personal support. The \$62 billion student success grant could help ensure that all students fulfill their potential.

As you consider a bold investment in college affordability, we urge you to pair it with a major new program to support evidence-based student success initiatives that meet the criteria for an expansion grant under the Education Innovation and Research program, an established and rigorous criteria for evaluating impact. Investing in proven student support models at two- and four-year

colleges as well as affordability measures would maximize the impact of these investments, and our nation, state and local economies, and students and families themselves will reap the rewards.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
American Council on Education
American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO (AFT)
America Forward
APIA Scholars
Association of Community College Trustees
College Promise
Complete College America
Council for Opportunity in Education
Deans for Impact
EDGE Consulting Partners
Education Reform Now
Excelencia in Education
Finding Common Purpose
GreenLight Fund
Higher Learning Advocates
Higher Education Loan Coalition (HELC)
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
JFF
iMentor
Knowledge Alliance
National Association of College Admission Counseling
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
National College Attainment Network
National Skills Coalition
National Urban League
New America Higher Education Program
Research Institute for Key Indicators
Results for America
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
Teach For America
The Community Outreach Fund at Maycomb Capital
The Education Trust
The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)
Third Way
uAspire
UnidosUS
University of California Student Association