

116th CONGRESSIONAL PRIORITIES FOR HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs)

HBCUs do a better-than-expected job of graduating students who come to college with the most financial and academic issues to overcome. They achieve these results despite their historical lack of resources. The country should invest more heavily in these institutions. Only with investments in institutions that serve disproportionately low-income students will America be able to meet its education, workforce, economic, and societal needs for the 21st century.

- **Improve the college readiness of African American students.** Support federal and state efforts to adopt and use rigorous college- and career-ready academic standards and promote strong public schools, including charter schools, magnet schools and themed schools, in African American communities. Support implementation of ESEA's systems of state, district and school accountability for student achievement and closing the achievement gaps between vulnerable children and their more advantaged peers. Promote meaningful parental engagement in school reform to facilitate closing achievement gaps. Target increased federal dollars for K-12 through programs that are focused on historically underserved students and schools. Encourage dual enrollment and early college high school programs to create more seamless college pathways for low-income students.
- **Provide early and personalized college advising that includes financial aid information.** Advance earlier, better and more personalized college advice for low-income students and students of color in middle and high school so that students can make college choices that put them on the track to employment and financial success. Such advice should include counseling and information about federal financial aid eligibility and repayment options so that students can make informed decisions about how to pay for college.
- **Improve the professional development of our teachers.** Ensure that our teachers have the proper education and training to perform their duties and provide our students with a quality education by restoring the Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program in Title II of the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA). Our students deserve teachers that are current with State certification and licensure requirements, and our teachers deserve a rigorous program that will lead to their success in the classroom.
- **Simplify and streamline the federal student aid process.** Simplify the FAFSA, the complexity of which is a barrier to boosting college attendance for low-income students and students of color. Make permanent the use of “prior-prior” year income tax data so that families can determine their federal financial aid eligibility earlier and more easily. Eliminate excessive income verification procedures and increase access to federal student aid for low-income students.
- **Invest in and modernize Pell Grants.** Make the Pell Grant Program a true entitlement program that guarantees aid to all students who qualify, covers a greater share of college costs, and provides flexible assistance to young and older adult learners. The Trump Administration and Congress should protect Pell Grant reserve funds that have accumulated in recent years and re-invest these resources into enhanced assistance for low-income students. Needed Pell Grant Program improvements include:
 - Significantly increasing the Pell Grant award over time to decrease the reliance on federal student loans for low-income students, eventually allowing the neediest of students to obtain a four-year degree debt-free, and continuing a cost-of-living adjustment for the award;

- Raising the family income level at which students automatically qualify for the maximum Pell Grant award to at least match 150 percent of the poverty level determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census;
 - Allowing students receiving means-tested federal benefits to qualify automatically for maximum Pell Grants;
 - Modernizing the Pell Grant Program to include incentives for on-time completion, such as providing support for dual enrollment programs, offering extra Pell funds for students who take 15 credits instead of 12 credits per semester, and incorporating flexibility for students to use Pell funds across award years; and
 - Enacting “second-chance” Pell Grants to provide educational opportunities for qualified individuals who are incarcerated.
- **Preserve campus-based student aid programs.** Preserve Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, the Federal Work-Study Program, and Perkins Loans. Improve how these campus-based programs allocate funds to colleges in order to better target assistance to low-income students.
 - **Make student and parent education loans less costly.** Reduce federal student and parent loan interest rates and eliminate origination fees, both of which make borrowing for a college education more costly than necessary for students and parents. Retain loan interest subsidies for low-income students. Grant institutions greater flexibility and discretion to limit student borrowing for students and parents based on objective criteria such as program of study with an option for students to appeal such decision if necessary.
 - **Make student and parent education loans easier to repay.** Streamline the complex array of federal student loan repayment options that few students understand and are able to navigate. Make income-based loan repayment automatic and universal for all borrowers (including parent borrowers) with flexible options for borrowers who wish to pay off their loan debt faster. Allow borrowers of federal education loans to more easily refinance loans at lower rates, without penalty or loss of credit towards forgiveness; improve the public service loan forgiveness program; and make all federal loan forgiveness tax-free.
 - **Enhance financial aid counseling.** Require students and parents to undergo financial aid counseling before accepting the terms and conditions for loans to include undergraduate and graduate subsidized loans and Parent PLUS loans. Require institutions to conduct annual loan counseling for students and make the terms and conditions easier for students and families to understand.
 - **Greater accountability for loan servicers.** Mandate that servicing contracts include provisions that servicers have a duty to borrowers as well as the Department of Education (Department), and require the Department to better streamline communications with loan servicers in a manner that is consistent and timely across multiple platforms. Require the Department to actively work with state entities to ensure servicers are in compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations.
 - **Implement a strong White House Executive Order for HBCUs.** On February 28, 2017, President Trump signed Executive Order 13779—White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically

Black Colleges and Universities, which establishes the White House Initiative on HBCUs in the Office of the President (rather than in the Department). Although critically important, the HBCU Executive Order is only the first step toward providing “equitable opportunities for HBCUs to participate in federal programs”—one of the HBCU Executive Order’s key goals. Without strong federal investments, however, President Trump’s commitment to HBCUs and the rebuilding of African American communities will be unfulfilled promises.

- **Fully fund the Title III HBCU discretionary programs.** Provide an annual investment of federal discretionary funds for HBCU operating support (\$375 million), graduate programs (\$125 million), endowment challenge grants (\$220 million), and capital financing loans (\$600 million) as authorized under Title III of the HEA.
- **Extend the Title III HBCU mandatory program.** Sustain the annual mandatory appropriations of \$85 million for STEM initiatives at HBCUs beyond 2019, when they are due to expire. *The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act* enacted a ten-year stream of mandatory appropriations and this essential funding should be extended through the period of the next reauthorization of the HEA.
- **Invest in HBCU infrastructure.** Include HBCUs in a \$1 trillion national infrastructure program by providing grants, no- or low-interest loans and tax incentives through a national infrastructure bank and/or the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, and Treasury. Increase federal support to repair, renovate, construct and acquire HBCU facilities and technology, including the rehabilitation of over 700 HBCU buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. UNCF’s HBCU infrastructure priorities include:
 - **Save historic structures on HBCU campuses.** Reauthorize the Historic Preservation Fund at the U.S. Department of Interior and provide annual appropriations of \$50 million to allow HBCUs to rehabilitate historically significant campus structures on the National Register of Historic Places.
 - **Restore the HBCU Grant Program.** Provide \$75 million for the HBCU Grant Program at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to support HBCU efforts to partner with their communities on economic development and community revitalization.
 - **Include HBCUs in a national infrastructure bank.** Ensure that the construction and renovation needs of HCBUs are included in any enactment of a national infrastructure bank.
 - **Provide tax incentives for HBCU bonds.** Authorize triple tax-exempt status (local, state and federal tax exemption) for bonds issued by HBCUs, which would increase the pool of potential investors and lower prices for these bonds. H.R. 1080, the *HBCU Investment Expansion Act*, from the 115th Congress serves as one model.
 - **Grow the HBCU Capital Financing Program.** Raise the cumulative, multi-year loan limit to \$3.6 billion for the HBCU Capital Financing Program. Appropriate \$25 million annually for loan interest subsidies for the purpose of leveraging approximately \$600 million in facility loans each year to HBCUs.
 - **Fund the Minority Serving Institution Digital and Wireless Technology Opportunity Program.** Support grants and contracts to HBCUs and minority-serving institutions to acquire and

augment digital and wireless networking technologies to improve the quality and delivery of educational services.

- **Fund new HBCU centers of innovation for national needs.** Provide new federal venture capital so that HBCUs can experiment, pilot, evaluate and scale up best practices and drive new innovations on their campuses—especially in areas of national need such as college success, teacher diversity and STEM. UNCF believes that HBCUs should have access to federal funds to expand their footprint as important engines of innovation with:
 - **College success initiatives.** HBCU centers of innovation for college success could provide institutions with the financial means and flexibility to test new approaches to enhance student completion and workforce outcomes, such as pathway initiatives, co-requisite remediation, accelerated degree programs, technology-enhanced delivery models and competency-based education. The [UNCF Career Pathways Initiative](#) offers a best-practice model for preparing HBCU graduates to immediately and seamlessly enter the workforce through stronger connections (e.g. mentoring, internships, experiential learning) with business and industry.
 - **Teacher diversity.** HBCU centers of innovation for teacher diversity could accelerate the education and training of effective minority teachers through traditional and nontraditional training programs. Improving teacher racial diversity could provide significant benefits to all students, especially African Americans. Although students of color are expected to comprise 56 percent of the student population by 2024, teachers of color comprise only 18 percent of the current teaching workforce (African American teachers are only 7 percent).¹
 - **STEM.** HBCUs are disproportionately successful at educating African Americans in STEM fields and can serve as best-practice models for other colleges and universities to further drive participation of African Americans in the STEM workforce. [HBCU centers of innovation in STEM](#) could expand innovative models, networks, partnerships and research in order to develop a more diverse science and engineering workforce.
 - **Social justice.** HBCU centers of innovation for social justice can research, develop and model solutions to some of today’s most persistent social issues. HBCU students disproportionately navigate the challenges of poverty, inadequate healthcare, mass incarceration, and low-performing elementary and secondary schools. Many HBCUs are also located in areas that are historically underserved and economically depressed. Thus, HBCUs are uniquely situated to study and address these issues with real-time impact and first-hand knowledge of the problem.
- **Include HBCUs in tuition-free college proposals.** Support college proposals that significantly reduce or eliminate tuition for HBCU students by authorizing tuition assistance grants to HBCUs. Support college proposals that target low-income students and offer additional academic, mentoring, internships and other non-financial supports that help low-income college students succeed.
- **Improve federal higher education data to increase transparency and accuracy.** Improve the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics, to capture better information about today’s college students—the vast majority (roughly 88 percent) of whom are excluded from IPEDS because they are not first-time, full-time students.² There is growing consensus that current methods of calculating some important postsecondary indicators, such as graduation rates, are flawed

because they do not sufficiently reflect the “nontraditional” characteristics of today’s 21st-century students and their mobility across institutions. These issues are important because, in gauging the effectiveness of colleges and universities at preparing and graduating students, policymakers need an accurate picture of each institution’s outcomes.

- **Judge colleges on the value they produce for their students and account for the “degree of difficulty” that institutions face.** Incorporate college metrics that are accurate, fair, and appropriate measures of access, affordability, and value of over 4,000 diverse, degree-granting institutions of higher education. Metrics should be “risk-adjusted” to account for differences in institutional missions, resources, and student populations to reliably measure the value added by colleges and universities—in essence, taking into consideration “the degree of difficulty” that HBCUs and other institutions face in educating significant numbers of academically and economically disadvantaged students.
- **Prioritize an incentives-based approach, rather than punitive fines, to higher education accountability.** Support college accountability proposals that reward institutions, like HBCUs, that enroll primarily academically and financially disadvantaged students. Support multiple indicators of college success that measure progress based on institutional growth relative to current performance. Oppose “institutional risk-sharing” proposals, which could require financially-strapped HBCUs to share in the cost of federal student loans not repaid and incentivize colleges and universities to turn away at-risk students with the greatest challenges to college completion.
- **Target higher education tax benefits to low-income students and families.** Reform the AOTC and LLC to expand aid to low- and middle-income families and remove obstacles to claiming education-related tax credits. Allow students to combine Pell Grants and AOTC to address unmet financial need. Ensure that low-income students fully benefit from Pell Grants by excluding all Pell Grant funds from taxable income, as provided for in the bipartisan H.R 3581, the *Pell Grant Flexibility Act*, introduced in the 115th Congress.
- **Create college savings accounts for low-income students.** Reform the AOTC to support contributions to college savings accounts as well as other innovations to help low-income families accumulate college savings. Experience with the UNCF College Account Program—the college savings account program piloted by UNCF and the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) and underwritten by Citi Foundation—suggests that a student with a college savings account is better prepared for and more likely to attend college than a student without one
- **Ensure justice-involved individuals have meaningful access to higher education.** Repeal the ban on Pell grants for incarcerated individuals. Remove question 23 from the FAFSA and eliminate drug convictions as a possible impediment to receiving federal student aid. Provide dedicated assistance to incarcerated individuals seeking to navigate the federal aid process, including loan servicing and default management help for those who borrowed prior to incarceration.
- **Ensure HBCUs have the resources and infrastructure needed to provide education services to justice-involved individuals and communities impacted by mass incarceration.** Provide HBCUs with resources and technical assistance to create and manage correctional education programs. Incentivize states and correctional institutions to work with HBCUs to provide programming. A recent report estimated that almost 1 in every 2 people has an immediate family member who has been incarcerated, and the numbers are higher for Blacks.³ Provide HBCUs with grant aid to support students on campus who have been impacted by mass incarceration both directly and indirectly

¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Digest of education statistics*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2017menu_tables.asp

³Elderbroom, B., Bennett, L., Gong, S., Rose, F., & Towns, Z. (2018). *Every second: The impact of the incarceration crisis on America's families*. Retrieved from FWD.us Website: <https://everysecond.fwd.us/downloads/EverySecond.fwd.us.pdf>