

NCAN's FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS

Fully Fund the Pell Grant

The Pell Grant helps 7.2 million students access education and training each year; most from families earning less than \$40,000 annually. In recent years, Congress and the Administration have enabled 1.7 million more students to pursue postsecondary education and prepare for high-wage, in-demand careers. NCAN was encouraged to see that the President's FY27 Budget Request provides funding to address the immediate Pell shortfall and maintain the current maximum. NCAN urges Congress to build on the Administration's proposal by fully funding Pell without cuts to eligibility, and increasing the maximum award by \$200 to help restore the grant's purchasing power. As costs of living have increased, a fourth year of flat funding erodes the value of the award, leaving students with significant affordability gaps. If the Pell maximum had kept pace with inflation, it would be \$8,100 today. Congress must act before the start of FY27 to allow students and families certainty as they plan for the coming year. NCAN also requests level funding for critical college access and success programs including TRIO, GEAR UP, SEOG, Federal Work Study, and AmeriCorps, which improve postsecondary attainment and strengthen our nation's workforce.

Strengthen FAFSA Functionality

Improvements to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and functionality have driven strong gains in completion rates. The high school class of 2026 is on track to reach record FAFSA completion levels, with 53.8% of seniors having completed the form as of April 24. To build on this progress, NCAN urges Congress to protect level funding for FAFSA and Student Aid Administration so the Office of Federal Student Aid can award aid without disruption or delay, prevent fraudulent applications, and further strengthen FAFSA functionality for students and families. Congress should also ensure robust support for the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC), so students and families can access timely, knowledgeable assistance through a well-staffed call center. Sustaining this investment will preserve record completion gains, strengthen confidence in the federal financial aid system, and ensure all students can access the financial aid they need to enroll in and complete postsecondary education.

Improve College Cost Transparency

A lack of clarity and consistency in financial aid offers can create barriers for students — especially those first in their families to attend college — who may be unable to anticipate or absorb unexpected costs. Increasing transparency by setting standardized terminology and definitions can help students and families distinguish between grants and loans and make informed decisions about education and training after high school. Particularly as costs of living rise, indirect costs such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare often create the greatest uncertainty. NCAN recommends that Congress require a standardized approach and data sources for estimating off-campus living expenses, taking into account geographic and institutional variations. Institutions should also clearly share the assumptions used to estimate these costs so students can evaluate their accuracy and make true apples-to-apples comparisons.

About Us:

The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan professional association with over 500 member organizations across the U.S. that help students prepare for, apply to, and succeed in postsecondary education. NCAN member organizations touch the lives of more than 2 million students each year and see firsthand the challenges that students face. With the right advising, financial aid, and mentoring, every student can complete a degree or credential, and in turn, strengthen our nation's workforce and economy. NCAN believes that all students should have the opportunity to complete affordable, high-quality education after high school.

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