

# Aim Higher

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Access | Affordability | Completion

## House Democrats Fight to Improve Higher Education for Working Families

House Democrats believe quality higher education must be accessible and affordable to empower America's working families to succeed in our economy. The decades old promise of the Higher Education Act (HEA) is to expand access and provide an affordable education to those who had been traditionally underserved by colleges and universities. It is Congress' responsibility to reexamine federal policy to ensure HEA lives up to this charge.

### Access

Higher education is still out of reach for too many students. Many families have never sent a member to college and think that higher education is unattainable, unnecessary, or too expensive. In too many classrooms in America, working towards a higher education is the exception, not the norm, even though studies and projections tell us that some form of higher education will be necessary to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

House Democrats remain committed to ensuring that all students have access to a quality higher education, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, disability, or family circumstance. We support strengthening outreach programs that help students of all ages understand the lifelong opportunities available by earning a degree or other credential past high school. Innovative pathways such as dual enrollment programs and competency-based education can help students earn college credit on a schedule that works for them. And we must ensure that no student prepared to succeed in college chooses not to go simply because they are unaware of the financial support available to them.

### Affordability

Over the past 20 years, growth in college costs has outpaced inflation by roughly 2% each year, with state disinvestment shifting college costs increasingly onto students. As college has become less affordable, Federal Student Aid programs have come under increasing pressure. The Pell Grant, the cornerstone of our higher education funding system, covered 77% of the cost of attendance at a four-year public college and 36% of attendance costs at a four-year private college in 1980; in 2015, those numbers were 29% and 13% respectively. Faced with increased tuition, students have increasingly become reliant on borrowing to pay for their education, delaying their ability to participate fully in the economy.

**Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats**  
*[democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/issues/education/higher-education](https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/issues/education/higher-education)*

House Democrats will fight to strengthen the Pell Grant so fewer students are reliant on loans and will work to reduce the interest rates on existing and future student loans. We support simplification of the repayment programs and reforms to the loan servicing process to help borrowers secure manageable payments and avoid default. And we aim to create a federal-state partnership to work with states to contain college costs and spur the investments needed to make tuition more affordable.

## **Completion**

The face of the average student in American higher education has changed. More students are taking classes part-time while working a job and providing for a family. Others are starting school at an older age than traditional students and taking classes over a longer period of time. Today's students face additional barriers to completing their degrees, limiting their chances of achieving the full promise of higher education. Many schools have made improving completion a priority and are implementing successful programs that respond to the unique needs of their student populations.

House Democrats are focused on solutions that help all students complete their higher education on time with a degree or credential. This focus includes ensuring students and families have access to the data they need to know which schools have a solid track record of graduating students. We look to assist more institutions in implementing student support programs proven to help complete their programs.