

Opening Statement of Congresswoman Susan Davis
Higher Education and Workforce Development (HEWD) Subcommittee Hearing
“Empowering Students and Families to Make Informed Decisions on Higher Education”
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2175 Rayburn

Thank you, Chairman Guthrie. And thank you to the witnesses for being here. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

The profile of our students attending college today looks much different than it did when the federal government first began collecting data on colleges and universities in the mid-1960s. Back then your typical student was a white 18-year old male going directly to college from high school in order to pursue intangible benefits. Today, our students are older, attending college part-time while balancing many priorities like childcare and work, and from more socioeconomically and racially diverse families than their peers of decades past.

Many of them are first in their families to go to college and have attended more than one institution throughout their college education.

And more and more, students are going to college to receive tangible benefits a decent chance of getting a job with a living wage and health benefits.

But our current postsecondary data system doesn't reflect today's student. Our most comprehensive dataset, the federally mandated Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, more commonly referred to as IPEDS, leaves many students unaccounted for.

Some students, for example, are unable to attend college in the fall right after high school due to financial setbacks or inability to line up child care. And schools, particularly community colleges, allow for that flexibility. However, many of the enrollment figures in IPEDS only account for students who first enrolled in the fall and leave out students who may have enrolled in the spring.

What's worse is the incomplete picture of graduation rates. Although nearly three out of five students attend more than one school

and nearly two out of five attend school part-time, IPEDS outcome metrics only account for first-time, full-time students. This means that transfer and part-time students are largely invisible in our higher education system. And although the Department of Education has been working to include more students in these metrics, it is simply not enough.

Given our significant investment in higher education, we have a vested interest in ensuring that colleges and universities are serving *all* their students well. But to do that, we need comprehensive information that accurately portrays today's students.

Additionally, many schools have signaled that the current system of data reporting duplicates efforts by the institution. Directly involving the Department of Education would decrease administrative burden placed on colleges.

Students also need better data. When Isabella asks how long it usually takes students to graduate at her school of interest, there should be an answer for her. And when she specifically asks questions about the success of other students who look like her, the response should not lead to political excuses.

In fact, our Committee should remember that providing better consumer information has been a bipartisan issue. Members have been pushing improvements to the postsecondary data infrastructure for years.

Where there are concerns about the privacy of our students, our Committee can come together to have a solutions-based conversation about the best way to secure this data. To dismiss this critical lack of data for privacy reasons would be short-sighted.

This type of data collection is what would allow us to uncover equity gaps in access, affordability, and completion for *all* students, and

empower them to make better informed decisions about where to spend their time and hard-earned money.

That's why two of our Members on our Committee, Rep. Paul Mitchell and Rep. Jared Polis, introduced the College Transparency Act last week. This bill would repeal the student unit record ban currently in HEA and create a cohesive student unit record data system. I applaud my colleagues for taking a bold step forward.

One thing is certain; our data infrastructure has not evolved with the changing student demographics and it is simply not equipped to do so. We need to improve our postsecondary data infrastructure system to move the needle on access, affordability, and completion.

Thank you, Chairman. I yield back.