How America Can Build Back Better

Recommended K-12 and Higher Education Priorities for the Biden Administration

Education Strategy Group (ESG) is a strategic consulting firm working in states and cities across the country to strengthen K-12 and higher education systems, build better pathways for students, and close equity gaps that have left too many young people and adults unprepared for success in the economy. Given our organizational focus, we are heartened to see a deep commitment in the Biden administration's plan to improve college and career readiness, expand access to postsecondary education, and enable more youth and adults to gain the skills and credentials necessary to find success in the workforce.

Based upon ESG's deep experience at the federal, state, and institutional levels and our ongoing work to design and implement policies and strategies to increase postsecondary readiness and success, we have developed a set of recommendations for the Biden administration as it hones and begins to implement its strategy. Our recommendations are grounded in the following principles:

- Postsecondary education and training is essential to economic opportunity and mobility. K-12 schools should no longer be setting their sights on high school graduation as the culminating success metric. This is especially important in our most under-resourced schools serving large numbers of low-income students and students of color.
- Not all postsecondary credentials have equal value, so as we invest in and grow pathways and programs in both K-12 and higher education, it is imperative to prioritize those that align to high-growth, high-wage labor market opportunities.
- If education is truly to be the great equalizer, our nation's success must be defined by our ability to support traditionally underserved communities—students of color, low-income students, first-generation college students, and displaced adult learners—in gaining access to postsecondary education and training and, ultimately, attaining credentials of value.
- High-quality data are essential for illuminating opportunity gaps and empowering responsive action. We must invest in quality data systems that make better connections across K-12, higher education, and workforce systems, and encourage the use of a new set of metrics in measuring the success of our schools.

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Addressing Urgent Needs Through Education Stimulus Investments

ESG strongly supports additional stimulus investments in K-12 and higher education to spur equitable economic recovery. If stimulus funds become available during the Biden administration, we encourage focusing on the following priorities (further details are described in the individual sections below).

1. **Prevent a "lost COVID cohort":** Recent data from the National Student Clearinghouse show that far too many students, especially students of color and low-income students, are either opting out of postsecondary education altogether or are getting lost in the gap between high school and higher education because of the weak hand-off between the two systems. The anxiety and financial uncertainty caused by COVID is taking what used to be a pipeline leak and turning it into a gushing stream. Given how critical it is for students to continue their education beyond high school to give them a fighting chance in the economy, this phenomenon is a national crisis. We strongly encourage investment that uses data to target supports to students most likely to drop out of the high school to college pipeline and creates incentives for K-12 and higher education systems to work together to catch those students before they opt out and facilitate their seamless transitions into postsecondary education and training.

2. **Prioritize high-value credentials:** There is significant interest in scaling non-degree credentials, especially for adults who are out of work. This is understandable, and we support it. But credentials below the bachelor's degree level differ vastly in the currency they provide to students in the labor market and in their stackability. As individuals face a shifting labor market as a result of COVID, it will be imperative that any new grant programs to support upskilling and reskilling create incentives for the completion of industry-recognized credentials and other non-degree credentials with verifiable labor market value and that result in family sustaining wages. These credentials should also be embedded within longer-term degrees and include incentives to persist after reattaching to the labor market.

3. **Support adult reskilling:** Recent surveys indicate that over one-third of individuals believe they will need to return to school for reskilling if they lose their job. As the numbers of Americans filing for unemployment continues to grow, higher education institutions—especially community colleges—need to better position themselves to help those who are out of work to reskill. Specific investment should be directed to institutions to design their programs and supports to be more welcoming to and supportive of adult learners. This would require investment in building capacity at community colleges to address the unique needs of adult learners seeking to reskill. These investments in capacity should support high-value, research-proven approaches such as navigators to support adult re-entry, high-quality accelerated programming, and clearer pathways from non-credit to credit programs.

K-12 Education

A high school diploma is insufficient for long-term success in the modern labor market; yet each year, nearly one million youth graduate from high school and do not move on to any postsecondary education or training. The vast majority of these individuals are students of color and/or from low-income households. With nearly every job created after the 2008 recession requiring some education or training beyond high school and the pandemic accelerating dramatic shifts in the labor market, it is almost a guarantee that students will need a postsecondary credential to find economic success. We believe the federal government has a meaningful role to play in supporting that journey.

Scale High-Quality Career Pathways

The new administration should prioritize ensuring that high schools prepare students for a full range of in-demand, family-sustaining wage opportunities within the workforce, with a specific emphasis on innovation in our low-income communities and communities of color. We believe the administration can leverage and highlight leading work around the country that should serve as models for others, with particular focus on:

- Clear alignment with in-demand, family-sustaining wage occupations that offer a path to economic and social mobility;
- Culmination in a credential that opens doors to those occupations;
- Focused advising to grow student insight into high-value occupations and what it takes to access them;
- Industry-aligned work-based learning experiences that allow students to apply classroom learning to deepen their technical and professional skills and grow their social networks;
- Embedded opportunities within the pathway to earn postsecondary credits in technical courses that count toward a related degree; and
- A relentless focus on preparing students for the demands of continued education and training in a related degree program within a postsecondary setting.

ESG recommends:

- **Incentivize communities to build and scale high-quality, demand-driven career pathways and retire those that no longer hold relevance in our economy.** Well-built pathways offer learners a direct route from classroom learning to good jobs. They are carefully aligned with the knowledge and skills demanded by the labor market; continue seamlessly into and through a related degree program; and offer learners industry-aligned work-based learning experiences as well as opportunities to participate in early postsecondary experiences and earn credentials needed for good jobs. However, communities cannot stop with building pathways; they must also place these pathways equitably across schools in such a way that underrepresented students —like those from low-income families and students of color—have the same chance as other students to enroll in, persist through, and complete those pathways. Artificial barriers like admission requirements and transportation shouldn’t keep these pathways out of students’ reach. States and communities need incentives for K-12, higher education, and workforce leaders to partner on this work. Together, they must analyze labor market data to develop new or scale existing pathways aligned to labor market need; retire pathways that lead to dead-end jobs; develop new advising and support structures for engaging students; and expand work-based learning opportunities. ESG has partnered with JPMorgan Chase and Advance CTE on several multi-state and multi-city initiatives that have supported the expansion of quality pathways in high-growth fields. Delaware, Kentucky, and Tennessee provide strong examples of states that have increased the number of students in career pathways that articulate to higher education and set students up for economic and career success. Denver, Indianapolis, and Nashville are leading examples of cities doing this work.

- **Expand access to industry-aligned work-based learning (WBL) for high school students.** WBL can be a driver of economic and social mobility for students. It enables them to explore potential careers, grow technical skills, build critical social networks, envision themselves in roles they perceive are reserved for others, and better understand what it takes to succeed in the workforce. We strongly support the administration's proposal for a $50B investment in workforce training, and we would encourage the administration to include youth apprenticeship in that funding, so that students can begin building meaningful career connections in high school. ESG is a partner in the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship (PAYA), which has invested in nine communities to help them scale youth apprentice programs that meet the partnership's definition of quality. These communities provide clear examples of the power of these connections for students, and there were a significant number of additional communities across the country that were interested in participating in this initiative but were excluded due to resource constraints.

- **Create incentives for high-return non-degree credentials that are embedded within longer-term education and career pathways.** There are over 4,000 credentialing bodies nationwide that, together, offer thousands of different industry-recognized credentials across industry sectors; yet very little information is available about their value and few efforts are in place to prioritize those that offer the greatest economic return for students. Without this information, there is significant risk that students will be steered into programs that pay little, provide no meaningful job progression opportunity, and shut down any path to upward mobility. States and communities must use a data-driven process to systematically sort through the "wild west" of credentials to confidently identify those that lead to an in-demand, family-sustaining wage job. They must design and offer incentives to schools and districts to help more students earn these high-return credentials. And they must enable data reporting that will help them understand which credentials are being earned and by whom. Our report *Credential Currency: How States Can Identify and Promote Credentials of Value* offers examples of how this can be done, and we have been working with a group of states over the past year to help them put stronger systems of credential identification in place. Moving forward, ESG will partner with the National Skills Coalition to build a platform for engaging larger numbers of states in this work.

Create Seamless Bridges between K-12 and Higher Education

Far too many students are lost in the transition between high school and higher education, and the circumstances brought on by the pandemic have exacerbated this challenge. Establishing cross-sector partnerships to bridge the gap can help students navigate the postsecondary transition maze. Community colleges have a particularly significant role to play in that work. ESG, in partnership with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), developed a series of recommendations for how community colleges can partner with K-12 schools to address issues like remediation, enrollment, and graduation gaps, which have persisted for decades. The community colleges highlighted in *Aligning for Student Success* are models for how collaboration can promote college readiness and success for all students.

To further emphasize college readiness and postsecondary enrollment as a core driver of the administration's plan for K-12 schools, we recommend the following:

- **Create a near-peer postsecondary advising network.** Expanding access to postsecondary advisors can have a meaningful, positive impact on enrollment and attainment. We encourage the administration to prioritize the reauthorization of the Serve America Act and expand funding for recent college graduates to serve as mentors for high school students—especially first-generation college students—as they prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training. Either through the creation of a national college advising corps, or incentive funding for the development/expansion of state advising corps, this could serve the dual purpose of employing recent college graduates (who are being hit hard by the economic fallout of the pandemic) and creating critical social networks for traditionally underserved high school students. Further description of this idea can be found in our brief, *Establishing a State-Level Postsecondary Advising Network*.

- **Expand dual enrollment, especially for students of color and those from low-income families.** We strongly support increasing access to early postsecondary credit opportunities for high school students. Data clearly show that students who participate in these courses in high school have a much greater chance of attending and successfully completing college. However, most states are finding that policies designed to increase overall participation in dual enrollment courses do not necessarily result in greater participation levels for students of color and those from low-income families. In partnership with the College in High School Alliance, we published *Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs*, which provides equity-based policy recommendations across six critical areas and highlights leading states throughout.

- **Invest in summer academic bridge programs.** "Summer melt" is a challenge every year; approximately 20 percent of high school graduates who are accepted and plan to enroll in higher education do not show up in the fall. Many of those who do enroll are academically underprepared. Given the learning loss and financial insecurities students have experienced as a result of the COVID pandemic, this problem will only get worse if action is not taken. It is critical that the federal government play a leadership role in ensuring there are supports in place to help students catch up academically before they transition to postsecondary education or training. Without these supports, they may end up stuck in the black hole of remedial coursework, which will severely limit their likelihood of graduating and significantly increase the chances they take on crippling student loan debt. The administration should consider immediate investment to help states stand up summer academic bridge programs that enable students to receive additional instruction and support, and increase their likelihood of matriculation. Texas College Bridge, funded through the federal stimulus dollars, provides financial incentives to students for completing coursework, and enables students that are successful to place directly into credit-bearing coursework upon college enrollment statewide.

- **Support extensive FAFSA campaigns.** The recent actions Congress took to make it easier for students and families to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are a critical step forward in making financial aid more accessible to students, especially those facing the most serious barriers. FAFSA simplification must now be followed up with extensive outreach to students and families to ensure all who are eligible apply. The federal government can support and incentivize targeted FAFSA campaigns at the state and local levels, building off of exemplary practices in states like Tennessee and Louisiana.

Prioritize the Most Predictive Measures of Success

There are nearly 7,000 high schools in America in which Black, Hispanic, or low-income students have less than a 50 percent chance of enrolling in higher education after graduation. To change the trajectory of these "coin flip" high schools, there must be a greater focus on the most predictive measures of postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and success.

Our new report, *From Tails to Heads: Building Momentum for Postsecondary Success*, recommends a set of eight "Momentum Metrics" that all districts and states should prioritize for improvement in their K-12 schools. Although the data clearly show that increasing student performance on these metrics would significantly move the needle on college enrollment and success, very few states and school systems make measuring and tracking them a priority. The federal government should take the following actions to support the use of the Momentum Metrics:

- **Require states to publish disaggregated postsecondary enrollment rates by high school.** While required by the Every Student Succeeds Act, only 32 states and the District of Columbia currently publish enrollment rates broken down by race/ethnicity or income status at the state level. Fewer than half make these data available by high school, with many requiring specific data requests to do so. These data are critical for helping practitioners and policymakers understand the gaps and barriers between K-12 and higher education and devise solutions to address them.

- **Include the full set of Momentum Metrics in the Civil Rights Data Collection.** While the data for the metrics largely exist in every district across the country, very few are using the data to prioritize their work. Making these metrics a component of the required data collection can bring greater transparency to their power, and open the door for deeper conversations among practitioners about how to drive improvement, especially for traditionally underserved students.

- **Build the metrics on postsecondary preparation, application, and enrollment into federal grant competitions.** New investments to support the development of innovative high schools, career exposure and exploration, postsecondary advising, and postsecondary success should require the collection and transparent reporting of progress on the recommended metrics.

- **Provide incentives and supports for states that share student-level FAFSA information with schools and districts.** Students that complete the FAFSA in high school are significantly more likely than their non-completing peers to enroll in higher education. Our *Fast Track FAFSA* report highlights states and districts that have prioritized FAFSA completion and the success they have been able to demonstrate. The use of data to target supports and monitor progress was consistent throughout all of the identified communities, which is further detailed in this strategy spotlight.

Higher Education

Nearly every state in the country has set a postsecondary attainment goal aligned to labor market projections. Despite significant improvement over the last decade in access and success, every state still needs to increase its attainment rate by more than 10 percentage points to meet their goals and put significantly more individuals on a path to economic mobility. The pandemic has made even more apparent the significant work still left to do to help more individuals of color access postsecondary education and training and attain credentials with labor market value. We believe a deep focus on access—including for adults and other populations of traditionally underserved students—retention, and completion of those currently enrolled, navigational supports for lifelong learning, and alignment with the workforce can help lead the country to a strong economic recovery.

Prioritize Higher Education as an Engine for Economic Recovery

In the economic recovery that lies ahead, equipping individuals with postsecondary credentials will be critically important, even as states and higher education institutions face tremendous financial and logistical stress. A renewed commitment to increasing postsecondary attainment is at the heart of a successful and equitable economic recovery strategy in the months and years ahead. The shifting nature of work requires more skills signaled by the attainment of postsecondary credentials. Unquestionably, we need more citizens obtaining credentials at all levels — from non-degree credentials to associate and bachelor's degrees and beyond. Our education and workforce systems must be positioned to assess and respond effectively to these new economic realities and adopt a nimble posture as the situation evolves. This starts with leveraging real-time labor market and hiring data to convey clearly to stakeholders which non-degree credentials are needed by in-demand jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage; and it includes ensuring that programs are accessible and provide opportunities to earn those credentials.

We believe the administration laid out a strong foundation for prioritizing higher education as an engine of economic recovery during the campaign. With an additional focus on the following strategies we think the plan can go even further in helping accelerate America's recovery:

- **Create incentives for attainment that are responsive to workforce demand.** We encourage the administration to incentivize systems and institutions to dramatically scale programs resulting in high-quality labor market opportunities. This will likely require resources and capacity to put real-time labor market data and tools in the hands of learners to make informed decisions, and for state, district, and institutional decisionmakers to drive decisions about program and pathway offerings that provide economic opportunity. Our brief *Pivot to Recover: State Postsecondary Attainment Agendas in the Era of COVID-19* spotlights how a number of states have pivoted as a result of the pandemic to promote postsecondary attainment aligned with labor market demand as critical to economic recovery.

- **Invest in programs that lead to high-value credentials.** It may be tempting to lower expectations during a down market in our urgency to help people find employment, but that can inadvertently encourage learners to pursue options that are less valuable for in the long term. Moving away from a "jobs first" mentality can help ensure learners can complete credentials that lead to family-sustaining wages. Any federal investment in shorter-term education and training paths should include strong safeguards around value for the individual, using thresholds in labor market analyses that prioritize occupations and related non-degree credentials that continue to be valued by employers and pay a living wage.

- **Scale intermediary organizations to strengthen the education to employment pipeline.** To deliver on the promise of high-quality career pathways—in both K-12 and higher education—we need stronger connections between education institutions and employers. This often requires capacity that does not exist in either sector. In a number of communities, third party intermediary organizations play this vital role. Unfortunately, far too few communities have strong intermediary organizations in place. Efforts to create seamless pathways across sectors should include opportunities to create or scale external partners to help sustain the work.

- **Offer greater transparency to students, families, and policymakers about pathway outcomes.** This starts with enhancing the College Scorecard to get relevant information into the hands of students and families. Additionally, funding should be provided to states and communities to conduct program-level equity audits to examine which students have access to high-quality pathways that align with labor market needs. This information should be made public, so that gaps can be filled and progress monitored. In addition, we should provide better tools for people to fully explore learning and career options that go beyond affirming paths put forward by family and friends.

- **Invest in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Minority-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities (HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs) to build better career pathways for their students and stronger partnerships with employers.** American businesses are facing evolving demands for skills and talent. They are also seeking to diversify their workforce to ensure it is more reflective of the communities and people they serve. Many HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs are well positioned to become career accelerators from the perspective of the students they serve and their relationships to local business and industry. There will need to be intentional investments in their capacity to help them stay abreast of shifting labor markets, build high-quality programs with more intentional career focus, and strengthen partnerships with employers in high-growth industries. Federal policies and resources should support HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs to create new programs in priority industry sectors and provide work-based learning experiences such as internships and apprenticeships within those programs.

Use Data-Driven Solutions to Increase Postsecondary Attainment

Over the past few years, the country has learned significantly more about what it takes to improve completion and attainment rates, and the federal government should lead the way in investing and promoting these evidence-based strategies, especially among institutions that serve large numbers of students of color and low-income students. ESG and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association have recently convened a cohort of states to develop more focused attainment plans. There are a clear set of strategies emerging as best practices.

We recommend that investments in postsecondary institutions, such as the creation of a Title I for postsecondary education or new grant program for community colleges, prioritize the following strategies:

- **Attainment of non-degree credentials of value that lead to degrees:** There are millions of jobs that require more than a high school diploma and less than a bachelor's degree. For many students, completing a high-quality certificate or licensure program can result in family-sustaining wages. More colleges can effectively establish these programs, make students aware of their availability, and ensure that they serve as on-ramps to degree programs. This is especially important through the COVID economic recovery as individuals need affordable, accelerated options that set them up for workforce success. These non-degree credentials MUST also include clear paths to degrees.

- **Alignment of non-credit and credit-bearing programs:** Most institutions offer non-credit workforce programs and credit-based programs that operate separately. Many employers primarily value the skills and competencies built within those programs and may not focus on the distinctions between these programs. Students value access, flexibility, and opportunity to reach their educational goals. Students in non-credit programs do not often have a direct pathway to continue their education on the credit side toward a degree and are unlikely to receive credit for the learning that occurred in their non-credit program. Our research has found that a number of colleges and systems (e.g., Prince George's Community College, Salt Lake City Community College, Kentucky Community and Technical College System, and Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY) have undertaken the difficult work to promote alignment of industry-focused non-credit programs with credit programs that lead to degrees. Elevating these and other exemplars can demonstrate how alignment can advance opportunities for increased transition to degree programs.

- **Guided pathways:** Leading institutions across the country are simplifying course pathways and connecting them to students' career goals so that they can set students up for success from the start. Easier-to-navigate course paths coupled with realigned advising structures has led to increased credit momentum for students in Tennessee and other states. The next evolution of this work is to better connect it to postsecondary career supports. This would include combining academic and career advising, promoting meaningful work-based learning tied to the major, and informed selection of majors.

- **Maximizing credit completion:** Students who complete 15 credits in their first semester are significantly more likely to persist and attain a credential compared to their peers. The University of Hawaii has doubled the percentage of freshmen taking 15 credits, leading to increases in on-time graduation. Research also suggests that completing credit-bearing mathematics and English courses within a student's first 30 credits is highly correlated with completion of a degree. Increasing the percentage of students meeting this goal requires comprehensive redesign of advising, teaching, and learning. Co-requisite remediation is an important strategy to address this challenge. Students who receive supplemental academic support while enrolled in an entry-level course are three to four times as likely to complete that course as compared to those who start in traditional remediation. Georgia, Indiana, Tennessee, and West Virginia have been national leaders in this work.

- **Proactive advising:** Rather than waiting for students to ask for assistance, proactive advising approaches take the initiative to push out information and support to students before they struggle and disconnect. Georgia State's matriculation and persistence outcomes have increased dramatically since it implemented an automated advising system, which alerts students to remind them of key milestones and informs their advisors when they have disengaged from their courses. They have also recently seen success in attacking "summer melt," or the phenomenon of students indicating their plans to enroll after high school graduation, but never ultimately matriculating.

Create On-Ramps to Adult Success

With unprecedented numbers of job losses, the country is likely to see a significant influx of adult learners seeking education and training. Postsecondary institutions—community colleges in particular—need to be prepared to serve these adult students. This will mean having high-quality accelerated programs that are responsive to the changing labor market, and dramatically altering the models of delivery and support to address the needs of these adult learners. To support the millions of unemployed Americans, the administration should have a robust set of strategies for helping communities reengage adult learners.

We recommend the following strategies:

- **Develop adult-friendly systems and structures.** Adult learners tend to take very pragmatic approaches to pursuing postsecondary education and training; they want to be certain that their investment of time and money will result in a return on investment. Yet the vast majority of higher education is built around a model designed to serve traditionally-aged students. Additional resources are needed to set up adult-focused capacity across institutions and systems, which should become self-sustaining with increased adult enrollment and retention. In addition, with the impending reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, there is an opportunity to revisit the ways in which independent student status within the federal methodology can inhibit the availability of Title IV aid for adults returning to school.

- **Expand high-quality, accelerated programs.** Using labor market data to surface high-demand sectors and stand up programs quickly will be key to recovery. This might mean initially offering programs to focus only on skill-based workforce credentials, but it is also critical to ensure that all programs have pathways that leverage learning into credit-bearing degree programs. Ohio, for example, offers the statewide One Year Option for students who have successfully completed non-credit, non-degree credentials to obtain a certification to earn a block of technical credit toward an Associate of Technical Studies degree. In addition, institutions and systems should also build purposeful processes like South Central College in Minnesota's Credit for Prior Learning Wizard, which reviews whether an adult student is eligible for credit for prior learning to help shorten the path.

- **Encourage the use of navigators to support adult re-entry.** Just as college transition support is essential for recent high school graduates, adult students benefit from guidance and resources around the process of returning to higher education. Several states—including Maine and Minnesota—have developed in-person and virtual navigator supports for adults entering postsecondary institutions. These become single-stop resources for adults beginning to navigate the systems from application to applying for financial aid and registering for classes.

- **Provide guidance/permissibility to more effectively braid funding to support adult learners.** Adult learners need support throughout their educational journey to address non-academic needs. The needs will be greater as the future workforce will require new and elevated knowledge and skills as a prerequisite to entry or upward mobility in a new technology-driven economy. The federal government provides multiple programs to support retraining, but the complexity of the processes across these programs reduces their impact. The federal government could create incentives for states to create a combined application across the WIOA core programs (e.g., adult, youth, dislocated worker, vocational rehabilitation, adult literacy) and more state partner programs (e.g., Trade Adjustment, Perkins, TANF, and Veterans). A coherent state-wide strategic approach to education, training, workforce and economic development would focus efforts, services, supports, and fiscal assets in a more impactful manner.

- **Invest in models that pair academic and career training to accelerate the path back to the workforce.** For instance, a new administration could leverage WIOA Title II funds to scale integrated basic education and training programs. Washington's I-BEST model has demonstrated dramatic success in helping low-skill adults gain a GED and postsecondary credential in an accelerated fashion, helping lift many individuals out of poverty.

- **Offer flexibility to serve targeted audiences.** The federal government should encourage greater flexibility in funds to serve adults, current and formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans, and many other groups of individuals that face significant barriers to postsecondary access and success. For example, the elimination of the ban on Pell grants for incarcerated individuals can be leveraged to enhance delivery and services inside prisons. One tool could be expansion of the Experimental Sites Initiative in Title IV to enable incarcerated individuals to access Pell Grants to complete meaningful postsecondary credentials.

Maintain Focus on College Affordability

We strongly support efforts to make postsecondary education and training opportunities more affordable for students, including doubling the maximum value of Pell grants, making colleges and universities tuition-free for all families with incomes below $125,000, enabling any youth or adult to attend two years of community college without debt, and providing loan forgiveness for students attending HBCUs, MSIs, and TCUs and college graduates in public service careers. We also believe investment to support the provision of wrap-around services and emergency aid for students can have a significant positive impact on the number of students persisting and attaining a postsecondary credential of value. To further this focus on affordability, and ensure that students are set up for economic opportunity, we also encourage the administration to:

- Reestablish the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau as an empowered advocate for student borrowers;
- Pilot the short-term Pell grant option, with a focus on credentials with demonstrable proof of labor market value; and,
- Ensure the proposed federal-state partnership for investment includes a Maintenance of Effort provision to ensure that state investment in other aspects of higher education does not decline as a result.

Education holds the key to economic revitalization and must play a central role in addressing systemic inequities. With bold, visionary leadership and strategic investment, the Biden administration can set the conditions for the collective achievement of more equitable educational and economic opportunities for all Americans.