



FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

To reach Goal 2025, the country needs a 21st century higher education system focused on student success and high-quality learning. Federal policy can and must help build that system — one that reflects the reality of 21st century students and fits postsecondary education’s rapidly changing environment. Students need postsecondary education that helps them meet their goals for the future, including a good job and a good life. They should not have to incur so much debt that they choose not to follow public-service career paths, such as teaching, or that they indefinitely postpone buying a house, opening a business or starting a family. Students and their employers should know what their degrees and other credentials mean in terms of the knowledge and skills students have attained — not just how many hours they sat in classrooms.

For the vision of a 21st century higher education system to become a reality, federal policy needs to look beyond access to encompass student success and work for all students in the 21st century, including working adults, low-income students, first-generation students and students of color. This statement of federal policy priorities is intended to prompt discussion about how higher education needs to change and what the federal government can do to help bring about those changes.

Priority 1: Support the creation and expansion of transparent pathways to high-quality degrees and other credentials.

1. **Students should have access to a variety of high-quality postsecondary education providers to meet their educational needs.**
 - a. Recognize a wider array of postsecondary education providers.
 - b. Encourage postsecondary education providers to collaborate with one another and forge pathways to credentials of value.
2. **Allow and support innovation in postsecondary education to improve outcomes for students.**
 - a. Help existing postsecondary education providers employ new methods to deliver learning and build new educational pathways to meet students’ attainment goals.
 - b. Allow for experimentation to develop new high-quality, low-cost delivery models and credentials.
 - c. Streamline regulations to assure that high-performing postsecondary education providers are rewarded with regulatory flexibility and allow for innovation in the field.



3. **Where the federal government directly funds higher education providers, demand clear evidence of high-quality outcomes for students.**
 - a. Direct federal resources to providers that demonstrate continuous improvement in student attainment, especially among students from traditionally underrepresented groups.
 - b. Evaluate federal programs and providers based on success in achieving student attainment goals.

Priority 2: Ensure that postsecondary education is affordable to all who need it.

1. **Federal student aid programs should both ensure access to higher education and provide incentives to complete programs.**
 - a. Structure federal student aid programs so that postsecondary education is affordable for low-income students.
 - b. Make the costs borne by students and families more predictable and transparent.
 - c. Provide incentives to increase degree and credential completion, reduce price, and limit student borrowing.
2. **Students should be able to easily access and manage postsecondary education benefits to forge a smooth path toward their goal.**
 - a. Ensure that students can easily apply for, view and monitor their use of all federal postsecondary education benefits for which they qualify.
 - b. Align minimum standards for student eligibility across federal benefits to the greatest extent possible.
3. **Students should be encouraged to use benefits at the provider where they are most likely to succeed.**
 - a. Permit students to use all postsecondary education benefits at a variety of providers that are held to high standards of quality.
 - b. Provide students with clear, accurate and meaningful information about providers.

Priority 3: Assure the quality of credentials and providers in terms of student learning.

1. **The quality-assurance system should be outcomes-based, place a priority on measures of student success, be transparent, and allow for a wide array of credentials, providers and modes of delivery.**
 - a. Hold validators accountable for measuring student outcomes, being transparent and encouraging providers to innovate toward higher-quality, lower-cost programs.
 - b. Recognize new validators, in addition to current ones, as assessors of educational quality.
 - c. Ensure protections for students and taxpayers against waste, fraud and abuse.
2. **Students, policymakers and other stakeholders should have access to key indicators of quality and measurements of the return on investment for both students and taxpayers.**
 - a. Ensure that metrics and data are comparable across providers and states.
 - b. Be clear about the use and purpose of the metrics.
 - c. Require that data collected and shared clearly reflect all types of students.
 - d. As much as possible, collect similar data related to students in all federal programs connected to postsecondary education.
3. **Students, policymakers and other stakeholders should have access to clear and transparent information to assess the quality of credentials.**
 - a. Encourage providers to use a transparent method that identifies and rewards student learning, not seat time, as the core basis for assessing student outcomes.
 - b. Encourage states, providers and organizations to develop meaningful and comparable measures of student learning, employment and other outcomes.