

November 10, 2022

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington, D.C 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona:

The undersigned organizations and education leaders urge you to include Early College Pell grants in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget proposal. Gone are the days when a high school diploma meant a lucrative job. Now, more than 80% of good-paying jobsⁱ require a postsecondary credential, and more than half of those require a bachelor's degree or more. Coupled with the economic strain of a post-pandemic America, our nation's young people require our action to ensure their future success.

Though high school graduation rates reached a pre-pandemic high of 86%, many high school graduates are unprepared for the demands of higher education. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center showed a 13% overall decline in freshman enrollment in Fall 2021 versus Fall 2019. Declines continued in 2022, including a decline in community colleges of 4.4% for Black students and 1.9% for Latinx students. However, according to the Clearinghouse, there is one bright spot in a sea of troubling data: the growth of dual enrollment. Early data for Fall 2022 shows that dual enrollment grew by 11.5% from Fall 2021, almost entirely offsetting the decline in enrollment at two-year institutions.ⁱⁱ

Dual enrollment programsⁱⁱⁱ and early college high schools^{iv} have proven time and again to be the catalyst for increased college access and success and are critical tools in preparing young people for the demands of a postsecondary education. These innovative approaches reimagine high schools, build alignment between high school and colleges, and create pathways to career success, especially for historically marginalized communities.

The administration has already shown its commitment to young people through investments in education and the workforce. Now is the time to deliver on President Biden's campaign promise^v to allow Pell Grants to be used to expand dual enrollment programs for young people from low-income families. Early College Pell grants should be tailored to the needs of younger scholars and be carefully designed to ensure that students are able to maximize their awards, academically and financially. As an example, the College in High School Alliance's Early College Pell proposal outlines a number of considerations for rigorously testing the expansion of Pell grants to younger students.^{vi}

By expanding qualifying Pell expenditures to include college while in high school programs, more young people will begin their journeys to a great first job. Early College Pell is both an investment in our nation's youth, and a successful future. Our future workers, voters, innovators, thinkers, and leaders are depending upon us.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
All4Ed
Academeum
American Student Assistance
Association for Career and Technical Education
Bard Early Colleges
Complete College America
Education Reform Now
Greater Owensboro Leadership Institute
Huntley Community School District 158
Kellogg Community College
Massachusetts Alliance for Early College
Mesalands Community College
Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL)
Mounds View Public Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Urban League
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)
Oakton Community College, Des Plaines and Skokie Illinois
Outlier.org
Owensboro Community and Technical College
RDP Consulting
Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation
Stargate Charter School
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
The Charles School at Ohio Dominican University
UnidosUS
Washtenaw Educational Options Consortium
Workforce Career Readiness

ⁱ Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, “Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs: High School, Middle Skills and Bachelor’s Degree,” 2018, <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/3pathways/>.

ⁱⁱ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Data, “Covid-19: Stay Informed: First Look Fall 2022 Enrollment,” National Student Clearinghouse Research Center Data, October 20, 2022, <https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Dual Enrollment Programs: Transition to College,” What Works Clearinghouse, February 2017, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/InterventionReport/671>.

^{iv} K. Zeiser, “The Lasting Benefits of Early College High Schools,” American Institutes for Research, February 18, 2020, <https://www.air.org/project/evaluating-impact-early-college-high-schools>.

^v “Plan for Educators, Students, and Our Future: Joe Biden,” Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website, October 2, 2020, <https://joebiden.com/education/#>.

^{vi} College In High School Alliance, “Early College Pell Proposal: Federal Design Principles,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/589d0f90ff7c507ac483988e/t/60ef54a38b80383d0b633dfd/1626297508218/Federal+Design+Principles+-+Early+College+Pell.pdf>.

