

# TRIO & THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT OF 1965

The Federal TRIO Programs (“TRIO”) emerged from recognition by Congress that financial aid alone is insufficient to ensure college completion. (In the Report Language to the 1980 HEA Reauthorization, Congress stated: “*Without the information, counseling and academic services provided by the TRIO programs, disadvantaged students are often unable to take advantage of the financial assistance provided by the other Title IV programs.*”<sup>1</sup>) Building upon this understanding of the need to address both financial and non-financial barriers to postsecondary completion, the TRIO community – including the Board of Directors of the Council for Opportunity in Education, regional and state TRIO association leadership, and practitioners in the field – urges the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to implement the recommendations below in reauthorizing the Higher Education Act of 1965 (“HEA”).

## **Relieve Regulatory Burdens**

Certain regulatory requirements absorb scarce resources that would be better used if dedicated to student services. In particular, the requirement that Talent Search programs track students through postsecondary completion poses an undue burden as these programs generally work with about 700 elementary and secondary students each year at a per-student cost of just \$400. Therefore, the TRIO community proposes that the Act shift responsibility for the tracking of program participants to the Department of Education, which has a far greater capacity to do so.

The TRIO community also proposes that the Act consider expanding TRIO eligibility to include to other student aid programs. As an example, in Student Support Services, we support the use of Pell Grant eligibility as an additional, alternative means of verifying student eligibility. Likewise, in Talent Search, if at least 70% of the students at a school are eligible for free lunch, a project may use attendance at that school as a proxy for income eligibility (as long as the project proposes to serve at least 70% of the students at that school).

## **Clarify Outcome Criteria**

- **Student Support Services**: Amend Outcome Criteria for Student Support Services to allow grantees to recognize the positive value of transfer before receipt of an associate’s degree by reverting back to the “and/or” language in §402A(f)(3)(C)(ii)(II).
- **McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement**: Amend Outcome Criteria to reflect “acceptance and enrollment of [McNair] students in graduate programs within 24 months of receipt of the baccalaureate degree” (§402A(f)(3)(D)(iii)); separate “continued enrollment” and “attainment of doctoral degrees” into two separate Outcome Criteria (§402A(f)(3)(D)(iv)); and increase the maximum research stipend to \$4,000 per annum (§402E(f)(1)).
- **Educational Opportunity Centers**: Amend the requirement in §402A(f)(3)(E)(i) for enrollment of high school dropouts into GED programs to allow for additional time (i.e., 2 years).

## **Simplify the Appeals Process**

Amend §402A(c)(8)(C) to specify that the Secretary shall not deny a secondary review to eligible applicants that can demonstrate evidence of a scoring error and fell within three (3) points of the final “cut off” score and that the Secretary shall not reserve or otherwise withhold funds during the initial grant award period in order to fund successful appeals.

## **Preserve Congressional Priorities**

Ultimately, the TRIO community views Congress as the guardian of the TRIO programs and the students they serve. As Administrations change, so, then, do policy priorities. Therefore, the TRIO community proposes that the authorizing Committees include language in the reauthorization bill that ***prohibits the Secretary from instituting competitive preference or other priorities absent congressional approval***. This would prevent any Administration from instituting priorities that target funds in a manner that values popular policy trends over student needs and contravenes governing law.

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. Rep. No. 96-520, at 25 (1980), as reprinted in 1980 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3141 (emphasis added).