

Priorities for the Biden-Harris Administration: Helping First-Generation, Low-Income Students and Students with Disabilities Complete College

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The Council for Opportunity's (COE's) mission is to achieve college access and success for low-income students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities. We provide a voice for these vulnerable populations, students of color, military veterans, and for the educators who work to provide these students access to college and a realistic chance of graduating.

COE Priorities for the Biden-Harris Administration College Access and Completion Agenda

Linking Growth in Pell Grant Funding to Growth in Federal TRIO Programs

The 2020 Democratic platform included the promise to *"double the maximum Pell Grant award for low-income students, and double federal support for TRIO programs that help first-generation college students, students with disabilities, veterans and other underrepresented groups apply to and complete college [emphasis added]."*^{1 2} This platform language is based on legislation **Senator Kamala Harris** co-introduced to annually increase TRIO funding to double in five years.³ The Biden transition team can make major steps towards this goal in 1) the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) COVID-19 or other supplemental appropriations requests; and 2) the FY22 Budget request. We recommend that the TRIO increase in the FY22 Budget request at least mirror the requested Pell increase (for example, if there is a 10% increase in Pell, there is at least a corresponding 10% increase in TRIO).⁴

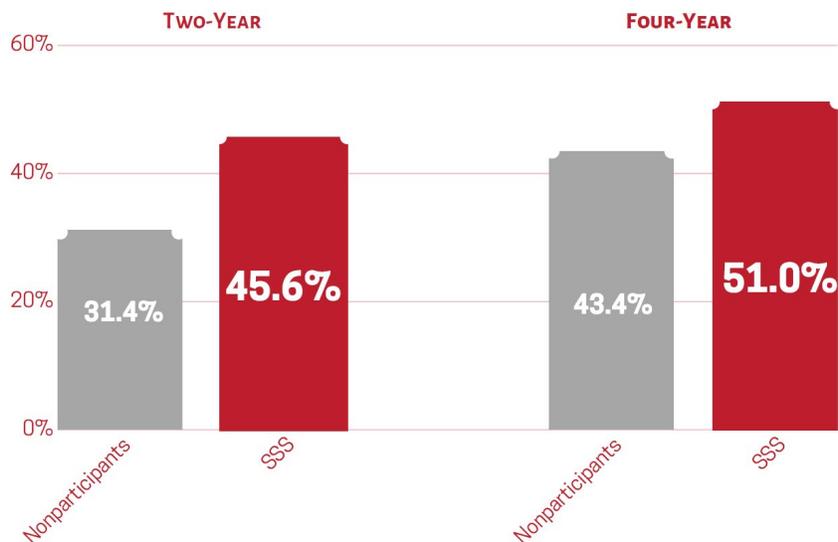
Focusing on College Completion

The nation has made significant progress in providing access to college, with college participation rates increasing significantly for low-income high school graduates.^{5 6} However, the nation has made much less progress in supporting low-income and first-generation students through their goal of graduation. The inequalities in graduation rates by family income and parent education level in the United States are stark. For many low-income students, there currently are simply too many financial and other systemic barriers to achieving their goals. Only 26 percent of students in the lowest family income quartile graduate within six years, compared to 69 percent of students from families in the highest income quartile.⁷ Nationwide, about 56 percent of undergraduates are first-generation,⁸ and about 40 percent are Pell recipients.⁹ Among Pell recipients beginning at a four-year college, less than half (49 percent) will attain a bachelor's degree in six years.¹⁰ Among first-generation students who are also low-income beginning at a four-year college, only about 40 percent will attain a bachelor's degree in six years, compared with 78 percent of students from families that are neither low-income nor first-generation college.¹¹ Considering those students who enter at either a two-year or four-year college, only about 21 percent of low-income and first-generation students will have attained a bachelor's degree in six years, compared with 66 percent for those who are neither low-income nor first-generation.¹²

The TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) undergraduate program has been shown to have significant impact on both college graduation and transfer rates for low-income and first-generation students. Most recently, a 2019 study contracted by the U.S. Education Department found that SSS participants were

more likely to persist, accumulate credits, and complete a degree than matched nonparticipants with similar demographics and high school achievement levels.¹³ At two-year institutions, SSS students were 47 percent more likely to complete an associate degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year institution in four years.¹⁴ At four-year institutions, SSS students were 18 percent more likely to complete a bachelor's degree in six years.¹⁵

Degree Completion or Transfer for TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) Students vs. Matched Nonparticipants with Similar Demographic and High School Achievement, by Institution Type



The Biden Administration can invest in the SSS program by funding down the slate for the 2020 competition. (The cut-off score for this competition was 1/3 point below a perfect score. Hundreds of additional strong proposals serving our country's neediest college students could be funded. The Administration could also schedule an additional Student Support Services competition in FY21 or FY22.) As indicated above, the FY21 COVID-19 supplemental, the Biden FY 22 Budget request, or new COVID-19 relief legislation would be appropriate vehicles to address this need, and TRIO COVID-19 funding efforts have garnered bipartisan, bicameral support in Congress this year.^{16 17 18 19 20}

Reconnecting Low-Income and First-Generation Students and Adults to the Pipeline to College

While COVID-19's total impact on increasing educational inequities is not yet known, observers conclude that low-income students, under-represented students, and minority students have been most likely to become disconnected from school – and their route to a college degree – during this crisis.²¹ Expanding the number of programs and students served in Educational Opportunity Centers for unemployed and low-income adults and Talent Search programs for first-generation/low-income middle and high school students through the FY 21 supplemental COVID-19 legislation and the Biden Administration's COVID-19 request in the next Congress—and expanding the number and reach of existing Upward Bound, Veterans Upward Bound, and McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement programs through the FY22 Biden budget request would address this issue. Each of these programs have shown strong results in college access and completion.^{22 23 24 25 26}

Ensuring Regulations Allow TRIO Programs to Serve DACA Students and Do Not Disadvantage Categories of Institutions or Schools Serving High Percentages of Low-Income Students

Several aspects of the TRIO regulations work against serving the most vulnerable populations and are inconsistent with the Biden agenda. For example, the requirement that TRIO students be citizens or in

the country for other than a temporary purpose makes it impossible for TRIO to serve Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) students.^{27 28} In addition, certain questions in the TRIO application requirements' Need sections disadvantage institutions with the highest percentages of low-income students, including tribal colleges and universities.²⁹ While a separate session of negotiated rulemaking would not be required to initiate these changes, perhaps a short add-on to a planned rulemaking session would be possible, and could save staff time and convening resources.

Ensuring that Student Debt Relief First Targets Low-Income Students and Alumni and Non-completers from Low-Income Families – and Educators and Other Human Service Professionals Working with Them

College graduates from low-income families and non-completers may not have the highest levels of debt,³⁰ but their levels of debt directly impact their own chances of building wealth for their families and the payoff seen by their communities for going to college. COE is committed to working with the Biden Administration in the development of loan forgiveness plans to prioritize these vulnerable populations and the college access and success professionals who serve them.

Alignment of the COE Request and the Biden-Harris Agenda

TRIO: A Program that Brings People and Regions Together

While TRIO is a program with roots in the civil rights movement whose earliest supporters were Representatives Shirley Chisholm and Louis Stokes, it has enjoyed tremendous bipartisan support and is critically important to students and families in Red States. As an example of that bipartisan support, Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and John Tester (D-MT) chair the TRIO Caucus in the Senate, and representatives Gwen Moore (D-WI-4th) and Mike Simpson (R-ID-2nd) chair the TRIO Caucus in the House, with over 140 bicameral members.³¹ This year, a record 232 bipartisan representatives (50 Republicans)³² and 49 bipartisan senators (seven Republicans) supported significant TRIO FY21 funding.³³

TRIO: A Program Understood and Appreciated by President-Elect Biden

As a first-generation college graduate, President-elect Biden knows the power of the dream of college for poor and working-class families. He supported TRIO funding as a U.S. Senator, and spoke of the dream, the potential, and the obstacles low-income and first-generation students face on numerous occasions, including how trained professionals can help them reach this dream. Here is just one example:

My father was a proud man, but he'd never gone to college, his greatest regret. In a sense, I think he was intimidated by the realization there wasn't much he could do -- he didn't know how to help me. ... From the time I can remember, my father would say, and I never understood when I was a little kid -- you're going to be a college man, and I'd say, "Dad, why is that so important?" He said, "They can never take it from you." ... It wasn't until I got a little older that I realized what a man of pride and dignity was, he didn't know what to do, what to tell me, what to say. As a matter of fact, I don't think my father stepped foot on the campus until I went to college, and it was only in my second semester. That's where a significant number of young, qualified, bright students find themselves today. Most don't even know what they don't know. [...] But having counselors at the front end when a child or a not [- The] average age of my wife's students is 29 years of age when they come in [-] to say, these are the courses if you take are directly transferrable to the state university, so they don't waste time and effort taking courses that aren't transferrable, helping them acquire access to a four-year degree quicker and cheaper than otherwise would be the case. It matters the advice that is given.³⁴

–President-Elect Joe Biden, remarks at the White House College Opportunity Summit, December 2014

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Notes

¹Democratic National Committee. *2020 Democratic Party Platform*. July 31, 2020.

<https://www.demconvention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-07-31-Democratic-Party-Platform-For-Distribution.pdf>.

² The Council for Opportunity in Education is a non-profit, non-partisan organization and, as such, does not endorse any candidates or political parties. The piece above is for informational purposes only and should not be construed otherwise. As a part of COE's federal engagement with both Republicans and Democrats, COE reached out to officials sitting on both party platform committees to request inclusion of provisions favorable to TRIO programs.

³ United States Congress. *College for All Act of 2017*. 2017. 115th Congress. S. 806.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/806>

⁴ The College for All Act of 2017 would increase TRIO by 20% the first year, then 17%, 14%, 13%, and 11% for the second, third, fourth, and fifth years, respectively.

⁵ Frey, R. and Cilluffo, A. *A Rising Share of Undergraduates Are from Poor Families, Especially at Less Selective Colleges*. Pew Research Center. Washington, D.C.: May 22, 2019. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/05/22/a-rising-share-of-undergraduates-are-from-poor-families-especially-at-less-selective-colleges/>.

⁶ Cahalan, M.W., Perna, L.W., Addison, M., Murray, C., Patel, P.R., & Jiang, N. *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2020 Historical Trend Report*. The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), and Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy of the University of Pennsylvania (PennAHEAD). Washington, DC: 2020. [http://pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the US 2020 Historical Trend Report.pdf](http://pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators%20of%20Higher%20Education%20Equity%20in%20the%20US%202020%20Historical%20Trend%20Report.pdf)

⁷ *Ibid.* at p. 153.

⁸ RTI International. *First-generation College Students: Demographic Characteristics and Postsecondary Enrollment*. Washington, DC: NASPA. 2019. <https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet-01.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education. "New U.S. Department of Education Report Highlights Colleges Increasing Access and Supporting Strong Outcomes for Low-Income Students." 2016. <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-us-department-education-report-highlights-colleges-increasing-access-and-supporting-strong-outcomes-low-income-students>.

¹⁰ Whistle, W. and Hiler, T. *The Pell Divide: How Four-Year Institutions are Failing to Graduate Low- and Moderate-Income Students*. Third Way. 2018. <https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-pell-divide-how-four-year-institutions-are-failing-to-graduate-low-and-moderate-income-students>.

¹¹ Cahalan, et al. at p. 154-5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ U.S. Department of Education. *Comparing Student Outcomes Between Student Support Services Participants and Nonparticipants in the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study*. Washington, D.C.: 2019. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/sssparticipantsinbpsls.pdf>.

¹⁴ 45.6% for SSS vs. 31.1% for nonparticipants. $(45.6-31.1)/31.1=0.47$.

¹⁵ 51.0% for SSS vs. 43.4% for nonparticipants. $(51.0-43.4)/43.4=0.18$.

¹⁶ Council for Opportunity in Education. "Federal TRIO Programs Emergency COVID-19 Funding Request for Phase 4." Washington, D.C.: April 2020. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qLzoxSCBfjxwgQ4LAqQ-SUOAwxRFtcDr/view>.

¹⁷ U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Ranking Member Patty Murray. "Senators Murray, Schumer, Democrats Introduce \$430 Billion Coronavirus Relief Bill to Address National Child Care and Education Crises as Democrats Urge Republicans to Act on Bold COVID-19 Relief." United States Senate. June 30, 2020. <https://www.help.senate.gov/ranking/newsroom/press/senators-murray-schumer-democrats-introduce-430-billion-coronavirus-relief-bill-to-address-national-child-care-and-education-crises-as-democrats-urge-republicans-to-act-on-bold-covid-19-relief>

¹⁸ Merkley, Jeff et al. "Merkley, Collins, Murkowski, Tester Urge Congressional Leaders to Support Vulnerable Students Amid Coronavirus Crisis: Bipartisan letter emphasizes need to increase funding for TRIO programs."

United States Senate. May 15, 2020. <https://www.merkley.senate.gov/news/press-releases/merkley-collins-murkowski-tester-urge-congressional-leaders-to-support-vulnerable-students-amid-coronavirus-crisis-2020>

¹⁹ Young, Don, et al. "Representatives Young, Horn, and Kuster Introduce Bill to Support Low-Income and First-Generation College Students During Pandemic." United States Congress. October 2, 2020. <https://donyoung.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=401775>.

²⁰ United States Congress. *Coronavirus College Access and Completion Emergency Relief Act*. September 29, 2020. 116th Congress. H.R. 8422. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/8422/>

²¹ Long, H. and Douglas-Gabriel, D. "The latest crisis: Low-income students are dropping out of college this fall in alarming numbers." *The Washington Post*. September 16, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/09/16/college-enrollment-down/>; Levin, D. "No home, no Wi-Fi: Pandemic adds strain on poor college students." *The New York Times*. Oct. 12, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/12/us/covid-poor-college-students.html>.

²² Talent Search projects serve young people in grades six through 12. In addition to counseling, participants receive information about college admissions requirements, scholarships and various student financial aid programs. This early intervention program helps youth from low-income families to better understand their educational opportunities and options. More than 312,000 students are enrolled in 473 Talent Search TRIO projects. According to the most recent data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, 80% of Talent Search participants enrolled in postsecondary institutions immediately following high school graduation. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service. *Fast Facts Report for the Talent Search Program*. Washington, D.C.: 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioalent/ts-fastfacts2016.pdf>.

²³ Upward Bound (UB) is an intensive intervention program that prepares students for higher education through various enrichment courses. Campus-based UB programs provide students instruction in literature, composition, mathematics, science, and foreign language during the school year and the summer. UB also provides intensive mentoring and support for students as they prepare for college entrance exams and tackle admission applications, financial aid, and scholarship forms. More than 70,000 students are being served by 956 Upward Bound projects. Recent analysis from the U.S. Department of Education showed that 86 percent of Upward Bound students in the 2013–14 high school graduation cohort enrolled immediately in college following high school graduation. Using a similar model to Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science provides students with a rigorous math and science curriculum in high school to encourage and enable them to successfully major in critically important science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines in college. Currently, there are 211 projects serving more than 13,100 students. Indeed, 70% of Upward Bound Math-Science programs have postsecondary enrollments of 80% or higher. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service. *Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science Programs: Postsecondary Outcomes Report*. Washington, D.C.: 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/ub-ubms-outcomes2016.pdf>.

²⁴ Educational Opportunity Centers located throughout the country primarily serve displaced or underemployed workers from families. These Centers help individuals to choose a college and a suitable financial aid program. There are 142 Educational Opportunity Centers in America serving more than 199,000 individuals. Recent analysis of performance data of the Educational Opportunity Centers found that more than half (57.6%) of "college-ready" students enrolled in institutions of higher learning and 71% of eligible EOC participants (high school seniors, postsecondary dropouts, etc.) applied to college. U.S. Department of Education. *Educational Opportunity Centers Grantee Level Performance Results: 2013-14*, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/eoc-gl-discussion-1314.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education. *Federal TRIO Programs. A Report on the Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 2007-08, with Select Comparative Data, 2002-07*. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/eocpublication07-08.pdf>.

²⁵ The Veterans Upward Bound program provides intensive basic skills development and short-term remedial courses for military veterans to help them successfully transition to postsecondary education. Veterans learn how to secure support from available resources such as the Veterans Administration, veterans associations, and various state and local agencies that serve veterans. There are 64 Veterans Upward Bound projects serving more than 8,400 students. According to the National Association of Veterans Upward Bound Program Personnel, in 2010-2011, more than 60% of recent program participants were enrolled in postsecondary education programs. Pell Institute. *TRIO Programs*. <http://www.pellinstitute.org/ed.shtml>.

²⁶ The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement program is designed to encourage low-income students and minority undergraduates to consider careers in college teaching as well as prepare for doctoral study. Students who participate in this program are provided with research opportunities and faculty mentors. This program was named in honor of the astronaut who died in the 1986 space-shuttle explosion. Currently, there are 187 projects, serving more than 5,200 students. According to recent performance data, in 2013-14, 69% of McNair participants who graduated in 2010-11 were enrolled in graduate school; meanwhile, 83% of students who first enrolled in graduate school in 2012-2013 persisted in their studies. U.S. Department of Education. *Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program Grantee Level Performance Results: 2013-14*. Washington, D.C.: 2015. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/mcn-gl-discussion-2013-14.doc>.

²⁷ Immigration status requirements for TRIO programs are found at: Student Support Services, 34 C.F.R. §646.3(a); McNair, 34 C.F.R. §647.3(a); Talent Search, 34 C.F.R. §643.3(a); Upward Bound, 34 C.F.R. §645.3(a); Educational Opportunity Centers, 34 C.F.R. 644.3(a)(1).

²⁸ See also :113 members of Congress wrote to the Obama Administration requesting administrative action on this issue. Polis, Jared; Hinojosa, Ruben, et al. "Letter to President Barack Obama Requesting TRIO Eligibility be Extended to DACA students." United States Congress. June 21, 2016. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/OB-rQtfM9pWS3Vk0tLWgzcWptcEU/view>.

²⁹ The Needs sections for these TRIO programs' selection criteria can be found as follows: Talent Search (34 C.F.R. §643.21(a)); Upward Bound (34 C.F.R. §645.31(a)); and Student Support Services (34 C.F.R. §646.21(a)(1) and (3))

³⁰ The Institute of College Access and Success. *Student Debt and the Class of 2019*. October 2020. <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/classof2019.pdf>.

³¹ Council for Opportunity in Education. *TRIO Caucus Member List as of April 10, 2020*. Retrieved from: https://coenet.org/advocacy_tools.shtml

³² Moore, Gwen; Smith, Christopher; Hartzler, Vlcky; and Payne Jr., Donald; et al. "Letter to House Appropriations Committee Requesting a Robust Increase in TRIO FY21 Funding." United States Congress. March 13, 2020. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M5bYuxgoi10TNejJvi3rA52zxnCiwG2I/view>

³³ Collins, Susan; Tester, Jon; Baldwin, Tammy; et al. "Letter to Senate Appropriations Committee Requesting TRIO Fiscal Year 2021 Funding." United States Congress. March 27, 2020 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fBm_wNW_Q0bnWDxMUMk9dqHmu7M6C2LZ/view

³⁴ Obama White House. Vice President Biden Delivers Remarks at the White House College Opportunity Summit. December 4, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W6EY-YCIYc>.