



COUNCIL *for* OPPORTUNITY *in* EDUCATION

2024: A Year in Review

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is a nonprofit organization established in 1981, dedicated to expanding college opportunities for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities. Through its myriad membership services, the Council works with colleges, universities, and agencies that host federal TRIO programs and provide approximately 875,000 low-income students and students with disabilities each year with college access and retention services.



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A Message from the President



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

As I reflect on my first year as President of the Council for Opportunity in Education, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work alongside all of you—dedicated leaders, educators, advocates, and supporters of educational equity. This year has been one of growth, discovery, and renewed commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of background or economic circumstance, has access to opportunities that can change their lives and futures for the better.

As we look back on the Council's journey over the past year, our shared purpose is as vital as ever. Together, we have built on the legacy of TRIO programs, expanding pathways for students not just to reach college but to succeed and thrive once they are there. A crucial part of our work in the coming years will involve strengthening and enhancing the opportunities available within COE's student and career-oriented programs. By broadening this work, we can help TRIO programs introduce their students to new, diverse career pathways and give them the tools to navigate these paths with confidence and resilience.

As we enter a new era of political leadership in Washington, D.C., we must advocate for the resources necessary to expand TRIO's reach so that more students can benefit from these programs' support. Together, we will amplify the voices of our students, educators, and alumni who can best convey our work's impact.

Finally, to ensure the continued excellence and effectiveness of the TRIO community, I am committed to advancing professional development opportunities within the college access and success community. Through enhanced training, networking, and resource-sharing, we can equip our community to meet the evolving needs of today's students and set new standards of excellence in educational opportunity programs.

Thank you for your commitment, partnership, and inspiration. Let us continue to build a community that believes in the power of education, uplifts every student, and stands ready to create a brighter future.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Jones

President

Council for Opportunity in Education

Advocacy

This year, COE advocated for increased TRIO funding, resulting in a proposed \$20 million boost for FY25 and widespread congressional support through bipartisan appropriations request letters. Additionally, COE secured a \$300,000 award from ECMC to encourage FAFSA completion and combat “summer melt,” aiding 100 TRIO programs in improving college enrollment outcomes for 2024-25.



U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) hosted members of the Wyoming TRIO delegation for a breakfast meeting during COE's Legislative Conference.

COE advocated zealously for increased funding for Federal TRIO Programs.

In its FY25 budget request to Congress, the Biden-Harris Administration asked for a **\$20 million** increase for TRIO programs. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) adopted this amount. As of this writing, the final FY25 funding remains pending.

In March, over 600 TRIO professionals participated in COE's Annual Policy Seminar in Washington, D.C.

Congressional TRIO Caucus Co-Chair **U.S. Senator Jon Tester (D-MT)** and **U.S. Representative Mary Peltola (D-AK-01)** addressed the group. Participants made 448 visits to their Representatives and Senators on Capitol Hill to ask for increases in TRIO funding. As a result of these meetings, a bipartisan group of 49 Senators and 199 House Representatives signed the FY25 TRIO Appropriations request letters. MasteryPrep, COE's preferred ACT provider, sponsored 20 scholarships for first-time Legislative Conference participants, helping them develop critical advocacy skills, amplifying TRIO's impact.



At Policy Seminar, U.S. Representative Mary Peltola (D-AK-01) addressed the pressing challenges facing Alaska, including the issue of “brain drain” and food insecurity in schools.

COE worked diligently to address challenges around the Better FAFSA and ensure the TRIO community and TRIO-eligible students maintain access to federally funded educational supports.

As part of this effort, COE pursued and received a \$300,000 award from ECMC to support the FAFSA Student Support Strategy project. This generous funding allowed COE to assist approximately 100 TRIO programs nationwide in boosting FAFSA completion

rates for the 2024-25 academic year and addressing “summer melt.” This effort aimed to ensure higher enrollment rates for students planning to attend college in the upcoming academic year.



COE Vice President Diane Shust and COE Director of Congressional Affairs Owen Toomey conversed with TRIO Talent Search alumnus and former U.S. Representative Henry Bonilla (R-TX-23) at a welcome reception for COE President Jones on Capitol Hill in February.

Professional Development

The 2024 Annual Conference in New York celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Federal TRIO Programs, drawing 1,700 practitioners to explore dynamic session strands and hear inspiring keynotes. COE also expanded professional development through partnerships with Xfinity and TIAA, offered leadership training at Yale University for rising TRIO leaders, and completed its P6 Management Institute, equipping over 300 new TRIO directors with vital skills.



COE Senior Vice President Angelica Vialpando illustrated COE's professional development and technical assistance offerings during COE's annual conference in September.

COE introduced its first-ever Institute for Access and Success, hosting sessions at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County in January and Dallas College in June. More than 100 TRIO practitioners gathered for these two-day, multi-faceted professional development forums tailored to meet the needs of both new and seasoned professionals. These institutes equipped participants with essential tools, innovative strategies, and proven techniques to champion student engagement and success. Focused on core areas like academic advising, financial aid, and workforce preparation, the institutes provided a space to share best practices and strengthen TRIO's impact on the students and communities it serves.

COE hosted two best practices forums and four proposal writing workshops exclusively for COE members to help institutions implement innovative strategies to work with participants, network with peers, and learn how to write a competitive TRIO grant. Over 1,000 college access and success professionals and 450 institutions participated. Due to ardent advocacy by the TRIO community, the Department of Education released the grant application several months ahead of schedule in anticipation of earlier award notifications.

COE's annual conference convened more than 1,700 college access and success professionals in New York City in September to inspire innovation in program practice and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Federal TRIO Programs.



Professional Development (cont.)

In July, COE partnered with NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising to introduce a credentialing opportunity for higher education professionals, to include TRIO staff and academic advisors.

As first-generation students comprise an increasingly significant portion of college enrollments, this credentialing opportunity equips higher education professionals with the skills and knowledge to better serve this population. The initiative, the **first of its kind** for the TRIO and academic advising communities, focused on advising first-generation students. The initial summer launch exceeded expectations, and popular demand continued into the fall. Nearly 100 participants have completed the course.



Immediate COE Past President Maureen Hoyle provided TRIO state leaders with lessons in advocacy and leadership at the Executive Leadership Institute at Yale University.



COE President Kimberly Jones posed for a photograph with Comcast Senior Vice President of Sales Marge Jackson, 2024 TRIO Achiever Pierina Sanchez and her mother, and past COE Board Chair Michelle Danvers Foust.

COE held its 2024 Annual Conference in New York City, celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Federal TRIO Programs, drawing 1,700 college access and success practitioners.

With eight dynamic session strands, attendees explored first-generation financial empowerment, college-to-career pathways, and global citizenship. Highlights included the annual Walter O. Mason Jr. Awards luncheon, featuring inspiring remarks from **2024 award recipients Randolph Holly Jr.**, executive director of COPE, Inc.; **Lydia Perez**, director of TRIO Support Services at Mesa Community College; and **Randall "Randy" Schroeder**, former TRIO Student Support Services educational counselor at the University of New

Hampshire. The award is COE's highest honor and recognizes individuals for their outstanding contributions to educational opportunity programs. COE is proud to partner with **Xfinity**, whose Internet Essentials program provides qualifying households with affordable, reliable, high-speed internet access. As the platinum conference sponsor, Xfinity supported COE's work through generous sponsorship, enriching the participants' experiences and providing them with valuable resources.



Sam Blanco III, past chair of the COE Board, introduced incoming 2024-2025 Board Chair Mara Luna during the closing session of the Annual Conference in New York City.

Professional Development (cont.)



In October, COE Executive Vice President Aaron Brown moderated a discussion among former and current COE board members about their experiences as elected leaders in TRIO.

To support the professional development of TRIO practitioners nationwide, COE partnered with TIAA. Key initiatives include a six-part webinar series exploring critical topics such as retirement planning, savings, budgeting, investing, entrepreneurship, Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), and other career support. TIAA's investment also included scholarships for TRIO professionals participating in COE professional development events.

Returning to Yale University in early October, COE convened 42 rising TRIO leaders to participate in its seventh Executive Leadership Institute for College Opportunity Professionals.

Four days of intensive workshops and group development experiences allowed participants to elevate their confidence, sharpen their skills, and foster meaningful collaborations. The experience deepened their understanding of how highly selective institutions can serve as gateways to opportunity for low-income, first-generation students.



The Executive Leadership Institute workshops and discussions focused on leveraging TRIO program capital on college campuses and influencing state and federal policy to advance the interests of TRIO students.



During the Executive Leadership Institute, COE President Emeritus Arnold Mitchem reflected on the early days of organized TRIO, illustrating the challenge college access and success programs faced in the late 1970s.

In November, COE completed the second year of its P6 Management Institute for New TRIO Directors, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. By the end of the grant period that ended in September, COE equipped more than 300 emerging leaders with essential skills. These trainings delved into the intricacies of federal legislation, adept budget management, and the art of attracting and retaining program participants, empowering TRIO directors to navigate their roles with greater confidence and impact.

Student Opportunities

COE brought 20 TRIO students to the Netherlands through the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Study Abroad Program, while the National Student Leadership Congress in Washington, D.C. empowered 148 high school students with legislative simulations, leadership workshops, and congressional visits. COE concluded 2024 by participating in the Jurassic STEAM Symposium, where 250 TRIO high school students explored the dynamic interplay of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math at Universal Orlando Resort.



Ni'Aisha Banks anticipated a fast-paced environment on Capitol Hill but one where she also could apply her academic knowledge to real-world policy work.

In January, COE selected Ni'Aisha Banks, a TRIO Student Support Services alumna, for its 2024 Thomas R. Wolanin Congressional internship. Banks interned for the House Education and Workforce Committee, supporting legislative staff and policymakers and working on special projects with fellow interns. Following her internship, Banks accepted a [job offer](#) as a full-time U.S. House of Representatives staff assistant.

COE selected *First-Gen: A Memoir* by award-winning author Alejandra Campoverdi as the subject of its fourth national Opportunity Matters Book Club. The 2024 [book club](#) convened over 50 TRIO programs, engaging more than 1,000 TRIO students and dozens of TRIO alumni by its conclusion in August. COE hosted a national speaker series to complement the offerings of local book clubs. Speakers included author Campoverdi, former White House Chief of Staff **Mona Sutphin**, and California Student Aid Commission Executive Director and TRIO alumna **Daisy Gonzales**.



Alejandra Campoverdi, pictured far right, posed with TRIO student participants for a photograph during the 2024 National Student Leadership Congress in Washington, D.C.

Together with its Dutch partners, ECHO, and the Hague University of Applied Sciences, COE hosted the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Study Abroad Program in The Hague, Netherlands. Twenty TRIO McNair and Student Support Services students and two group leaders from across the country [immersed themselves](#) socially and culturally in the Netherlands, met student leaders representing immigrant communities, visited the U.S. Embassy, and studied at The Hague Summer School.



Study abroad programs are more than just academic experiences; they are opportunities for personal growth, cultural immersion, and the development of global perspectives. For first-generation and low-income students, these programs can be life-changing, offering experiences that might otherwise be out of reach.

Student Opportunities (cont.)



TRIO Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Talent Search students met with their Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill in June.

In June, COE welcomed 148 TRIO high school students from throughout the United States and U.S. Territories for the annual National Student Leadership Congress at American University in Washington, D.C. Students simulated the [legislative process](#), attended a college fair, and participated in leadership development workshops. As part of the experience, students visited their Members of Congress to learn about careers in public policy. COE hosted a networking dinner connecting students and TRIO alumni for discussions about their personal and professional journeys.

In partnership with FirstGen Forward, COE centered its 2024 First-Generation College Celebration campaign around getting first-generation college students registered to vote with resources from Civic Nation. To help TRIO programs plan their First-Generation College Celebration or TRIO 60th anniversary event, COE created a TRIO Turns 60 & First-Generation College Celebration Toolkit. After First-Generation College Celebration Day 2024, the [toolkit](#) collected over 900 downloads. COE and FirstGen Forward also awarded 65 colleges and institutions grants to support their local celebrations.

Also in November, COE participated in the 2024 STEAM Symposium with Comcast NBCUniversal, bringing 250 TRIO high school students to the Universal Orlando Resort.

Through panels, networking sessions, and exploring Universal theme parks, students experienced the powerful intersection of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM)

to understand how these fields shape industries and create career opportunities. Highlights included a behind-the-scenes look at Universal Park's highly anticipated Epic Universe and lessons about how technology and creativity drive industries like media and entertainment.



In a world where access to technology is paramount for academic success, this event aimed to empower the students on their educational journey.



The symposium culminated with a laptop giveaway to each of the TRIO high school student participants.

Alumni Engagement

In 2024, COE deepened its commitment to TRIO alumni engagement and career opportunities by launching initiatives like the second national TRIO Career Development Program cohort, which connected over 160 students with mentorship, career readiness workshops, and internships. Additionally, corporate partnerships created career pathways for TRIO students in STEAM, business, and public service.



COE recruited over 160 TRIO students for its second national TRIO Career Development Program cohort. The program provided **robust career readiness support** and mentorship from TRIO alumni and talent-sourcing partners, actively engaging TRIO Student Support Services and McNair students. Participants gained practical skills in hands-on sessions and dynamic career workshops. By the conclusion of the 2024 program, several students secured internships and job offers.

COE partnered with Idaho National Laboratory (INL) to launch a dedicated affinity group to mentor students, offer internships, and provide TRIO alumni and students access to impactful business, marketing, science, and technology career opportunities. This collaboration with INL offers students and alumni direct access to hands-on experience, helping them develop key skills for long-term career success. The ongoing support of partners like GMA Construction, the U.S. State Department, and INL creates lasting opportunities that uplift students, their families, and their futures.

TRIO Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement program alumna Jasmine Wilson Bryant posed for a photo during COE's alumni reception in Washington, D.C. in March. Wilson is now a senior social worker with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Idaho National Laboratory is one of the national laboratories of the U.S. Department of Energy. Historically, the lab has been involved with nuclear research, although the laboratory does other research as well.



Alumni Engagement

In September, COE honored six outstanding TRIO alumni with the 2024 National TRIO Achiever Award. Michael S. Cashman, DeRionne P. Pollard, Gabriel Reyes, Pierina Ana Sanchez, Antjuan Seawright, and Scott Winton have made remarkable contributions across public service, education, science, policy, and diplomacy. Each honoree highlighted how TRIO nurtures resilience, ambition, and commitment to positive social impact, and their remarks illustrated TRIO's power in under-resourced communities.



These outstanding alumni of the Federal TRIO Programs have demonstrated exemplary leadership, dedication, and commitment to advancing educational opportunities and breaking barriers for underserved students (Pictured from left: Pierina Ana Sanchez, DeRionne P. Pollard, Gabriel Reyes, Michael S. Cashman, Antjuan Seawright, and Scott Winton).



COE also honored former U.S. House **Representative Henry Bonilla (R-TX-23)** with the 2024 COE **Lifetime TRIO Achievement Award**. Bonilla's journey from a housing project in San Antonio to the halls of Congress was made possible through the TRIO Talent Search program sponsored by Project Stay, also in San Antonio.

Bonilla began his acceptance speech by expressing gratitude for TRIO, which helped him envision a future beyond poverty: "Not bad for a Mexican boy who came from that background. And it happened because TRIO works." Bonilla, the first in his family to attend college, went on to earn a degree in journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, which launched his successful career in television broadcasting before he was elected to Congress.

The Pell Institute delivered impactful programming in 2024, hosting equitable evaluation workshops, releasing its *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States* report, and providing data insights on first-generation students and underrepresented populations. Through events like the SFARN Conference and reports such as “*Is College Worth It?*,” the Institute explored trends in educational equity, career readiness, and postsecondary value, emphasizing inclusive practices and systemic reforms to address barriers in higher education.

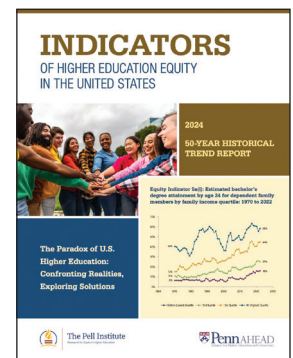


The Pell Institute hosted interactive equitable evaluation workshops for more than 100 college access and success professionals in Washington, D.C. and New York City. These workshops helped TRIO professionals master the art of program evaluation by equipping participants with practical tips, interactive worksheets, and comprehensive guides to elevate their [assessment endeavors](#).

The Pell Institute released its *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States 2024: 50-Year Historical Trend Report*, the ninth in the current series, in partnership with the Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy of the University of Pennsylvania

(PennaHEAD). [The report found](#) that higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher incomes and more significant job opportunities and that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to attend “most” or “highly” competitive institutions. At the same time, those from lower-income families tend to enroll in less selective institutions. Accompanying the report release, The Pell Institute hosted a webinar attracting over 150 stakeholders.

The Pell Institute released a series of data fact sheets to provide a comprehensive look at first-generation students. The [fact sheets](#) focus on their economic, health, and racial demographics, how they spend their school days, and their college aspirations, including FAFSA completion and attitudes toward student loans. They also examine first-generation undergraduate profiles and post-bachelor outcomes such as employment, degree completion rates, and loan repayment trends.



SFARN provided a leading platform for financial aid researchers and practitioners to participate in formal presentations and panel discussions on policy changes, student loan debt, and access to higher education.



In July, The Pell Institute hosted its 41st Annual Student Financial Aid Research Network (SFARN) Conference at the University of Maryland—College Park, with generous support from the Lumina Foundation. The conference showcased [emerging data trends](#) in college enrollment, financing postsecondary education, student basic needs, and postsecondary value.

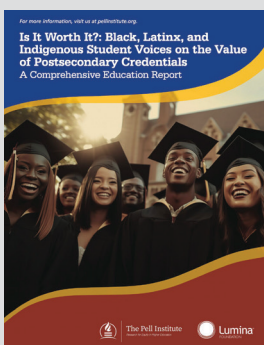
The Pell Institute released Volume 5 of the Opportunity Matters Journal, featuring 11 powerful manuscripts ranging from empirical studies to practice-oriented frameworks to narratives from the field. [The featured manuscripts](#) highlighted the need for inclusive curricula that reflect diverse student populations and tailored interventions to address educational disparities and educator well-being, the role of mentorship and community support in postsecondary success, and the importance of addressing systemic barriers that have historically disenfranchised students in their access to higher education.

In September, a COE annual conference plenary session, “Equity in Action: Building Brighter Careers with TRIO Programs and Supportive Career Centers,” highlighted the Pell Institute’s Ascendium-supported research and the forthcoming national framework for TRIO programs to develop stronger relationships with university career centers. Panelists tackled challenges and opportunities faced in developing these relationships, TRIO’s role in career readiness, and best practices for career centers to enhance student success through stronger partnerships with TRIO programs.



Representatives from CareerLaunch, Ascendium, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers discussed how institutions can leverage TRIO programs to shape student career pathways during COE’s annual conference in September.

The Pell Institute released its report, “*Is College Worth It? Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Student Voices on the Value of Postsecondary Credentials*,” with support from the Lumina Foundation. [The report](#) provided critical insights into these student populations’ barriers to equitable access and completion and important implications for delivering value through more inclusive practices and policies in higher education. The report release webinar attracted more than 640 stakeholders, featuring a summary of the report’s findings and a panel of TRIO students who served as members of the project’s advisory board.



Membership Services

In July, COE Senior Vice President for Membership and Human Resources Alvin Phillips announced his retirement after nearly three decades of service. Additionally, COE exceeded its FY24 membership and fundraising goal by 13%, raising \$4.7 million through its Fair Share campaign.



In July, COE honored the exceptional career of Alvin Phillips, who announced his retirement after decades of dedicated service. Phillips served as senior vice president for membership and human resources and has been integral to COE's mission and success. The recipient of the 2015 Walter O. Mason Jr. Award, he initially volunteered at COE before spending years leading legislation and regulations training. For the last 18 years, his work in membership services generated \$64 million in revenue for the Council.

Alvin Phillips continues to volunteer as senior advisor to COE President Kimberly Jones. Phillips has been with the Council since retiring from the U.S. Army as a Lieutenant Colonel after serving 20 years on active duty.

COE concluded its fiscal year by exceeding its FY24 membership and personal contributions fundraising goal by 13%, raising \$4.7 million through its annual Fair Share campaign. In FY24, all 10 regional TRIO associations, 46 TRIO state associations, and five federal territories (Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, Palau, and Puerto Rico) exceeded their fundraising goals. COE collected personal contributions from 1,081 supporters.



Regional member association representatives posed for a photograph with their Fair Share awards during COE's Fair Share luncheon in New York City.

Acknowledgements

COE extends heartfelt gratitude to our organizational partners for their unwavering support and dedication throughout 2024. Thank you for believing in the power of education to change lives!

American University • Ascendium Education Foundation • Bright Learning Lab • Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring • College Board • Comcast NBCUniversal • Consortium for College Opportunity • ECHO • ECMC Foundation • FirstGen Forward • Genius Potential Inc. • The Hague University of Applied Sciences • Idaho National Laboratory • Institute of International Education • Johns Hopkins University • Lumina Foundation • MasteryPrep • NACADA • NASPA • Paradigm Shift • Princeton University • Strada Education Foundation • Study Smart Tutors • TIAA • U.S. Department of Education • U.S. Department of State • UStrive • Vizual • Yale University

COE extends its deepest gratitude to our donors. Each of the individuals listed below contributed \$1,000 or more to the Council in 2024-2025.

Laurel Anderson • Cherryl Arnold • Cynthia Ayala-Cooper • Joan Becker • Earnestine Bell • Henry Bonilla • Joy Brittain • Aaron Brown • Fernando Cardenas • Margaret Cahalan • Lise Chapman • Donna Christian • Bernard Clay • Ann Coles • Daniel Connell • Barry and Ingrid Cosgrove • Brenda Dann-Messier • Shrylin Davis • Kyle Ethelbah • Earl Farrow • Chris George • Roger Grant • Kathleen Greene • Sam Hart • Sheldon Hart • Oscar Hernandez and Laura Thompson • Maureen Hoyler • Cheryl Johnson • Kimberly Jones • Lucy and Thomas Jones • Ngondi Kamatuka • Belinda Lee • Jonathan McKenzie • David Megquier • Donta Mills • Arnold and Freda Mitchem • Gregory Moldenhauer • Thomas Mortenson • Deborah Northcross • Cynthia Park • Jennifer Perdue • Alvin Phillips and Tia Johnson • Anthony Plonczynski-Figueroa • Andrea and Archie Reeve • Jean Rhodes and Karl Wittrup • Bruce and Sharyn Schelske • Diane Shust • Jerinae and Welmon Speed • Antonio Stephens • Floyd Stoner • Marilyn and Paul Thayer • Angelica Vialpando • Kristian Wiles • Linda Williams-Cockrell • Camille Zeigler



Fair Share contributions this year helped see to it that COE could continue providing trainings, advocating for TRIO, and anticipating new needs in 2025.



COE Resource Development Committee Co-Chairs Sergio Galvez and Jeff Kahlden posed for a photograph during the annual Fair Share Luncheon.



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About the Federal TRIO Programs

TRIO programs (Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, Veterans Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program) help students overcome economic, social, academic, and cultural barriers to higher education. TRIO services include assistance in choosing a college and tutoring; personal, financial, and career counseling; assistance in applying to college; workplace and college visits; special instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and mathematics; assistance in applying for financial aid, and academic assistance in high school or assistance to re-enter high school or college.

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