

# Advocate for RCUs: 2024 Policy Priorities

The need for increased federal student aid is a challenge across postsecondary education. As educators of the “new majority” in higher education—students of color, low income, first generation, working adults, and/or veterans—regional comprehensive universities (RCUs) know firsthand the impact increased federal assistance can have on a student’s retention and ability to complete their course of study.



This 2024 Policy Priorities guide reflects this knowledge, asking Congress to protect programs and funding vital to RCU students and communities as it considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). As federal officials continue to search for ways to make college more affordable, accountable, and accessible, RCUs represent the best return on taxpayer investment in higher education, proudly improving degree completion rates and significantly strengthening the social and economic mobility of their graduates. RCUs provide an affordable and high-quality degree.

As you familiarize federal officials and staff with RCUs, we ask that you include our shared priorities within your advocacy plan and mention how important support for each priority is to your students, faculty, institution, and community.

## #DoublePell

### 38% OF STUDENTS AT RCUS RECEIVE A PELL GRANT

A proven program that has been the foundation of federal student aid for decades, Pell Grants open the doors to higher education and create opportunity for students with low and moderate incomes to lay the foundations for a successful future. In 2023, the maximum annual award was \$7,395. Since 1972, more than 216 million students have received a Pell Grant.

The Pell Grant is especially critical to students and families of low and moderate incomes. For these students, doubling the Pell Grant to \$13,000 could make the difference between an affordable opportunity and carrying debt as they pursue postsecondary education.

AASCU joins fellow members of the Double Pell Alliance in calling on Congress to strengthen this proven investment and double the maximum Pell Grant award to \$13,000.

## Double the Pell Grant's Maximum Amount

- No program authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965 has had greater success or impact than the federal Pell Grant program.
- Since 1972, more than 216 million students have received a Pell Grant.
- The Pell Grant has lost its purchasing power. The maximum Pell Grant would cover more than 79% of the cost of earning a degree in 1979. It now covers 32% of costs.
- Nearly 60% of Black students and roughly half of American Indian or Alaska Native and Hispanic or Latino students receive a Pell Grant each year. Almost 40% of student veterans are Pell Grant recipients.
- Attainment of a college education is possible for half of first-generation college students and 56% of student parents because of Pell Grants.
- Among total Pell Grant awards, 47% went to students whose families earn less than \$20,000 annually.
- Increasing Pell Grants is the most important and direct way to make college affordable again.

## The “ASK”

**Support doubling Pell Grants to a maximum of \$13,000.**

---

## Fix the Educator Pipeline

The educator pipeline is in crisis; America needs a renewed national investment in educators. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 270,000 teachers are expected to leave the field each year between 2016 and 2026. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this trend. At the same time, student enrollments in educator preparation programs are plummeting and school districts across the nation are struggling to fill positions.

Past legislative proposals have focused on partial solutions when a comprehensive state-federal partnership is required to address the multifaceted challenges of educator shortages. States and local communities cannot fix the educator pipeline on their own.

AASCU calls on Congress to fully fund and support educator preparation, recruitment, and training programs in the FY25 federal budget to address financial barriers, standardize educator preparation programs and increase capacity, and diversify the profession.

## Education in Crisis

- The country's outlook is directly linked to the strength of the education profession.
- However, at least 270,000 teachers are expected to leave the field each year between 2016 and 2026.
- It is imperative that the nation strengthen its educator preparation programs and diversify the teaching corps.
- States and local communities cannot repair the educator pipeline on their own. They need increased federal engagement.
- Congress must preserve and reinforce Title II of the HEA.
- A reauthorization of the Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) is needed.

## The “ASK”

### Co-sponsor the EDUCATORS for America Act. (S.1341/H.R.2992)

- Doubles TEACH Grants to \$8,000 per year.
- Provide recruitment and completion grants to educator preparation programs.
- Includes the costs of education clinical experiences in the cost of attendance calculations when awarding financial aid.

---

## Support RCUs in HEA Reauthorization

Last updated in 2008, the HEA is overdue for congressional reauthorization. Programs and funding authorizations that directly impact RCU students and institutions to afford better access to a postsecondary education are at stake for cuts or elimination.

### RCUs Respond to the Needs of Their Communities.

Starting as the normal schools of the past, RCUs continue to prepare and educate the majority of the nation's teachers and nurses for today and tomorrow. Programs and grants authorized under Title II aid in the certification of well-prepared and supported educators who reflect the diversity of the students and communities they serve.

## **RCUs Educate the “New Majority.”**

Titles III and V help strengthen the academic, financial, and administrative capabilities of institutions commonly known as minority-serving institutions (MSIs) which include Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISI), predominantly Black institutions (PBIs), and others.

## **RCUs Provide Tangible Return on Investment for Taxpayers and Students.**

As Congress continues to push for improved affordability and accountability in higher education, RCUs represent the best return on investment for taxpayers through improved retention and completion rates, lower cost of attendance, and increased social mobility for graduates. AASCU calls on Congress to acknowledge and incorporate RCUs, their students, and the communities they serve as they draft legislation aimed at reauthorizing parts of the HEA.

## **College Retention and Completion Grants**

- Degree attainment is the most important goal in higher education.
- The nation needs to increase the investment in new student support services and activities to combat the growing divide between student enrollment and degree completion, particularly among students of color.
- Student retention and college completion drive students' ability to repay educational loans that often keep non-degreed students from attaining economic stability.
- In academic year 2020–21, 68% of RCUs had a net price below \$15,000, compared with 36% of non-RCUs.
- In academic year 2021–22, the average in-state tuition and fees among RCUs was \$9,438, compared with \$11,645 among non-RCUs.
- In FY23, 177 RCUs met the eligibility requirements to apply for federal designation and funding for at least one MSI type, compared with 19 non-RCUs.

## **The “ASK”**

**Incorporate the needs of RCUs and their students when reauthorization of the HEA occurs.**