



PRESIDENTS
FORUM

2026 Policy Agenda



OUR COMMITMENTS



Students First - We prioritize students above all else, measuring every policy by its ability to improve access, affordability, and outcomes. Education systems exist to serve students, not institutions, faculty, or staff.

Access for All - We believe in true access that opens pathways for every student, regardless of race, income, gender, or background. We believe in policies that remove barriers and create real opportunity.

Accountable Innovation - We champion technology and practices that demonstrably improve outcomes. Innovation must be results-driven and centered on student success.

Empowering Working Learners - We must adapt higher education to the needs of working learners by offering flexible, affordable, and tailored pathways to upskill and reskill throughout life.

Outcome-Driven Education - We support cost-lowering, outcome-driven policies centered on workforce alignment, skills, and competencies to maximize education's return on investment.

Parity Across Modalities - We advocate for equal value and regulatory parity for online, distance, in-person, and hybrid education, ensuring all students succeed regardless of how they learn.

Accountability - We affirm that all institutions, regardless of governance or funding model, must meet high standards and produce meaningful outcomes for students. Accountability measures should reflect the context of the students served, recognize institutions that create the greatest economic lift, and provide education opportunities for high social value careers.



FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Pell Funding - The Pell Grant remains the foundation of federal student aid and one of the most effective tools for expanding access to higher education for low income students. Without adequate funding, expanding eligibility risks diluting the value of the grant for the students it is meant to serve. Funding Pell Grants ensures that all eligible learners, whether pursuing degrees or workforce credentials, have reliable and predictable support.

Workforce Pell - We are pleased to see the passage of Workforce Pell as an important step toward expanding access to high quality, short term workforce education, reflecting a shared commitment to aligning education more directly with economic opportunity. As implementation advances, the focus must remain on impact by making programs accessible, aligned with workforce demand, and intentionally designed to drive student completion and economic mobility. Flexible delivery models and clear accountability for outcomes will be essential to delivering real value for both learners and employers.

Military Tuition Assistance - Military Tuition Assistance is a critical support for service members and their families, expanding access to education while strengthening readiness and long-term economic mobility. Continued collaboration between Congress and the Department of Defense is essential to ensure recent improvements are fully implemented and to continue strengthening the program over time. Ensuring parity in Tuition Assistance funding and maintaining eligibility for VA education benefits for distance education programs will help ensure that service members have equitable access to learning opportunities regardless of location. Sustained modernization of Tuition Assistance will help ensure it remains a meaningful, competitive benefit for those who serve and the institutions that support them.

Bolster Dual Enrollment - Federal policy should prioritize sustainable funding, clear cross-state pathways, and strong alignment between high schools and postsecondary institutions to ensure quality and transferability. Thoughtful implementation and accountability for outcomes are essential to ensure dual enrollment expands opportunity, strengthens college readiness, and delivers long-term value for students and states.

Expand Innovative Learning Models - Federal policy must better support innovative learning models that reflect how today's students learn and work. This includes ensuring parity across instructional modes and methods, modernizing how quality and engagement are defined, and recognizing that learning can occur asynchronously, online, and through competency-based pathways without sacrificing rigor or accountability. Policies governing regular and substantive interaction should focus on meaningful engagement and student progress rather than rigid time-based assumptions. Expanding flexibility for alternative learning models is essential to serving working adults, military learners, and other nontraditional students while maintaining a strong focus on quality, completion, and value.

Embrace Technology - Policy should encourage the responsible use of emerging and existing technologies to personalize learning, strengthen advising and student services, improve institutional efficiency, and support innovative instructional models. Federal frameworks must enable institutions to adopt and scale technology in ways that enhance quality, transparency, and accountability without locking innovation into outdated regulatory assumptions. When used thoughtfully, technology can help institutions better serve today's learners and connect education more directly to opportunity.

Work-Integrated Learning and Accelerated Pathways - Federal Work-Study remains an important tool for supporting student employment and affordability and should be strengthened to better serve today's learners. Internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of work-based learning provide powerful pathways for students to connect education to real-world experience and career opportunity. Expanding Credit for Prior Learning further accelerates progress by recognizing learning gained through work, military service, and life experience. Together, these approaches reduce time and cost to completion while improving student and workforce outcomes.

Data Reform - Federal data systems must be modernized to provide accurate, meaningful information while reducing unnecessary burden on institutions. Data collection should emphasize integrity, consistency, and outcomes, aligning with how today's institutions deliver education and support students across multiple modalities. Streamlining overlapping and outdated reporting requirements will improve transparency for students and policymakers while allowing institutions to focus resources on student success. Strong alignment between federal data systems and accreditation can further reinforce accountability, reduce duplication, and ensure that quality assurance is driven by clear, reliable, and student-centered measures.

Employer Funded Education - Indexing Section 127 employer education benefits to inflation was an important step in preserving its value for working learners. Additionally, an increased cap would reflect today's education and training costs and unlock employer investment at new levels. Raising the limit would activate funding that is currently sitting on the sidelines, enabling employers to play a larger role in supporting workforce aligned education and more flexible learning models. Every additional dollar invested by employers reduces pressure on students and public funding while expanding access to upskilling and reskilling and strengthening partnerships between employers and institutions to meet evolving workforce needs.

Modernize Graduate and Professional Education Definitions - Federal policy should modernize how graduate and professional education is defined to better reflect today's learning models and workforce needs. Current distinctions often fail to align with the changing needs of today's professional landscape. Updating these definitions can improve clarity, reduce regulatory friction, and ensure policy supports high-value programs that prepare learners for evolving professional roles.





FEDERAL RULEMAKING



Establishing a Voice for Adult and Working Learners - The Presidents Forum should serve as a central advocate in negotiated rulemaking, ensuring that the unique needs of adult and working learners are represented in federal regulations.

Strengthen Accountability Frameworks - Federal accountability should be grounded in simple, clear standards that focus on student success rather than complex or duplicative compliance requirements. An effective framework should emphasize outcomes that matter to students, including completion, affordability, and post-education opportunity, while providing transparency and consistency across programs. Accountability should align with accreditation and be designed to protect students, reinforce quality, and support continuous improvement without discouraging innovation or access.

Inclusive Access - Inclusive access programs that reduce costs, integrate seamlessly with financial aid, and guarantee students access to essential materials must be protected.

Honoring State Reciprocity Agreements - State authorization reciprocity agreements play a critical role in expanding access to education for students who learn and work across state lines. Federal policy should continue to respect and provide the structure necessary to allow states to collaborate through reciprocity agreements, including for licensure-aligned programs and Workforce Pell-eligible offerings. Preserving reciprocity reduces unnecessary barriers, supports institutional compliance, and ensures students can access high-quality education and workforce pathways regardless of geography.

Streamlining Mergers and Acquisitions - The mergers and acquisitions process for higher education institutions should be streamlined and expedited. Current approval pathways through federal agencies, state education boards, and accreditation bodies often create unnecessary delays that hinder efficiency-gaining consolidations. Proposed reforms include establishing clear and consistent timelines for approval, reducing redundant oversight, and creating transparent guidelines that prioritize institutional performance and student success.

Safeguard Federal Student Aid - Federal student aid is the backbone of access to higher education for millions of learners and must be protected in ways that ensure both integrity and sustainability. Safeguarding aid should focus on strengthening transparency, preventing bad actors, and ensuring public dollars are directed toward programs that deliver real value for students without imposing unnecessary complexity or barriers that undermine access or innovation.

A Path to Secure Funding - A sustainable federal funding model must balance accountability with access, ensuring institutions can continue serving diverse learners while demonstrating meaningful outcomes. Recent accountability proposals, including those advanced through negotiated rulemaking and similar discussions, highlight the need for a clear, coherent framework that aligns funding with student success without discouraging innovation or enrollment of non-traditional learners.

Accreditation - As the Department of Education modernizes accreditation through negotiated rulemaking, reforms should shift the center of gravity from inputs and processes to measurable student outcomes. The primary consideration should be the lift an institution provides, defined by how far a student progresses from where they began, in terms of completion, earnings, and long-term economic mobility. Accreditation should reward institutions that create upward mobility for working and low income learners, not simply those that enroll students with strong incoming advantages. At the same time, the framework should protect space for innovation in delivery models, competency based education, and employer aligned programs, while ensuring transparency and accountability for results. A modern accreditation system should be outcomes driven, innovation friendly, and focused relentlessly on student success.





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