

THE WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT

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COLLEGE ACCESS CHALLENGE GRANTS: INCLUDING ADULT LEARNERS, STRENGTHENING STUDENT SUCCESS

Thomas J. Hilliard¹

THE WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT

Strengthening State Policies for
America's Working Poor

Millions of American breadwinners work hard to support their families. But, despite their determination and effort, many are mired in low-wage jobs that provide inadequate benefits and offer few opportunities for advancement. In fact, more than one out of four American working families now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially.²

Launched in 2002 and currently supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and Mott foundations, the Working Poor Families Project is a national initiative that works to improve these economic conditions. The project partners with state nonprofit organizations and supports their policy efforts to better prepare America's working families for a more secure economic future.

For more information:
www.workingpoorfamilies.org

INTRODUCTION

A college education pays, and it pays more with each passing year. As automation and offshoring drain the once plentiful supply of middle-income jobs available to high school graduates and dropouts, the payoff for higher education degrees continues to rise. Over the past four decades, family income has increased by 46% for adults with a college degree, but only 7% for those with a high school diploma.³ Despite trendy news stories about unemployed college graduates living with parents, an adult with a bachelor's degree is only half as likely to be unemployed as one with a high school diploma.⁴

Obtaining a college degree is the surest route out of poverty, but individuals in poverty are much less likely to access and complete college. Even when they graduate from high school with comparable grades and standardized test scores, low-income students lack many of the supports that middle-income students possess – most obviously money, but also information on obtaining financial aid or choosing a college. Often, they know little about the routines and expectations of college life, particularly students whose parents did not attend college. Only one of every nine adults whose parents' family income was in the bottom 20% graduate from college by age 40, compared to over half of adults whose parents' income was in the top 20%.⁵

The federal government has long sought to improve educational attainment in low-income communities. The Pell grant program, the Stafford and Parent PLUS loan programs, TRIO, and Perkins all seek to help Americans with limited means gain access to college and succeed there. Yet the federal government lacks certain important tools for improving college access and success. It does not fund or govern public higher education institutions or public P-12 school districts, and it cannot easily prescribe policies that make sense for local educational systems that fit together in complex ways.

The inadequacy of federal efforts to boost postsecondary attainment has become increasingly apparent. Nationally, rates of postsecondary attainment have stagnated for the past three decades. As of 2008, 79 million adults between the ages of 25 and 54 lacked a college degree, more than six in ten of all working-age adults. In 14 states, two-thirds or more of all working-age adults lacked a college degree.⁶ In addition, 16 million adults between 18-24 did not have a degree and were not enrolled in college.⁷

The *College Access Challenge Grant Program*, or CACG, is intended to strengthen educational attainment of low-income students by funding state strategies that improve access to postsecondary education. Congress established CACG in 2007 as a federal matching grant program; this year states will receive \$150 million from the federal government for this program. States can use the funding for a variety of strategies intended to expand access to postsecondary education, including marketing campaigns, web portals, mentoring programs, financial aid and others. At present, CACG policymakers are primarily focused on improving the rate of college entry by middle and high school students. While this is a vital strategy, CACG has great untapped potential to improve college access and success for a much larger, yet often overlooked, population: low-skilled adults who are no longer in the formal education system.

The **Working Poor Families Project** supports efforts by state nonprofit organizations to strengthen state policies that can help low-income workers achieve economic security and become productive participants in the economy. WFPF encourages its partners to engage with state policymakers to ensure that state controlled resources support broader access to college and higher rates of persistence and completion among students of all ages. It is essential to communicate the importance of lifelong learning to policymakers, leaders of P-12 and higher education systems, and to prospective students. Higher education is no longer a rite of passage for recent high school graduates, but a resource for adults to draw upon at any age – often many times during a career. This policy brief identifies opportunities for strengthen-

ing state implementation of the CACG Program to support the educational needs of low-skilled and disadvantaged adults.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Educational attainment has become a top economic priority in the United States, perhaps even the top long-term priority. U.S. educational attainment has stagnated over the past 30 years, even as other nations have dramatically raised their own output of college graduates. In 2002, the United States ranked 12th in the share of 25-34 year-olds who have attained a postsecondary credential.⁸ Gaps in educational attainment are widening as well. Today, whites are far more likely to enter and graduate from college than blacks or Hispanics, upper and middle-income Americans than low-income Americans, and women than men.⁹ These gaps are not only impoverishing many communities around the country, but threaten America's ability to compete in a global economy.

President Barack Obama has elevated higher education as a top economic priority through his ambitious goal to add five million college graduates by the year 2020, returning the United States to its former place as the most educated nation in the world. Others also recognize this priority. For example, the National Governors Association has launched the bipartisan "[Complete To Compete](#)" initiative, which focuses on increasing the number of students in the United States who complete college degrees and certificates.¹⁰ Separately, 24 states have joined in an "Alliance of States," convened by [Complete College America](#), pledging to significantly increase the number of Americans with a college degree or credential of value and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.¹¹

Improving America's postsecondary educational attainment depends on achieving two fundamental goals: first, more Americans must enroll in college, especially people from disadvantaged communities that are demographically less likely to do so. This is generally referred to as "college access." Second, more students who enroll in college must complete college with a credential of value in the labor

market. This is generally referred to as “student success.” Both are essential goals for educational attainment in the United States.

CACG TACKLES COLLEGE ACCESS

The College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG) has become the federal government’s leading initiative to foster innovative policies and practices around college access. The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 established CACG to improve the rate at which low-income and underserved student populations attend college.

The U.S. Department of Education distributes grants to each state based on the number of individuals living under the poverty line. The state must commit one dollar for every two dollars of federal funding, although the state can supply its share through a combination of public and private funds. This encourages states to obtain philanthropic support, which some have done.¹² States can conduct the initiatives directly or subcontract to private organizations.

States can use CACG funding for any combination of seven allowable uses, including:

- 1) Provide information for students and families regarding the benefits of a postsecondary education, postsecondary opportunities and planning, and career preparation.
- 2) Provide information on financing options for postsecondary education.
- 3) Conduct outreach activities for students at risk of not enrolling in or completing postsecondary education.
- 4) Assist in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.
- 5) Provide need-based grant aid.
- 6) Conduct professional development for guidance counselors, financial aid administrators, and college admissions counselors.
- 7) Provide student loan cancellation or repayment or interest rate reductions.

States can focus their efforts on any resident who lacks a college degree or certificate. This includes

middle school students already slipping off the college track, high school seniors making decisions about their futures, young adults, adults in their prime earning years, and older adults.

CACG permits but does not emphasize measures to improve student success. Only two success strategies are authorized in the statute. First, states can fund need-based grant aid, which greatly improves the chance that low-income people will enroll and succeed in college. Second, they can conduct outreach activities for students “at risk” of not completing postsecondary education. Students can be considered at risk if they have certain demographic characteristics, such as being the first in the family to attend college, testing into developmental education, failing one or more classes in the first year, or leaving college for at least one semester. Outreach activities can include a broad range of interventions to improve student success. However, administrators at the U.S. Department of Education say that the majority of state funding must go toward access-related purposes.¹³

After CACG was authorized in 2007, many state policymakers were cautious about using the program to launch new initiatives, given its modest funding and uncertain future. After all, CACG had only been authorized for two years of funding, leaving the strong possibility that states could be left to fully fund college access initiatives in the third year if Congress failed to reauthorize the program.

Passage of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act in March 2010 reassured states about the CACG’s staying power. This monumental bill, which established national health care reform and eliminated the role of private lenders in originating federal student loans, also expanded and extended funding for the CACG Program. The CACG budget more than doubled, from \$66 million annually in 2007-2009 to \$150 million annually 2010-2014.

Relative to national expenditures on higher education, a \$150 million budget may seem tiny. Yet it represents an important new funding source for states at a time of contracting budgets. Unlike legislatively appropriated funds, governors can designate an agency of their choice to disburse funds. The agencies chosen in the most recent round of grants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: State Agencies Administering CACG and Federal Funding in 2009 and 2010

State	Agency	2009	2010
AK	Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
AL	Alabama Department of Education	\$1,128,810	\$2,052,910
AR	Arkansas Department of Higher Education	\$706,129	\$1,500,000
AZ	Arizona Office of the Governor	\$1,348,705	\$2,931,727
CA	California Student Aid Commission	\$7,678,868	\$15,038,830
CO	Colorado Department of Higher Education	\$852,698	\$1,651,716
CT	Connecticut Department of Higher Education	\$419,180	\$1,500,000
DC	Office of the State Superintendent of Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
DE	Delaware Department of Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
FL	Florida Department of Education	\$3,116,708	\$6,391,555
GA	Georgia Board of Regents	\$2,089,027	\$4,170,570
HI	Hawaii Charter School Administrative Office	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
IA	Iowa College Student Aid Commission	\$474,145	\$1,500,000
ID	Idaho State Board of Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
IL	Illinois Student Assistance Commission	\$2,411,050	\$4,621,733
IN	Indiana Commission of Higher Education	\$1,223,581	\$2,440,928
KS	Kansas Board of Regents	\$501,584	\$1,500,000
KY	Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority	\$1,019,425	\$2,051,545
LA	Louisiana Board of Regents	\$1,239,533	\$2,221,573
MA	Massachusetts Department of Higher Education	\$879,879	\$1,703,211
MD	Maryland Higher Education Commission	\$615,592	\$1,500,000
ME	Maine Finance Authority	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
MI	Michigan Department of Education	\$2,092,786	\$2,092,786
MN	Minnesota Office of Higher Education	\$735,025	\$1,500,000
MO	Missouri Department of Higher Education	\$1,148,535	\$2,249,306
MS	Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning	\$932,499	\$1,850,911
MT	Montana Department of Labor & Industry Workforce Services	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
NC	University of North Carolina General Administration	\$1,898,671	\$3,827,447
ND	Bank of North Dakota	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
NE	Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
NH	New Hampshire Postsecondary Education Commission	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
NJ	New Jersey Commission on Higher Education	\$1,097,047	\$2,191,189
NM	New Mexico Higher Education Department	\$556,798	\$1,500,000
NV	Nevada System of Higher Education	\$383,809	\$1,500,000
NY	New York State Higher Education Services Corporation	\$4,017,131	\$7,601,629
OH	Ohio Board of Regents	\$2,268,044	\$4,381,431
OK	Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education	\$915,434	\$1,694,526
OR	Oregon University System	\$697,006	\$1,500,000
PA	Pennsylvania Department of Education	\$2,105,061	\$4,167,672
RI	Rhode Island Office of Higher Education	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
SC	South Carolina Commission of Higher Education	\$989,701	\$1,917,048
SD	South Dakota Department of Education	\$3,300,000	\$1,500,000
TN	Tennessee Higher Education Commission	\$1,410,814	\$2,716,766
TX	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	\$6,262,491	\$11,845,689
UT	Utah State Board of Regents	\$433,354	\$1,500,000
VA	State Council of Higher Education for Virginia	\$1,010,008	\$2,240,031
VT	Vermont Student Assistance Corporation	\$330,000	\$1,500,000
WA	Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board	\$1,116,302	\$2,084,539
WI	Wisconsin Department of Administration	\$911,111	\$1,638,380
WV	West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission	\$448,769	\$1,500,000
WY	University of Wyoming	\$330,000	\$1,500,000

STATES INNOVATE BUT STILL MISS OPPORTUNITIES

States have already administered CACG programs for two years, creating a track record of state policy preferences. The third year of funding will be crucial, since it represents the first year of expanded funding over an extended time. The U.S. Department of Education finished approving state applications in October 2010 and released [summary abstracts](#) for each state. The applications show that certain approaches are very popular, while others remain largely unused. In addition, the applications identify the populations targeted by each state. Unfortunately, the majority of states are devoting their entire CACG grants to improve college going rates among a narrow population: middle and high school students.

The key purposes to which states apply their CACG grants are:

- ♦ **Professional development:** Supporting staff members who advise prospective college students on the college transition, such as high school guidance counselors and college financial aid counselors.
- ♦ **FAFSA completion/financial aid counseling:** Assisting prospective students in completing their Free Application for Federal Student Aid and counseling them on financial aid availability and application procedures.
- ♦ **Web portals:** Developing websites that promote college attendance and provide related services.
- ♦ **Marketing campaigns:** Developing outreach initiatives through television, radio, and print outlets to encourage individuals to consider college as a viable option.
- ♦ **Mentoring and individualized information on college transitions:** Providing information and coaching to individuals on aspects of the college transition, such as application procedures and deadlines, selection, and financial aid.

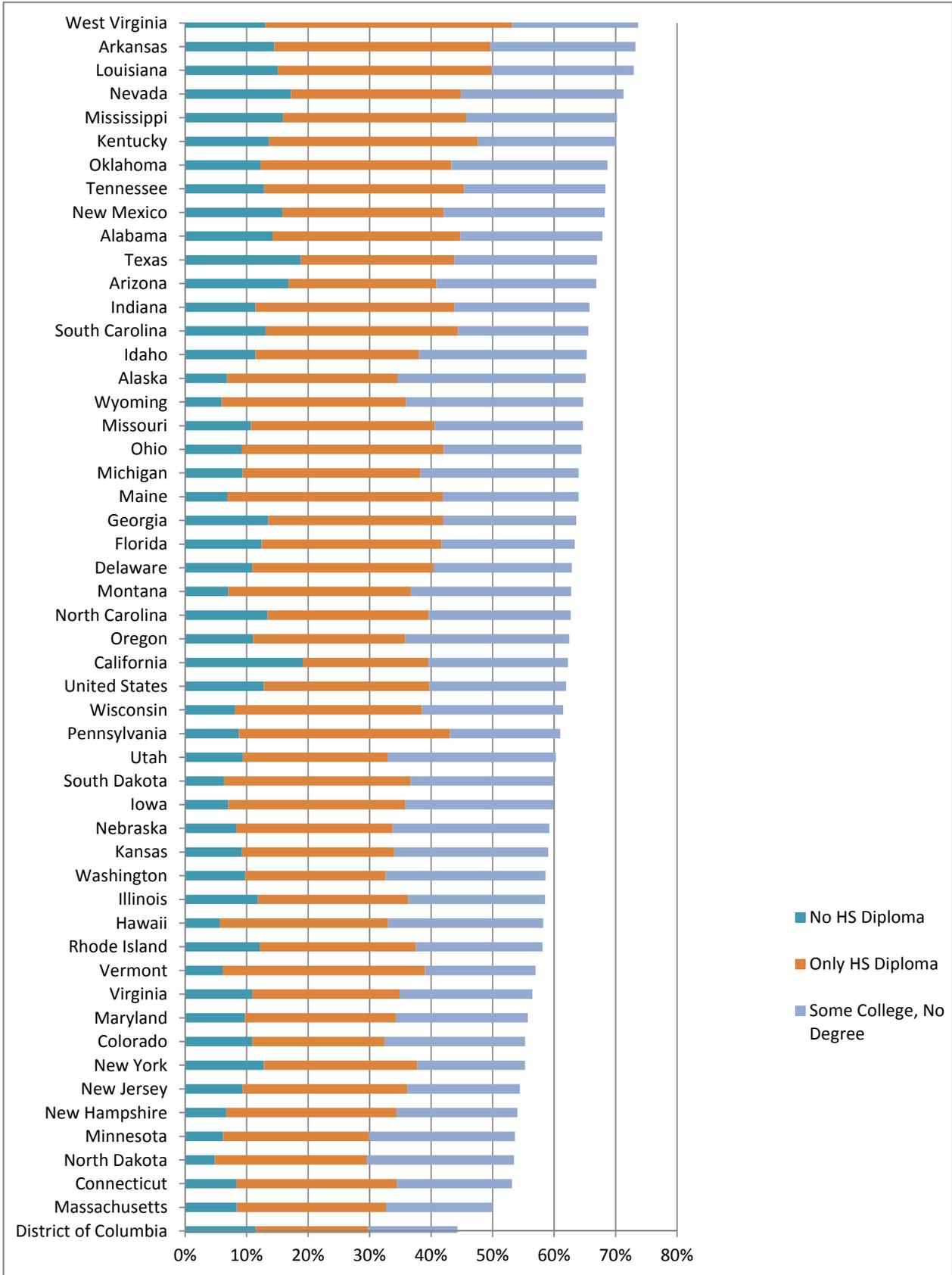
With the new funding, a number of states (including Texas, New Hampshire, and Alaska) are implementing sophisticated, multi-pronged initiatives based on data analysis and evidence of effective practices, while other states simply plan to expand existing programs.¹⁴

Most states focus solely on students in the P-12 system. For example, Minnesota's application begins with the following statement: "Need for the College Access Challenge Grant is based on the impediments to postsecondary success faced by students in middle and high schools from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education." While many middle and high school students face serious impediments to postsecondary success, every state also has a significant portion of adults who lack a college degree and face steep obstacles to entering or staying in the middle class (Chart 1).¹⁵

Expanding college access and success among adults as well as young people is necessary to ensure that the United States can field enough skilled workers to power its economy over the next generation. The higher rates of postsecondary attainment in other industrialized nations represent a competitive advantage. For the U.S. to ramp up its number of skilled workers, Americans at all ages have to enter and graduate from college at higher levels. To improve competitiveness and lift communities out of poverty, states need to lift college going rates among both high school-age youth and adults already in the labor market.

A handful of states with notable adult learning initiatives do not include them in their CACG plans. Policy leaders in these states may believe that adult learners are adequately covered by other programs, enabling them to focus CACG funds on a discrete population of at-risk high school students.¹⁶ This is a defensible yet potentially risky strategy, as it creates separate silos for adult and high-school age populations, and leaves adult learners in the state-funded silo, where funding is more likely to deteriorate.

Chart 1: Share of People Ages 25-54 Lacking College Degree by State, 2008



Source: Working Poor Families Project, *Analysis of American Community Survey 2008 by Population Reference Bureau.*

LEARNING FROM THE LEADERS

States have at least one good reason to focus on the transition from high school to college: disadvantaged high school students are a captive audience. For the most part, they attend public institutions operated by state-funded and state-regulated school districts. This enables state agencies and their local partners to target many of their interventions cost-effectively. In addition, they can observe changes in college going rates among high school seniors to demonstrate effective outcomes.

Low-skilled adults, on the other hand, are dispersed in the workforce. It may not be obvious to state CACG policymakers how they would reach large numbers of adults and persuade them to attend college. Yet interventions to improve college access among low-income and minority adults are achievable, and some states in the CACG program are leading the way.

What follows are key approaches to expanding adult college access and success. Where available, they are illustrated with concrete examples from state CACG applications and performance reports.

INCLUDE LOW-SKILLED ADULTS IN THE STATE VISION FOR EXPANDING COLLEGE ACCESS.

At present, many states simply propose to increase the rate at which high school graduates enroll in college, or make a general statement that all people in the state should have an opportunity to attend college. Instead, the state can identify both P-12 students and low-skilled and disadvantaged adults as target populations for initiatives to improve college access. By declaring that the state will seek to improve college access for adults, state leaders lay the foundation for accountability in implementation.

- ♦ Georgia's College Access Plan creates a "specific focus on the dual pipeline" of P-12 students and low-income adults at risk of not completing college. Indiana and Utah also identify adults as a target population.

Oregon demonstrates that investing CACG dollars in adult college access works

The Oregon University System has developed the nation's most sophisticated career pathways system. At the inception of CACG, Oregon alone put expanding adult access to college at the center of its initiative. The Oregon University System worked closely with the state's community college system, workforce agency, and financial aid agency to devise a multi-faceted outreach approach:

- ♦ Running television and radio ads informing the public that college is an option and that financial aid is available; the majority of air time was provided pro bono.
- ♦ Creating brochures in English and Spanish for distribution to schools, colleges, and state agencies.
- ♦ Developing a web portal aimed at adult learners.
- ♦ Establishing an Adult Learner College Line to answer questions from adults who needed a personal touch in understanding their college options; Spanish-speaking operators were always on duty.

CACG policymakers also commissioned an independent evaluation to provide external evidence of the initiative's effectiveness. The evaluation found a remarkable impact at community colleges in a single year; e.g., the number of independent students applying for the Oregon Opportunity Grant jumped by 51% between 2008-09 and 2009-10. Reviewing available data and customer feedback, the evaluators concluded that the Oregon CACG Project had been "a highly successful project."¹⁷ Sadly, Oregon seems to be turning away from its effective focus on adult learners to focus primarily on traditional-age students in 2010-11. However, many of the assets built up over the past two years will remain.

SET GOALS FOR BOTH ACCESS AND SUCCESS.

Adult college students typically require more support to stay in college than more traditional students, because they have work and family obligations and their basic skills have typically gone rusty after years outside the formal education system. It is therefore especially important to pair college access measures with student success measures. State CACG plans should set goals to maximize student opportunities to succeed. By setting goals for both college access and student success, CACG policymakers take responsibility for students who enroll as a result of the state's college access program.

- ◆ Texas has set four goals for its CACG program, including: "Increase the number of students who persist in college and graduate."

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS WHO HAVE LEFT COLLEGE TO RETURN AND COMPLETE THEIR DEGREE.

Several states are piloting outreach to "stop-outs," students who leave college without a degree. These students have accumulated credits and, with a little mentoring, can get back on a fast track to graduation. Nationally, over 28 million Americans between ages 25 and 54 have some college experience but no degree.

- ◆ New Jersey used its CACG funding to launch the Disengaged Adults Returning to College (DARC) grant program, which provides resources for higher education institutions to identify and contact students who completed some college but did not attain a degree. The institutions provide counseling and financial aid advising services.
- ◆ Texas's Adult Degree Completion initiative will deploy a targeted marketing campaign to reach students who stopped out with 55 hours or more of college credit. The Texas Higher Education Control Board will develop an online transfer mapping system to assist and facilitate re-entry for adults

wishing to complete a degree or credential, and provide "reverse transfer" counseling to help students who have completed some credits at a university to complete their degree at a community college.

TARGET ADULTS FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS.

A majority of states are using CACG funds to raise awareness of higher education through marketing campaigns. These campaigns usually involve some combination of television, radio, and print advertising and a web portal. Creating a targeted marketing campaign to appeal to low-income adults is equally cost-effective. However, marketing to adults requires stressing different selling points, such as affordability and value in obtaining a better job.

- ◆ The Oregon University System hired an advertising firm to develop television, radio, and billboard ads and create a [web portal](#) for adults interested in college. The theme of the marketing campaign, "College Is Possible: You Can Go!" responded to adult concerns that they could not afford or find time to attend college. Both the web portal and an associated hotline provide abundant financial aid and financial planning assistance. See sidebar, "Oregon demonstrates that investing CACG dollars in adult college access works."
- ◆ Georgia is planning to establish Military Resource Centers on college campuses to provide a point of contact for military veterans and active-duty soldiers. The goal is to enlist greater numbers of adults with military backgrounds and experience. Since many low-income adults discharged from the military still lack postsecondary education and training, this is a promising model for other states to consider.
- ◆ Kentucky developed *Adults Returning to School*, a publication that addresses the questions, concerns and unique needs of adult students. Over 15,000 copies have been distributed to date.

CONDUCT OUTREACH IN SETTINGS FREQUENTED BY DISADVANTAGED ADULTS.

A number of states have set up outreach to youth at risk of not attending college, often by subcontracting to community organizations. With little additional effort, they can conduct outreach to disadvantaged adults as well. These might include one-stop centers, Head Start centers, Child Care and Information Referral Resource programs, and state, local and community benefit offices where TANF, Food Stamps, WIC, Medicaid, and child support are accessible, local educational agencies, public libraries, and community centers. In addition, employers with large numbers of low-income workers could partner with state CACG initiatives to promote college enrollment.¹⁸ This option is largely unexplored among states.

- ♦ Regional and mobile outreach counselors in Kentucky make regular visits to sites around the state. Some of the most common sites are frequented by prospective adult students, including adult education centers, businesses, chambers of commerce, correctional facilities, one-stop employment centers, Head Start programs, social service offices, and military offices. In addition, the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Agency sponsors adult education conferences that provide information on postsecondary opportunities.
- ♦ Montana will use its CACG grant to train its workforce training providers to assist adults in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

STRENGTHEN DISTANCE LEARNING OPTIONS.

For states with dispersed rural populations, marketing the availability of distance learning programs and supporting expansion of distance learning capability would seem to make sense. Wyoming and Hawaii are planning to use CACG funding for this purpose, although details were not available.

INFLUENCING CACG: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WFPF STATE PARTNERS

CACG initiatives exist in all 50 states, and represent important opportunities for WFPF state partners to strengthen educational opportunities for low-skilled and disadvantaged adults. The planning process for each state will differ, however. While many federal grants go to the State Higher Education Executive Officer, the CACG grant permits the governor to designate the administering agency and fiscal agent. The responsible agency may be a higher education agency in one state, a financial aid agency in another or a university system in yet another. Hawaii has turned over CACG to its P-12 charter school office and Montana to its state workforce agency. Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, and North Dakota switched administering agencies between 2008 and 2010. No clear pattern is visible, but the changes emphasize that governors can and do exercise their discretion to make course corrections.

WFPF partners can bring new and valuable perspectives to state higher education policymakers in shaping their CACG initiatives, and in prioritizing college access and success among low-skilled and disadvantaged adults.

First, WFPF state partners should seek to participate in their state's CACG steering committee.

CACG encourages partnership structures at the state level. The most effective state initiatives, such as those in Texas, Alaska, and Oregon, have organized multi-stakeholder steering committees to conceptualize and coordinate implementation of the state CACG plan. If a state does not have such a committee, state partners should propose forming one and explain the benefits experienced in other states. If such a committee already exists, state partners should ask to join, so they can add their expertise and distinctive point of view. The **Southern Good Faith Fund**, for example, has joined the steering committee for the Arkansas CACG initiative.

Second, state partners can work with state administering agencies to explore ways to amend the 2011 CACG state proposal.

States must file a new application every year to maintain funding, and this application represents a point of leverage for state partners. Helpful amendments could include:

- ◆ Identifying low-skilled and disadvantaged adults as a population for whom the state seeks to expand college access.
- ◆ Making improved college success a coequal goal with expanding college access.
- ◆ Encouraging students who have left college to return and complete their degree.
- ◆ Launching a public awareness campaign targeted to adults, or including adults in an existing public awareness campaign.
- ◆ Conducting outreach on postsecondary transitions in settings frequented by disadvantaged adults.
- ◆ Strengthening distance learning options, especially in predominantly rural states.

Third, state partners should work collaboratively with state administering agencies to add the target population of low-skilled adults to existing initiatives.

Even though states are prohibited from adding new activities to their approved FY 2010 plans, most states can include adults in their existing activities more fully than they presently do. The Massachusetts web portal excludes adults with its headline, “Everything you need to get ready for life after high school,” as well as its choice of stock photos and contact information. Other states provide models that Massachusetts might consider. For example, the Iowa web portal uses inclusive language and offers links for “adults” and “job seekers.”¹⁹ Some initiatives cannot easily be extended to adult learners, such as near-peer mentorship programs. However, almost all states are investing in multiple outreach methods, some of which could be expanded to include adults.

**WORKING POOR FAMILIES
PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) WFPF state partners should seek to participate in their state’s CACG steering committee.
- 2) State partners can work with state administering agencies to explore ways to amend the 2011 CACG state proposal.
- 3) State partners should work collaboratively with state administering agencies to add the target population of low-skilled adults to existing initiatives.
- 4) State partners should track implementation and monitor for results.
- 5) State partners should keep legislative leaders informed of CACG activities.

Fourth, state partners should track implementation and monitor for results.

Collaboration is by far the most preferable strategy. But state partners should be prepared to hold their state agencies accountable for successful implementation, while highlighting effective and meaningful interventions.

Fifth, state partners should keep legislative leaders informed of CACG activities.

Legislative leaders have an interest in state efforts to advance college access and success. They should be kept informed of the state’s CACG plans, activities, and progress, particularly in briefings on how effectively the postsecondary system is addressing the needs of low-skilled and disadvantaged adults.

The College Access Challenge Grant Program is only one federal initiative, funded at a level deeply inadequate to meet its stated goal. But in a time of fiscal retrenchment – and outright budgetary crisis in some states – CACG represents a new funding source that can support innovative strategies for expanding access and improving success among low-skilled and disadvantaged adults in all WFPF states.

For questions about this policy brief or the Working Poor Families Project contact:
Brandon Roberts
robert3@starpower.net
(301) 657-1480

ENDNOTES

¹ Tom Hilliard is an independent consultant specializing in postsecondary education, workforce, and economic policy. He is grateful to Karmon Simms-Coates of the U.S. Department of Education for her explanation of the finer points of the College Access Challenge Grant Program, Joseph Holliday of the Oregon University System for his insights into the Oregon CACG program, Demaree Michelau of the Western Interstate Council on Higher Education, Brian Sponsler of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Don Baylor of the Texas Center for Public Policy Priorities, Karen White and Heather McKay of the New Jersey Center for Women and Work, Jason Bailey of the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, and Brandon Roberts and Deborah Povich of the Working Poor Families Project for their valuable comments and feedback.

² Brandon Roberts and Deborah Povich. *Still Working Hard, Still Falling Short: New Findings on the Challenges Confronting America's Working Families*, Working Poor Families Project, October 2008, p.i.

³ Ron Haskins, et al, *Promoting Economic Mobility by Increasing Postsecondary Education*, Economic Mobility Project, May 2009, p. 7.

⁴ Economic News Release, Table A-4, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Labor Services, November 5, 2010. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t04.htm>.

⁵ Haskins, p. 12.

⁶ Working Poor Families Project. *Analysis of the American Community Survey 2008 by Population Reference Bureau*.

⁷ Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, tabulated by Kids Count Datacenter, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁸ *Education at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), September 2009.

⁹ Mikyung Ryu, *Minorities in Higher Education: 24th Status Report*, American Council on Education, October 2010.

¹⁰ See <http://www.subnet.nga.org/ci/1011/>.

¹¹ John Quintero, *Widening the Doorways of Opportunity: Philanthropic Efforts to Strengthen Postsecondary Education and Skill Development Systems*, Working Poor Families Project, Summer, 2010, p. 6. (<http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/policybrief-summer2010.pdf>). Also see http://completecollege.org/alliance_of_states/.

¹² Examples include the Imagine Fund in Michigan, USA Funds in Indiana, Houston Endowment in Texas, and the New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation. To learn about a specific state, review the state's CACGP application and read the Budget Narrative.

¹³ Personal Communication, Karmon Simms-Coates, Director, College Access Challenge Grant Program, U.S. Department of Education, August 13, 2010.

¹⁴ For example, the state of Florida will use 80% of its CACG funding to modestly expand enrollment in its state financial aid program. This represents a missed opportunity to field innovative college access programs that could be scaled up over time. The Florida student unit record system is the nation's most advanced, capable of tracking students from preschool to college and out into the labor market. Such a system is capable of identifying populations that would be most responsive to a policy intervention and tracking the effectiveness of that intervention with unusual precision. Florida and other states may benefit from greater investment in new approaches next year.

¹⁵ Working Poor Families Project. *Analysis of the American Community Survey 2008 by Population Reference Bureau*.

¹⁶ Personal communication, Demaree Michelau, Director of Policy Analysis, Western Interstate Compact for Higher Education, September 1, 2010.

¹⁷ Ken Kempner and Craig Taylor, *Year Two Evaluation, College Access Challenge Grant Program of Oregon*, commissioned by Oregon University System, August 2010.

¹⁸ Correspondence with Amy-Ellen Duke Benfield, Center for Law and Social Policy, September 3, 2010.

¹⁹ The Massachusetts web portal can be found at <https://yourplanforcollege.org/>. The Iowa web portal can be found at <https://secure.ihaveaplaniowa.gov/default.aspx>.