

Why Higher Education Investment Should Be a Priority for the SOTU & the President's FY '22 Budget Request



Third Way Education

The Biden Administration has laid out a bold agenda for U.S. higher education. In the upcoming Joint Address to Congress and the President's FY 2022 budget request, the White House has well-timed opportunities to elevate two core priorities from the Administration's higher education plan: **doubling the maximum Pell Grant** and establishing a **federal-state partnership** to increase college affordability.

Both initiatives are integral to making college more accessible and equitable for all students—especially given the role that higher education must play in the economic recovery from COVID-19—and they are both of high importance to the American people. In a [national poll](#) from November 2020, 60% of likely voters ranked increasing federal aid, like doubling the Pell Grant, as a top priority for the Biden Administration to improve the value of a college degree. And when presented with a list of goals for higher education, making college more affordable to reduce student debt

ranked top of the list, with 70% of voters nationwide saying it is very important to them. We urge you to prioritize the inclusion of these two investments in the State of the Union address and in the upcoming president's budget request as immediate actions your Administration can take to further these goals in your first year:

- **Doubling the maximum Pell Grant will help millions of low- and middle-income college students access a college education and take on less debt to earn a postsecondary credential.** While the Pell Grant used to cover 80% of the cost of college, today it covers less than 30%—resulting in fewer than half of community colleges and only a quarter of public four-year schools being affordable for the average Pell Grant recipient. Doubling the dollar amount of the maximum grant will restore the purchasing power of Pell, greatly increase the average grant received by the Black and Hispanic students who disproportionately benefit from Pell Grants, and make completing college more affordable for the nation's low-income students, students of color, and student veterans by reducing reliance on unwieldy student loans that contribute to the student debt crisis. Doubling the Pell Grant also shares broad support from more than 200 diverse organizations and stakeholders.
- **Establishing a federal-state partnership will bolster college affordability for current and future students and help the Administration meet its goal to make community college tuition-free.** In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, state budgets are facing significant uncertainty that will continue for some time, resulting in volatility in funding for higher education. The current moment presents an opportunity to reimagine a federal-state partnership for college affordability that will leverage new federal investment and incentivize sustained state funding for all public institutions. A robust federal-state partnership will help reduce the cost of college for students and families, ensure that public colleges have the necessary resources to serve all students well, provide federal support to help states respond to funding inequities, and proactively mitigate future budgetary shocks (and ensure higher education funding isn't further raided to deal with the impact of the pandemic). In addition to forming the cornerstone of the President's plan to make public community college tuition-free, this partnership would represent a clear promise to ensure a college degree is affordable and accessible for future generations of students—and lay the groundwork for free public college for all who can't afford it.

We urge the White House to present the value of these two priorities and communicate their importance to the American public during the Joint Address to Congress and by including them among the education priorities listed in the President's first budget request. Making the Administration's support of these initiatives clear in its first 100 days will demonstrate President Biden's commitment to addressing long-standing affordability and access inequities that have prevented our higher education system from meeting its full potential to serve all students.

Association of Young Americans (AYA)

Center for American Progress

The Education Trust

Excelencia in Education

Higher Learning Advocates

The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)

Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)

National College Attainment Network (NCAN)

New America

Third Way

UnidosUS

Veterans Education Success

Young Invincibles

(If you'd like to add your organization to the list of signatories, please contact Nicole Siegel:
nsiegel@thirdway.org.)

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