



nassgap

National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs

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Proposal for Workforce LEAP

The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP), a voluntary association of state aid program administrators, has prioritized supporting and facilitating federal/state partnerships that leverage public and private funds to advance regional, state, and national educational goals.

The federal and state governments have a long-standing mutual interest to support and fund post-secondary education and attainment in order to provide opportunities for adults to enhance their employment options. When evaluating the United States in an increasingly competitive global economy, many researchers point to the need to address the adult population with “some college” credits but no college degree or who need workforce retraining or career redirection. NASSGAP has reviewed these concerns and proposes the following:

Whereas, the majority of states have a goal that over 50% of their adults aged 25-xx (or “workforce age adults”) shall have an economically viable degree, certificate, or credential by 2030 or earlier.

Whereas, demographic trends reveal that these essential above goals cannot be attained solely by funneling high school graduates into postsecondary education.

Whereas, the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey routinely shows 5.5 to 6 million jobs open and unfilled in the United States, many because potential employees do not have the skills needed to fill those positions and these jobs potentially, therefore, are at risk of being shipped overseas.

Whereas, many working adults, and especially single parents, have family and work commitments that financially preclude them from pursuing education, yet some may be just a handful of credits away from earning a degree or certificate that qualifies them for a better job and a higher salary, strengthening the American economy.

Whereas, the Federal Leveraging Educational Assistance Program – LEAP – previously existed as a federal/state partnership to more efficiently support low income students and those pursuing in-demand careers within a state. This now retired program offers an effective blueprint for a new LEAP program focused on adult students.

Whereas, the post-recession economy is improving but it is also evolving and some of the jobs that were lost will never return. According to a new report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, there is an “ever-increasing demand for better education credentials and upskilling across an array of new fields.”

Whereas, studies have consistently demonstrated that individuals with college degrees have significantly higher earnings and lower unemployment than those with some college but no degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that degree-holders earn on average about \$400 more per week than those with only some college. This represents a 53 percent increase in earnings potential for low income families. Further, individuals with a college degree are unemployed at rates significantly below that of those with “some college.”



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Whereas, individuals with a college degree pay 63 percent more in income taxes, report healthier lifestyles, and are less likely to receive public assistance.

Whereas, research has shown that while the United States' higher education attainment is high overall, other countries are increasing attainment at a faster rate. This trend will put the United States into a competitive disadvantage over the next couple of decades. While the primary solution is to increase the percentage of younger citizens with a degree, attainment efforts must be broadly focused.

Whereas, the fastest growing job markets in the United States are "middle-skill" jobs that require some education beyond high school but not necessarily a bachelor's degree. Some states are beginning to recognize the need to focus on academic programs that provide certifications and credentials that lead to well-paying jobs.

Whereas, there are many individual state and private efforts within the various states that address adult students but the effectiveness of these programs is limited due to lack of centralized coordination or marketing. Federal funding for administration could enhance and focus these efforts.

Whereas, the adult population has been identified by NASSGAP as a priority cohort of students to be addressed via reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Whereas, adult students often face stiffer challenges in pursuing education as many do not have access to the grants and scholarships available to high school students entering higher education, do not have support from other family members, are often unemployed or underemployed, and often must balance time between work, family, and education. Even a relatively inexpensive program, such as a short-term credential program costing under \$5,000, can remain out of reach.

Therefore, NASSGAP proposes a bill amending the Higher Education Act of 1965 to strengthen federal-state partnerships in postsecondary education and to expand and to better prepare the workforce for the 21st century economy.

A Proposal:

NASSGAP proposes the creation and implementation of Workforce LEAP. This program would foster a federal/state partnership to leverage state and private investments with federal dollars to enhance the job-readiness and employment of adult students.

Purpose:

It is the purpose of this program to incentivize and enhance state efforts to improve degree completion, credential attainment, and workforce outcomes of adults.

Target Population:

Adults who have stopped out of college after completing some college or adult career changers who have been laid off and since remain unemployed or underemployed relative to their last year of pre-layoff income.

Use of Funds:

Federal and non-federal matching dollars may be used for any one or combination of the following activities at the discretion of the state, based on local needs:

- Provide last dollar gap funding for adults attempting to complete an undergraduate degree at a nationally or regionally accredited, Title IV eligible institution. The state may restrict participation if funding is insufficient to cover all institutional sectors.
- Expand flexible options for delivery of degree programs and combine credits earned, such as: on-line learning, weekend programs, multiple institution delivery, etc., that are more adult and employment friendly.



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- Provide grants to adults enrolled into short-term programs that offer industry-based certifications in a state-defined high demand field. Participating institutions and programs must be recognized by the appropriate state credentialing entity. The states may restrict participation by institutional sector and demand field if funding is insufficient to cover all sectors and fields.
- Incentivize businesses and corporations to expand apprenticeships and workforce recruitment programs that target adults. There is a growing interest in apprenticeship programs that offer opportunities for individuals to “earn while they learn.”
- Support programs that provide pathways from GED to the workforce through partnerships between adult education and colleges to gain industry certifications. As an example, in Virginia, the PluggedInVA program offers a variety of programs across the state in high demand fields. <http://www.pluggedinva.com/sample-page/> . In Nebraska, the GAP program offers financial assistance to Community College students taking non-credit courses that could lead to jobs in high-need fields. <https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/gap>
- Align economic development efforts with recruitment and training opportunities for new or expanding businesses, which can offer greater opportunities to help business grow an experienced workforce while providing job training skills to individuals.
- Provide funding for child-care for those adult students demonstrating a need.
- Support administration, marketing, and education information directing adults towards in-demand careers and the post-secondary programs that support them; including early aid estimates and college information.
- Provide sub-grants to public and private entities consistent with the above approved uses of Adult LEAP funds. Participating private organizations must be non-profit and have a demonstrable existing partnership or affiliation with a state agency or local education authority.

Match:

The match to federal funds may be via documented non-federal dollars or in-kind services directed specifically towards the target population and targeted programs and services as covered within Use of Funds. The federal dollars shall not exceed a ratio of \$4 federal for every \$1 non-federal.

Administrative Costs:

A state can assign no more than 10 percent of federal dollars for administration of the program.

State Agreement:

As a condition of receipt of funds, a state shall enter into an agreement with the Secretary. The agreement shall contain the following assurances:

- Federal funds will supplement and not supplant other federal and state funds otherwise available to carry out activities described under Use of Funds.
- A state will identify the intended use of program funds – consistent with Use of Funds – and develop goals and measures to determine success.

State Eligibility Criteria:

This Act provides federal matching funds for state need-based financial aid programs meeting the following criteria:

- A state program provides aid to adult students who would otherwise be eligible for Title IV aid, but have used up their Pell and/or loan eligibility or are enrolled less than half-time.
- A state program provides aid to adult students enrolled into an otherwise non-Title IV program, at a Title IV institution, that leads to a recognized workforce certification or credential program.
- The program is certified by the Governor as aligned with workforce needs to provide adults with skills and credentials needed to fit the needs of employers in the local economy.
- A state has established performance metrics to verify the efficacy of the program.