

FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES



Lumina
FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

Lumina Foundation is committed to the creation of a just and fair universal postsecondary learning system that offers every American the opportunity for a better life. This student-centered, outcomes-focused system will recognize learning wherever and however it occurs. The system also will offer a wide range of transparent, quality credentials connected by clear, learning-based pathways that lead to further education and employment.

Federal policy can help create this system — a system that embraces students of color, adults, students from low-income households, and students who are the first in their families to attend college. To achieve this vision, federal policy must look beyond efforts that merely increase college enrollment. Student success must be an equal objective, and without compromising quality. We must know and understand the needs of today's students and be responsive to the rapidly changing technological and workforce environments they face.

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Lumina focuses on three populations: 1) students who are 18-22 years old and face financial and systemic barriers to success; 2) returning adult students who have some college education but lack a credential — whether it's a degree or high-value workforce certificate; and 3) adults with no recognized education after high school. These groups represent tens of millions of Americans who must contend with significant forces that are reshaping the economy and driving the need for college degrees and other postsecondary credentials. This challenge is further exacerbated by the limited opportunities and resources available to many of these students within the postsecondary ecosystem. Expanding educational opportunity for these groups is essential to reducing the inequity that pervades much of American life.

At Lumina, we take a range of approaches as we work to effect change in federal policy. We support the conditions to create and sustain the political will for change. We also provide policy leaders with nonpartisan research and advice, point them toward potential policy options, and support advocacy efforts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our federal policy recommendations include:

1. Support today's students no matter where or how they learn. To increase the proportion of Americans with postsecondary education, federal policy must allow colleges and universities to innovate responsibly so they can better meet the needs of students. Federal policy should consider how federal student aid is interacting with new academic programs and pathways such as those based on competencies as well as work-and-learn opportunities. Expanding access to innovative programs and practices must be linked to federal quality assurance — to ensure that student aid is being used only at accountable providers.

Policies to consider are:

- Expand competency-based education through a broad, long-lasting demonstration project. This would allow for large-scale innovation while protecting student and taxpayer investment from waste, fraud, and abuse.
- Give education providers — traditional and emerging — incentives to collaborate to forge new academic pathways leading to degrees and other credentials of value.
- Update federal student aid rules and regulations to better meet the needs of today's students.
- Ensure that the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments work with the Department of Education to find ways to apply the knowledge and skills acquired through military service toward degrees and other postsecondary credentials.

2. Eliminate disparities in educational outcomes across racial and ethnic groups. Federal policy should create incentives to significantly increase educational attainment among American Indian, black and Latino students. Students from these communities disproportionately face barriers to access because of historic and systemic discrimination. One barrier in particular is that many students in these communities come from households with less wealth and fewer resources available for postsecondary education. Federal policy can address student diversity and achieve fair and just outcomes by ensuring financial access to higher education among all students, including those who need assistance most. Federal policy also financially supports colleges and universities that serve large numbers of students of color. Institutional appropriations to minority-serving institutions, community colleges, and open-access institutions remain critically important to increasing attainment and improving other key student outcomes.

Policies to consider are:

- Re-examine the support structure for minority-serving institutions that is based solely on the percentage of students of color admitted. Instead, consider approaches that reward institutions with a mission to help more students of color earn degrees and other quality credentials, while also encouraging capacity-building and improving infrastructure to boost institutional performance.
- Establish measures, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, that clearly show how providers deliver on student success and completion.
- Focus on helping students pay the full cost of college attendance, not just tuition and fees.

3. Reform quality assurance to focus on individual student outcomes. Federal quality assurance should focus on desired results among students, not primarily on characteristics of the institutions awarding the degrees. The objective should be to shift federal quality assurance toward a risk-based approach built on relevant data regarding institutional finances and governance; educational outcomes, especially among students of color; and development of employability skills among graduates.

Policies to consider are:

- Hold accreditors accountable for publicly measuring how well students demonstrate knowledge and skills that are vital to success in life and work.
- Clearly define responsibilities for upholding academic quality across states, accrediting organizations, and agencies of the federal government.
- Reorient accreditation so that it subjects institutions to different levels of scrutiny based on their student learning and completion data.
- Collect data about students that make it possible to follow their paths into — and through — academic programs as well as their employment after graduation.
- Encourage postsecondary providers to create high-quality, lower-cost academic programs.
- Include credentials such as certifications along with college degrees in quality-assurance approaches.

4. Ensure that postsecondary education

is affordable. The rising price of a postsecondary education — and the growing portion of that price borne by students and families — are barriers to reaching the nation's goal of 60 percent of adults with college degrees, certificates, industry certifications or other credentials of value by 2025. Federal policy should ease financial stress on students and their families, and it should ensure that educational providers more accurately estimate prices for current and prospective students. Federal subsidies for students from low-income households should be prioritized, and these subsidies must be structured to reduce the risk of students dropping or stopping out.

Policies to consider are:

- Offer federal student aid programs that are flexible enough to meet the variety of needs that a student might encounter.
- Create a state-federal partnership to address affordability issues.
- Frame affordability in a way that is clear and predictable, built around a defined financial benefit, and based on a reasonable contribution from resources available to students and families.

5. Align the postsecondary education and workforce development systems.

Too often we artificially separate postsecondary education and workforce development. This creates a fragmented system that is difficult to navigate. Ultimately, both areas must work together to ensure that more Americans have knowledge and skills that allow them to be informed citizens and prepared for a global economy.

Policies to consider are:

- Support programs that award degrees and other credentials based on demonstrated competencies (e.g., academic programs that allow students to show mastery or proficiency of knowledge, skills, and abilities leading to credentials — whether such learning is gained on the job, in the military, online, in the classroom, or through innovative learning experiences).
- Support development of career pathway road maps that guide people to suitable programs.
- Create bridge programs that allow people to combine basic skills instruction with career and technical certifications.



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March 2019

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.