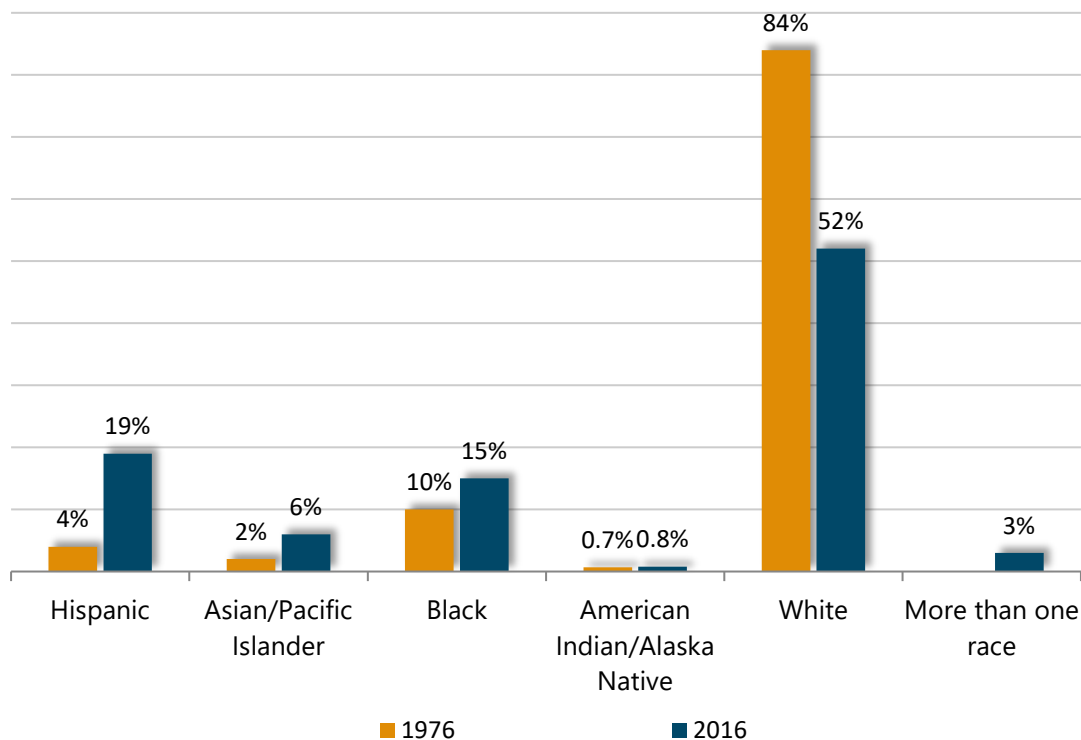


## The Changing Face of Postsecondary Students

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) must recognize the nation’s changing demographics of postsecondary students. In recent years, historically underrepresented students have become a larger segment in higher education, and these trends are expected to continue. HEA reauthorization is an opportunity to increase educational attainment levels; close equity gaps; and ensure the federal government, states, and institutions transform their policies and practices to respond to these changing demographics:

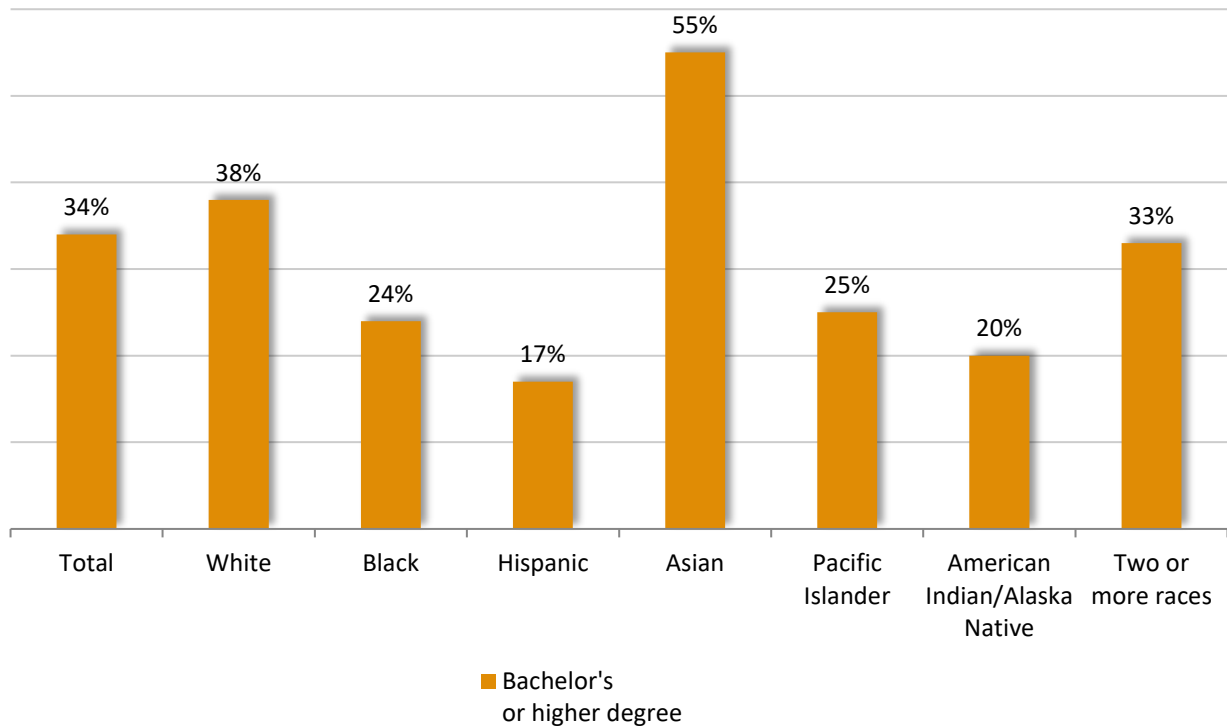
Between 1976 and 2016, students of color significantly increased their college participation, as illustrated in the chart below.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Undergraduate Enrollment in 1976 and 2016 by race/ethnicity**



**U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016.**

Despite this progress, disparities still exist. According to 2017 data from the U.S. Department of Education, Asian and white adults are far more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than Black, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic adults.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2: Educational attainment of adults age 25 and older, by race/ethnicity: 2017**

**U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics, 2017.**

“Opportunity youth” are transition-age youth ages 16 to 24 who are not currently working or in school, but who wish to resume their education and advance along a career path. They face unique barriers because they did not follow the traditional path of high school to college.

These young people disproportionately have low incomes. Forty-one percent live in poor households, compared to 27 percent of their connected counterparts.<sup>3</sup> Many come from high-poverty schools, which often lack adequate numbers of quality teachers, advanced placement courses, and school counselors—the supports most needed by youth in poverty.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, opportunity youth experience toxic stress, a culmination of adverse events that contribute factors to their dropping out of school.<sup>5</sup> Our higher education financing structure must be changed to accommodate the needs of opportunity youth.

CLASP supports policies and federal higher education programs that expand access, improve student outcomes, and ensure that students of color receive an affordable, high-quality education. Many students of color attend open-access institutions and are low-income; immigrant students; student parents; adult learners; returning citizens or incarcerated individuals; undocumented students; English Learners; or youth who have been disconnected from postsecondary and career pathways, including homeless and foster youth.

## CLASP Principles to Promote Racial Equity and Inclusion

- Make federal higher education programs more responsive to the needs of low-income students, students of color, opportunity youth, and adult learners.
- Along with making college debt-free, federal-state partnerships must focus on closing equity gaps, improving student outcomes, fostering healthy campus climates, and encouraging states to increase targeted support for low-income students, students of color, adult students, parenting students, opportunity youth, undocumented students, first-generation college students, and foster and homeless youth.
- Incentivize best practices in states and institutions that offer clear and guided pathways, culturally responsive comprehensive supports, dual-enrollment approaches, and high-quality instruction and educational delivery systems.
- Create incentives for states to invest in postsecondary education at levels greater than before the Great Recession.
- Ensure that opportunity youth can access postsecondary education opportunities and career pathways.
- Develop culturally responsive racial equity and accountability standards for students of color by encouraging states, institutions, and accreditors to improve student outcomes, promote racial equity and inclusion on college campuses, and scale up work-based learning opportunities.
- Increase targeted funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to strengthen their capacity.
- Avoid punitive risk-sharing policies that create disincentives for access and harm institutions that serve large concentrations of low-income students and students of color, such as HBCUs and MSIs.

## Recommendations

**Expand best practices leading to transfer, completion, and career pathways.** Expand best practices in states and institutions that increase college affordability, transfer, and completion—and that lead to career pathways for low-income and other disadvantaged students.

**Promote Healthy Campus Climates:** Authorize a new federal grant program to revamp academic counseling, advising, and mental health services that could help students of color, adult learners, and low-income students succeed in school. Congress should consider a culturally responsive Guided Pathways model that promotes systemic change, clear and guided pathways, and comprehensive supports. Give HBCUs, HSIs, PBIs, TCUs, AANAPISIs, and other MSIs priority consideration.

Require states and institutions to promote healthier campus climates, free of harassment and violence. Compel them to provide culturally responsive academic advising and mental health services and support cultural and community centers to help students of color succeed in college. Require them to improve institutional monitoring and responses to hate crimes and related incidents based on a low-income student's race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, disability or immigration status.

**Restore Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated individuals.** Rigorous research proves that restoring access to Pell Grants can help transform the lives of incarcerated individuals and reduce recidivism.<sup>6</sup> Reversing the ban on Pell Grants would have implications for racial equity as African American and Latinx communities experience disproportionate rates of incarceration. The combined African American and Latinx communities make up approximately 32 percent of the U.S. population, but comprise 56 percent of all incarcerated people.<sup>7</sup>

**Remove questions about prior drug convictions from the FAFSA.** A drug conviction does not prevent financial aid eligibility unless the offense occurred while a student was receiving federal financial aid. However, questions about drug convictions can mislead and discourage students from communities that are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. These questions compound many other barriers to FAFSA completion.<sup>8</sup>

**Allow undocumented students to access federal student aid.** Since June 15, 2012, more than 820,000 undocumented immigrant youth (Dreamers) who entered the United States as children have benefitted from temporary legal protections through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA). These protections have allowed undocumented youth to remain and work in the United States without fear of deportation and to access postsecondary education, driver's licenses, and occupational and professional licenses.<sup>9</sup>

Although more than an estimated one third of DACA recipients come from low-income families, HEA bars undocumented students from receiving any type of federal financial aid. Expanding federal student aid to undocumented students could help them afford a postsecondary credential and succeed in college and beyond.

**Pass the DREAM Act and provide targeted supports for undocumented students.**<sup>10</sup> Pass legislation like the DREAM Act that would provide a path to legal permanent residency and citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrant youth who have lived in the United States for most of their lives. Authorize a grant program to provide counseling, advising, legal, and other supports for Dreamers at two-year and four-year institutions. Include "counseling, advising, legal, emergency grants, and other supports" for Dreamers as an allowable use in HEA -Title V undergraduate and graduate programs.

**Promote racial equity and accountability standards in the accreditation process.** Congress should require accreditation standards for racial equity and inclusion and focus accreditors on making institutions more responsive to the needs of diverse student populations. In doing this, Congress can ensure institutions do more to close gaps in educational attainment, promote healthy campus climates, and prepare students for the workforce.

Accreditation standards must encourage: reduced college costs; comprehensive student supports; healthy campus climates; hiring and retaining a diverse, culturally and linguistically prepared faculty and staff; and, scaling up early warning systems and interventions to support underprepared students. These standards should also encourage dual-enrollment approaches; workforce preparation; and, innovative models that promote transfer and completion for low-income students, students of color, adult students, foster and homeless youth, and undocumented student populations.

**Strengthen the definition of "regular and substantive" interaction.** Increase the quality of online and distance educational programs and delivery systems by clarifying and strengthening the definition of "regular and substantive" interaction in HEA to ensure that low-income students, students of color, and underprepared students have access to faculty and the support they need to succeed in school.

**Support targeted funding for HBCUs and MSIs.** Congress should help strengthen the capacity of institutions (HBCUs, HSIs, PBIs, TCUs, AANAPISIs, and other MSIs), many of which are community colleges. These institutions educate high concentrations of low-income students and students of color and serve as engines of economic and social mobility.<sup>11</sup> Targeted investments in these institutions can increase access, affordability, and academic success for students who have low incomes and are historically underrepresented in higher education. Include targeted funding for HBCUs and MSIs in federal-state partnerships offering debt-free associate and/or bachelor's degrees. Include targeted funding for MSI innovation fund proposals.

**Support increased funding for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP), TRIO, and High School Equivalency Program (HEP)-College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP).** College and career readiness programs targeting low-income students, students of color, and migrant and seasonal farmworker families help low-income and first-generation college students complete a high school diploma and prepare for college. Increased investments in these federal programs will support students in their pursuit of postsecondary education and family-sustaining jobs and careers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Radwin, Jonathan G. Conzelmann, Annaliza Nunnery, T. Austin Lacy, Joanna Wu, Stephen Lew, Jennifer Wine, and Peter Siegel. 2018. *2015-2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 16): Student Financial Aid Estimates for 2015-2016*. NCES 2018-466. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC; Lorelle L. Espinosa, Jonathan M. Turk, Morgan Taylor, and Hollie M. Chessman, *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*, February 14, 2019. <https://www.equityinhighered.org/>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2017* (NCES: Table 104.10). [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_104.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_104.10.asp)

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Burd-Sharps and Kristen Lewis, *Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps: Youth Disconnection in America*. Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council. <http://www.measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2017/>  
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<sup>4</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy, *Course, Counselor, and Teacher Gaps: Addressing the College Readiness Gap in High Poverty Schools*, June 2015. <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/CollegeReadinessPaperFINALJune.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> America's Promise Alliance, *Don't Call Them Dropouts: Understanding the Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation*, May 20, 2014. <http://www.americaspromise.org/report/dont-call-them-dropouts>  
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<sup>6</sup> Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, et al, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, The RAND Corporation, 2013. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND\\_RR266.sum.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND_RR266.sum.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *Criminal Justice Fact Sheet*, accessed on January 20, 2019. <http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>.

<sup>8</sup> Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, et al, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, The RAND Corporation, 2013. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND\\_RR266.sum.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND_RR266.sum.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, *Amid Court Challenges, Here's What Will Happen If DACA Ends*, Center for American Progress, 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2018/08/15/454798/amid-court-challenges-heres-will-happen-daca-ends/>.

<sup>10</sup> Rosa M. García, *The Vital Importance of DACA Protections*, Center for Law and Social Policy, 2018. <https://www.clasp.org/blog/vital-importance-daca-protections>.

<sup>11</sup> Lorelle L. Espinosa, Robert Kelchen, Morgan Taylor, *Minority-Serving Institutions as Engines of Upward Mobility*, American Council on Education, 2018. <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/MSIs-as-Engines-of-Upward-Mobility.pdf>.