



National Association for College Admission Counseling

Guiding the way to higher education

2009 Policy Positions

As education professionals dedicated to helping all students make the transition to postsecondary education, NACAC members consider improving college access to be the number one educational priority for the association. Based on the association's research and collaborations with like-minded coalition partners, NACAC has identified recommendations under three major policy areas to improve college access.

- Access to quality school counseling
- Investment in need-based financial aid
- Rigorous, college preparatory curriculum for all students

All of NACAC's policy positions, recommendations, and legislative priorities fall under one or more of these principles. NACAC's 2009 recommendations are as follows:

Elementary and Secondary Education

Quality school counseling is a critical element in successful school reform. Research conducted by NACAC and in concert with our coalition partners indicate that school counselors are in a unique position to help students develop and maintain a college access mindset, especially for first generation, low income, and underrepresented students. NACAC recommends that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) provide funds to the neediest school districts to hire and train school counselors for the purpose of helping students prepare academically and financially for college.

NACAC research indicates that rigorous, college preparatory coursework is the most important factor in admission decisions. Given the small share of education funding provided by the federal government, the federal role should be providing incentives to states to encourage innovation in this area. NACAC recommends that NCLB Title I funds be allocated to the neediest high schools to develop and support innovative approaches to improving curriculum, including dual enrollment or early college programs in partnerships with colleges and universities. Additionally, NCLB should help states make K-12 funding more equitable. Improved access to resources means improved opportunities for student achievement and improved postsecondary options.

NACAC's Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests concluded in September 2008 that admission tests like the SAT and ACT are inappropriate for use as achievement or accountability measures. NACAC recommends that any assessments that claim to measure students' academic achievements should be aligned with school curriculum in order to be effective.

The following legislation has been supported by NACAC:

- The Pathways to College Act (S 3326), Senator Richard Durbin
- The Put Counselors Where They're Needed Act (HR 3439), Congresswoman Linda Sanchez
- The Student Support Act (HR 6654), Congressman Ed Towns
- The Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP)



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Early Awareness and College Access Initiatives

Programs like GEAR UP and TRIO are proven early awareness programs that fit perfectly with NACAC's policy goal of improving college access for underrepresented students. A major component of both these programs is access to quality college counseling services. NACAC recommends a continued significant investment in GEAR UP and TRIO, neither of which have received meaningful increases in appropriations for several school years. Public schools across the country suffer from high student-to-counselor ratios, and effective programs like GEAR UP and TRIO can help ease that burden.

Fraud and Abuse in Federal Student Aid Programs

NACAC was founded on a set of principles that its members believe should guide the college admission and enrollment process. During the recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), several strong protections for Title IV programs were substantially weakened or removed. NACAC is concerned that in the absence of such protections, scarce federal funding for student financial aid are at substantial risk of fraud and abuse. The US Department of Education's Office of Inspector General has suggested that protections against waste, fraud and abuse that are removed from statute or substantially weakened should be replaced with alternative mechanisms for ensuring that taxpayer funds are not exposed to unnecessary risk. The weakening of the HEA incentive compensation ban and 90/10 rule, combined with the elimination of the 50 percent rule, have all but eliminated HEA protections installed in the early 1990s to protect against abusive practices—some of which we believe are still prevalent. NACAC recommends that Congress should:

- Re-examine the 90/10 rule to determine the government's interest in ensuring that no private education company derives 100 percent of its revenue from Federal sources;
- Reaffirm the ban on incentive compensation and re-writing "safe harbor" regulations that opened loopholes and effectively weakened the HEA statutory ban; and
- Redefine the cohort default rate to ensure that true default rates are clearly articulated, and that colleges are held accountable for high default rates.

Helping Students Pay for College

Need-based student aid.

Research shows that need-based student aid has the most positive impact on the college-going rates of underrepresented students. NACAC supports increased investment in need-based aid as the most crucial component of improving college access. The Pell Grant is the cornerstone of the federal financial aid system, and NACAC recommends it should be expanded to meet increasing need, and Congress should take steps to make sure the shortfall is addressed. NACAC also supports general reform to the student aid system, including recommendations from the College Board's Rethinking Student Aid Study Group regarding ACG and SMART grants, the campus based aid formula, and higher education tax credits.

Financial aid simplification.

Other factors that affect a student's ability to pay are the complexity of the federal financial aid system. NACAC applauds steps that have been taken to simplify the FAFSA and standardize financial aid award letters, but barriers still exist. NACAC recommends that the application process be further simplified through the use of family tax information.



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Student loans.

The Federal Family Education Loan program costs taxpayers more than three times what the Direct Loan program costs, yet students receive nearly the same loans and the same loan terms with either program. NACAC recommends implementing the STAR Act, which would save taxpayers \$13.4 billion over ten years, and would redirect those funds to need-based financial aid programs to make college more affordable for needy low- and middle-income students. Additionally, NACAC opposes “no strings attached” bailouts for lenders, and instead would recommend bankruptcy protection for private borrowers.

Undocumented Students

According to the Supreme Court’s 1982 decision in *Plyer v. Doe*, students brought to this country as minors have the right to public elementary and secondary education. Unfortunately, a gap in immigration law prevents these students from pursuing citizenship, even if they attend and graduate from college. NACAC recommends the immediate passage of the DREAM Act, which would provide paths to citizenship for qualifying undocumented students, and would return to the states the right to determine eligibility for in-state tuition.