REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT: ACCESS AND INNOVATION

HEARING

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, FOCUSING ON ACCESS AND INNOVATION

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JANUARY 25, 2018

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C O N T E N T S

STATEMENTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 2018

Page

REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT: ACCESS AND INNOVATION

Thursday, January 25, 2018

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room SD–430, Dirksen Senate Office building, Hon. Lamar Alexander, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Alexander [presiding], Enzi, Burr, Isakson, Paul, Collins, Young, Hatch, Murray, Sanders, Casey, Bennet, Murphy, Kaine, Warren, Hassan, Smith, and Jones.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ALEXANDER

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will please come to order.

This is another in a series of hearings as we work to get a result by early spring on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. This is the digital age, with remarkable inventions everywhere we turn, and so today, we are looking at how the Federal Government can get out of the way so schools can innovate to meet the needs of all of today's college students.

Senator Murray and I will each have an opening statement. Then we will introduce the witnesses. After the witnesses' testimony, Senators will each have 5 minutes of questions.

The world around universities is changing, and so is the university student. 2007, just 11 years ago, there was no iPhone, a microblogging company named Twitter just gained its own separate platform and started to scale globally, and Amazon released something called Kindle. It is a world where employers need more workers with postsecondary degrees than they ever have.

Georgetown University economists predict we will be 5 million short in 2020 of people with the necessary postsecondary skills. And according to Georgetown, during the recovery from the last recession, over 95 percent of newly created jobs went to college-educated workers.

It is also a time when college students are coming to college from various stages of life. According to the Lumina Foundation, 38 percent of college students today are 25 years or older. Fifty-eight percent work while enrolled in school, and over a quarter are also raising children. Many graduated from high school and immediately joined the workforce, are now coming back to school to learn new

skills to increase their earning potential. Of the 21 million students pursuing higher education, 38 percent attend school part-time, up from 31 percent in 1965.

Today's hearing is another in a series of examining proposals as we work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, and from these hearings, I see a consensus emerging that is student-focused. Simpler, more effective regulations that make college more affordable and easier for students to apply for financial aid and pay back their loans, reducing red tape so administrators can spend more time and money on students, making sure a degree is worth the time and money students spend to earn it, and helping colleges keep students safe on campus.

Our reauthorization and today's hearing is focused on students, therefore. Today, we will look and see how we can help colleges provide an education that works for every student, whether it is an 18-year-old college freshman, a mom returning to school to finish her Bachelor's while also working full-time, or a 25-year-old low-income student who is the first in his or her family to attend college. In other words, how can Congress create an environment for colleges to innovate to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's students?

As the typical university student has changed into a more wide-ranging group, there is a bipartisan consensus that colleges need to be able to offer solutions to meet those students' diverse needs, flexible class schedules or online learning to accommodate for family and work commitments. While we may not all agree on all aspects, there are a number of proposals from Senators that would help schools offer innovative approaches to students.

For example, Senators Bennet and Rubio have introduced the Higher Education Innovation Act, a bill that would create a pilot program to allow alternative accreditors to monitor students' results, such as completion and getting a job, to determine if institutions or new non-college providers could receive Federal aid.

Senators Bennet and Hatch have the Pay for Student Success Act. It would allow universities to pilot new strategies for improving college completion, then be paid if their strategies are successful.

Senators Kaine, Portman, Brown, Cardin, Gillibrand, Hassan, Klobuchar, and Stabenow have introduced the JOBS Act. It would allow students to use Pell Grants to pay for short-term skills and job training programs that lead to credentialing in employment in high-demand fields like healthcare and cybersecurity.

I hope our witnesses today will discuss these and other proposals, as well as their own work to help colleges meet the needs of students. One of the most promising innovations is competency-based learning, which helps students finish a degree based on their ability to demonstrate knowledge of the subject rather than hours spent in the classroom.

A good example is a working mom studying at the University of Wisconsin who has earned her Associate's degree in nursing, wants to get her Bachelor's degree in nursing to increase her earning potential. Through the university's new flexible option, she is able to earn credits and finish tests and assignments on her own time, in-

cluding between her shift and her son's baseball game, to earn her degree sooner.

I know Senators Bennet, Isakson, Hatch, and Murphy have introduced legislation in the past to establish a pilot program so Federal aid can more easily follow students to competency-based programs. Two of our witnesses today are experts in competency-based programs, and I hope they will discuss this promising approach, as well as how to meet the unique challenges these students may face.

I hope our witnesses also will talk about any barriers that the Federal Government has in place that are preventing schools from creating innovative programs and solutions. Today's college student could look many different ways, and colleges are working hard to meet their needs. And what I want to know is how can we get the Federal Government out of the way so they can meet the students' needs?

Senator Murray.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURRAY

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to welcome all of our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing from all of you on ways we can make college a reality for all of our students who may not have access to the opportunities that higher education can create.

Providing pathways to college for nontraditional and underrepresented students should be a top priority of ours, but we also need to consider whether these pathways are accessible to all students and whether underrepresented students have the tools they need to succeed. I believe we had a productive conversation on reducing college costs last week. And Chairman Alexander, I was encouraged to hear you say simplification shouldn't mean eliminating aid, and the Higher Education Act should be student-centered.

I couldn't agree more, but as we all know, the devil is in the details. I am confident we can find a bipartisan solution, but it will be challenging, and this is just the beginning. After all, if we want to truly help students, we also need to improve how we hold colleges accountable for student performance and find ways to combat the rising number of threats to student safety on campuses, including campus sexual assault. And because many of these challenges are intertwined, I look forward to working with the Chairman and stopping at nothing less than a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Now I want to dig a little deeper into the students we are hoping to help and the multiple overlapping barriers they have to overcome in higher education. Students from low-income families are far less likely to even apply to college than their wealthier peers. Students who are the first in their family to go to college often struggle to navigate the complex financial aid system and how to succeed in their courses.

Students of color face implicit bias and discrimination, leading to significant inequities that begin early in our K-12 system. Veterans, service members are often targeted by predatory for-profit colleges that do not prioritize their education. Students who are homeless or in our foster care system get lost in paperwork and bureaucracy when they try to apply for financial aid and housing.

Working adults need a flexible schedule so they can continue to work while earning a degree that provides them with the skills that are relevant to their careers, and I could go on. So I look forward to a conversation today on how we can provide a path to students who may not feel there is a place for them in higher education and how we can set up every student with the support they need to navigate their program, graduate on time, and move into a good career.

Now I know there will be a lot of discussion today around improving access to higher education and the role of innovative models of education and how they play. But we also need to make sure we have strong guardrails to hold all programs accountable for results to make sure that we—our students get a high-quality instruction and the right support. Federal policy can't set up our students to fail.

We would not want to repeat instances where students were misled or cheated by their schools and are now stuck paying back loans on a nonexistent or worthless degree. In the worst cases, a student's college or training provider may have decided they could no longer make a profit and simply closed down or collapsed, and those kinds of outcomes are unacceptable.

There are a number of solutions I believe can work in conjunction to support students, improve access, and encourage responsible innovation. High-quality online programs and competency-based education allow students to learn at their own pace and should absolutely be a part of this conversation. They can give students the flexibility to work on their degree when and where they want to, whether that is at home, as the Chairman talked about, after their kids have gone to bed, or even on their commute to work.

Many of these schools and programs fail to provide students who need the most help with the supports they need to succeed. Sometimes that deepens the equity gap we already have.

All programs must be held accountable for educating students and preparing them for jobs in today's changing economy. Additionally, colleges and universities should create partnerships with high schools to offer dual enrollment programs or early college opportunities, giving all students, including underrepresented students, a better shot at success.

We must provide students with the tools to make it to graduation day, including in-depth advising, tutoring, career counseling, and full financial support to help with their childcare and textbooks, and food and housing, and transportation. These are just some of the many solutions proposed to address gaps in higher education enrollment, persistence, and completion. And I hope we can debate the merits of each of these thoroughly.

But as we continue to have these conversations, we cannot be allured by innovation for innovation's sake and risk allowing a generation of students to be sacrificed in the process. With experimentation must come evidence. That is the only way to guarantee our students are benefiting from innovative programs. It is the only way to truly actually protect our taxpayer dollars, and it is the only way to make sure students don't simply become guinea pigs for any outside-the-box idea.

The Higher Education Act allows for responsible innovation with Experimental Sites Initiatives. We should strengthen that policy to make sure more schools are participating in meaningful experiments, collecting real evidence that shows what causes students to succeed.

Now before we end, I just want to reiterate my concern today about the Department of Education's implementation of our Nation's K-12 education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act. We did include Federal guardrails in ESSA to ensure our most vulnerable students, the students who struggle more than their peers, are able to get the support they need.

Chairman Alexander, last week you said if I was concerned, you are concerned. And that was encouraging to hear. And I am confident we can work together to make sure the Department is implementing our bipartisan law as we intended and then get to our good faith negotiations on the Higher Education Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Senator Murray.

I have reviewed the Department's approval of plans. I have found no instance where they granted a waiver as a part of the plan, and I didn't find any instance where they didn't follow the law. However, Secretary DeVos has asked and sent a letter that will ask to meet with you and with me to discuss it, and I will look forward to doing that and following up your concern about it.

I appreciate you bringing it up, and I can tell from each of our opening statements that we are listening to each other, which is a good—which is a good sign. Sometimes the opening statements have an audience of one.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. So, but that is the way the system works, and it is terrific.

I am pleased to welcome our witnesses today. Our first witness is Dr. Joe May, chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District in Dallas, He is the founding president of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, a community college consortium that focuses on making the American dream possible for everyone.

He was president of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, of the Colorado Community College System, and president of Pueblo Community College. He has been a faculty member at Cedar Valley College after completing his doctorate at Texas A&M.

Our next witness is Ms. Donna Linderman, the University Dean for Student Success Initiatives at the City University of New York. She oversees several CUNY programs that help prepare students to succeed and graduate from college. A program called Accelerated Study in Associate Programs has doubled graduation rates and currently serves 21,000 students seeking Associate's degrees at the nine CUNY schools.

Our third witness is Dr. Barbara Brittingham, president of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. The commission is the regional accrediting agency of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, presiding over 225 colleges and universities in the Northeast and 11 internationally. Dr. Brittingham was previously dean of the College of Human Science and Services at

the University of Rhode Island and the founding dean of the College of Education at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates. She served on the boards of six national accreditation organizations.

I turn to Senator Smith to introduce our next witness.

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Chairman Alexander, for organizing this hearing and for giving me the opportunity to introduce Dr. Bushway, who is here from Minnesota.

Dr. Bushway has been an innovative leader in higher education since she was a faculty member at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul in the 1990's, which was founded as a university without walls. And she has developed competency-based education models at Metropolitan State and at Capella University, helping to bring accountability and definition to this approach based on evidence. At the Federal level, she has served as a senior adviser in the United States Department of Education, where she worked on education innovation.

I want to thank you, Dr. Bushway, for being here, and I look forward to hearing more about your work.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Smith. And I turn to Senator Hassan to introduce our final witness.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Murray.

Welcome, Mr. Larsson. I am very pleased to welcome Mike Larsson to this hearing. Mike comes to us from Boston, where he is co-founder and president of Match Beyond, an innovative nonprofit focused on ensuring that our most vulnerable have the opportunity to earn a college degree and thrive in the 21st century economy.

Now why is the Senator from New Hampshire introducing somebody from Boston, you all might ask? Because, as people know, Massachusetts and New Hampshire have a fairly robust competition going.

The reason I have the privilege of introducing Mike Larsson this morning is that his organization, Match Beyond, partners with Southern New Hampshire University's College for America, an online, competency-based, direct assessment program that awards Associate and Bachelor degrees. College for America offers students from all across our country an affordable and flexible path for individuals seeking to obtain a degree. And really, Southern New Hampshire University and College for America have really been visionaries in this area.

Thanks to Mike's work with Match Beyond, students can access College for America programs while, at the same time, receiving in-person, wrap-around student supports that help them earn their degrees and prepare for their future careers. Today, there are over 200 students enrolled, and 70 students have already completed the program through this partnership.

Mike, we look forward to hearing from you this morning about the efforts you have taken to strengthen higher education as we work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

Thanks for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hassan. I believe New Hampshire is also confused about which state Daniel Webster represented in the U.S. Senate.

Senator HASSAN. No confusion. We just take pride and ownership there all the way through.

The CHAIRMAN. Good, great. Thank you very much.

Dr. May, let us begin with you.

STATEMENT OF JOE MAY, ED.D., CHANCELLOR, DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT, DALLAS, TEXAS

Dr. MAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Murray, Members of the Committee.

As introduced, my name is Joe May. I am the Chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District, and our district is comprised of 7 colleges supporting about 150,000 students annually, with over 7,000 employees. I am also the president of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, a coalition of community colleges with the goal of enhancing student success.

We have all heard the statement that college is not for everyone, and what they mean is a 4-year degree is not needed by everyone. However, today, almost all jobs require some education beyond high school, and HEA should be broadened in order to take in the range of eligible programs for Federal financial aid to include non-traditional, skill-based programs that lead to high-wage jobs that are going unfilled.

Today, I will discuss three ways collaboration can be used to increase college success, innovation, and student success—employer collaborations, K-12 collaborations, and collaborations with non-institutional education providers.

First, employer collaborations. I believe this will focus on the short-term, sometimes called "workforce Pell." Between September 2015 and September 2016, there were 122,000 jobs created in North Texas. Sixty-five percent of those jobs required higher education, with 32 percent requiring a Bachelor's degree or higher, 33 percent requiring a certificate or Associate degrees to meet the needs of our community.

We need flexible, funded short-term workforce Pell that supports private partnerships to get students the skills that they need through short-term training and education programs, work learning programs, and apprenticeships to obtain higher-paid career opportunities. This can be addressed by allowing Pell Grants to pay for career and technical education certificates with as few as 150 clock hours of instruction. Our strategy should be to grow and not import talent because we cannot export poverty.

Next, K-12 collaborations. We have created collaborations between high schools, colleges, universities, employers, nonprofits, and individuals that improve upward mobility for thousands. It is called the Dallas County Promise. Through partnerships that remove friction between high school and college, and then college and work, we can achieve our workforce needs of 65 percent of high school graduates earning a high-value certificate or degree. Better yet, these students are graduating debt free.

Yet as we expand these partnerships and increase the number of students enrolling in college while still in high school, we actually

hurt our scores on the College Scorecard. The current Federal reporting system provides no way of recognizing successful collaborations between K-12, 2-year and 4-year institutions, and employers. And I am sure that we would agree that the over 1,800 students that will graduate from Dallas high schools annually with an Associate's degree are the very embodiment of success. Let us change our reporting requirement so that we can recognize the success.

The noninstitutional provider collaborations. A better-educated population includes not only baccalaureate graduates, but those who graduate with certificates and Associate's degrees. This is why so many industry-based organizations are offering high-value educational programs. These efforts are closely tied to industry standards and lead directly to high-paying jobs.

Yet if the program is not at least 600 contact hours and not affiliated with an accredited or federally recognized institutions, students must pay out-of-pocket for these credentials. The Dallas County Community College District, in partnership with Straighter Line, a noninstitutional provider; the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, CHEA; and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; were one of eight selected in 2016 by DOE to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's EQUIP Initiative.

Students begin their higher education career at Straighter Line. They can earn up to 50 percent of their credit toward an Associate's degree for little or no cost. Through this partnership, students can receive Title IV benefits to take courses from Straighter Line and the Dallas County Community College District.

We know that there is a great need for short-term certificates in technical fields. We have left our future workforce in the hands of a few students who could afford to pay out-of-pocket. The new Higher Education Act must prioritize career and technical education certificates and degrees and provide them the same value as baccalaureate and advanced degrees. To keep our economic engine running, we need to educate all of our students.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. May follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOE MAY

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

My name is Joe May, the Chancellor of the Dallas County Community College District. Our district is comprised of seven colleges with over 7,000 employees—we are the largest community college district in Texas. In addition, we operate one charter high school and partner with school districts on 31 Early College High Schools. Combined, we will serve over 150,000 credit and non-credit students this year.

I have heard people make the following comment: "College is not for everyone". What they mean is that a 4-year degree is not needed by everyone, however, almost all jobs today require some education beyond high school.

The Higher Education Act was created at a time when there were great middle-class jobs that required no more than a high school diploma. Today, however, we live in a very different world.

Between September 2015 and September 2016, there were 122,000 jobs created in North Texas. Our labor market information office looked at these jobs and determined that fully 65 percent required more than a high school diploma. In fact, 32 percent required a Bachelor's degree or higher while 32 percent required a certificate or an Associate's degree.

In a survey conducted by the Dallas Regional Chamber, over 2,000 business leaders indicated that their No. 1 concern was finding and attracting talent. Their No. 2 concern was retaining talent.

The Higher Education Act is the primary way that we ensure both student access and innovative solutions to ensure that colleges and universities are responsive to the needs of individuals, employers, and our Nation. We must ensure that higher education is accountable to producing the skilled workforce necessary to keep companies in our communities.

While previous versions of the Act have done a relatively good job of encouraging individuals to earn a Bachelor's degree, it has not had the same impact on encouraging more short-term certificates or Associate degrees in technical fields that support the ever-changing economy.

In drafting the new Higher Education Act, there are several opportunities to help improve access and innovation. These would include areas such as supporting competency-based-education, online learning, short-term education programs, partnerships with non-institutional providers, apprenticeship and work-learn models, and creating local partnerships. I will speak on how all these can be synthesized into one word—collaboration.

Access can be improved through collaboration. Innovation can be improved through collaboration.

There are opportunities for a revised Higher Education Act to help improve access and innovation. Today I'll discuss three ways that collaboration can be used to increase college access and student success--Employer Collaborations, K-12 Collaborations, and Collaborations with non-institutional education providers.

By encouraging greater access to innovative solutions, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act has the potential to help grow our economy while rebuilding our middle class.

Employer Collaborations

As I mentioned a few moments ago, people searching for jobs should be working hand and glove with employers searching for a skilled workforce. The current challenge we face as a nation is in bringing these two together. While Title IV was designed to encourage the attainment of baccalaureate degrees, current law does not allow for students to receive Title IV benefits unless they are in a program that is at least 600 contact hours in length.

Perhaps this was acceptable policy when only a quarter of our population needed a postsecondary credential, it is not acceptable when we have thousands of jobs going unfiled that require less than 1 year of education, but more than a high school degree. 65 percent of jobs in the workforce require some form of postsecondary education.

The current system keeps students locked into low-wage jobs because they can't afford to take time off to earn an Associate or Bachelor's degree. In North Texas alone, getting more people in short-term certificate programs would have a huge financial impact on the economy.

Therefore, by allowing Pell grants to be used to pay for career and technical education certificates for programs with as few as 150 clock hours of instruction, we can help keep companies in our country, grow stronger families and have more viable communities.

To meet the dynamic pace of our economy, we should match skills that are needed in our communities. We need to collaborate, we need private sector partnerships. Those relationships should be rewarded, not prohibited. By partnering with employers, we can certify work eligible programs that meet employer's needs while helping people get hired.

My recommendations are:

- Allow flexibility to leverage private partnerships
- To assist with transparency, require public reporting of job acquisition information on individuals awarded workforce Pell
- Require colleges to publicly report whether individuals who were awarded workforce Pell obtain employment in their field
- Allow Pell to be used for short-term training certificates, for example, 150 clock hours of instruction
- Extend Pell to potentially 14 semesters

K-12 Collaboration

By believing in providing more access and innovation, then we must provide more opportunities for all students. We aim to solve the problem locally, even if that means working against our own best interest.

I am proud of our K-12 collaboration on the Dallas County Promise. The promise is a transformational effort between school districts—specifically 31 schools—colleges, universities, workforce, and communities to increase college completion.

The Promise is about one thing, and one thing only: Eliminate barriers and remove friction in transitions and processes both within and between systems. It is about ensuring that there is a network of financial, educational, and business resources to ensure that every student can succeed.

Why—you may ask. Because institutions of education face several regulatory barriers allowed under the Higher Education Act that impede student success through these types of educational innovations. Currently, instructions for reporting current high school students taking college courses and instructions for first-time-in-college(FTIC) students who earned college credits in high school are unclear and limiting to student success. These challenges result in skewed completion data collection and reporting.

This innovative use of dual-credit/early college high school is the educational framework of the promise program designed to help mitigate educational access barriers and ensure reduced time to degree completion without the need to incur debt.

As we continue to expand dual credit, increase the number of early college high schools, and grow the Promise program, we need related successful outcomes to be recognized through the Federal data collection system.

However, it is difficult to address student success barriers when managing administrative limitations and barriers. My recommendation is to allow institutions to track all enrolled students regardless of student categorization. This would allow reporting systems to actually student success by allowing institutions to report current dual enrolled students separately in the fall enrollment survey, and graduating with a credential and getting a middle-class job.

These modifications would improve data collection and allow for better data analysis that informs policy and practice. It would clarify how institutions define high school students taking college courses.

The impact of this change could be huge, for example in Dallas, we anticipate within the next 2 years over 1,800 students will graduate high school with an Associate's degree annually. Imagine if cities across the Nation were experiencing similar results. This would have a tremendous positive impact on our economy. Currently, these students are not fully counted toward our graduation and completion rates. They do not meet the laws definition of the first-time in college full-time student that must enroll in the fall semester to be tracked and counted as successful.

I would urge this Committee to consider reforming Federal graduation rates to better reflect community college student success.

Another critical component of our access strategy is opening our doors wide to all students looking for opportunity. This includes our DACA students.

If we care about businesses and communities prospering, then we must find a pathway for all our students, that includes students identified as Dreamers. I ask that you consider allowing those students to be eligible for Pell. DFW, at approximately 36,000, is the largest metro area in Texas with DACA recipients. Of the seven colleges that comprise DCCCD, seven are HSI. Today, 65 percent of jobs in Dallas county require a degree or certification beyond high school. To keep our economic engine running we need to educate and train all our students.

My recommendations are:

- Allow institutions to track all enrolled students regardless of student categorization
- Allow for new definitional and instructional language that addresses the unclear existing IPEDS definitions and instructions
- Allow community colleges to report current dual enrolled students separately in the IPEDS fall enrollment survey
- Allow community colleges to report current dual enrolled students separately in the IPEDS 12-month enrollment survey
- Allow DACA recipients to be eligible for Pell

Non-Institutional Education Providers

The Higher Education Act's existing policies do not align well with non-traditional partnerships, and ultimately the students pay the cost.

In 2015 The U.S. Department of Education initiated an experimental program designed to accelerate and evaluate innovation through partnerships between colleges and universities and non-traditional providers of education. The goals of EQUIP are straight forward-provide more Americans with the skills, knowledge, and training they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This is accomplished by breaking down the silos between organizations that almost never collaborate, despite the fact that they often have a shared mission.

The Dallas County Community College District, a regionally accredited community college system, in partnership with StraighterLine, a non-accredited, non-institutional provider of postsecondary education proposed to the US Department of Education an initiative to work together to improve college access while lowering both the educational delivery cost and the cost to students.

To ensure quality, we proposed to engage the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's (CHEA) Quality Platform and DCCCD's accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. As a result, this is one of only eight initiatives selected in 2016 by the Department of Education to participate in the Experimental Sites Initiatives Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships or EQUIP initiative.

Through this partnership, 600 students will have the opportunity to receive an Associate in Science in Business or an Associate in Arts in Criminal Justice for little or no out of pocket cost.

The partnership creates a pathway for students to earn an Associate degree by taking over 50 percent of their courses through StraighterLine's online platform.

This partnership also allows StraighterLine students to receive Title IV benefits through DCCCD.

    1. Because of the low cost of DCCCD and StraighterLine courses, students
    can complete their degree without incurring debt.
    2. The quality of the program is assured by the following groups:
      a. U.S. Department of Education
      b. Council on Higher Education Quality Platform (CHEA)
      c. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

As we often discover when attempting to implement innovation solutions for students and employers, both existing policies and regulations make implementation a challenge. In fact, StraighterLine was forced to change a proven business model to accommodate current Title IV requirements.

It has required a multi-step approval process between representatives in the Department of Education in Washington and by the regional office. Sometimes, it was unclear who was making the decisions. We should focus on accountability of results, not accountability of processes. Innovative programs like this should include innovative processes--outside of the bureaucratic norm.

My recommendations are:

- A flexible act that facilitates collaboration among non-institutional providers
- Prioritize career and technical education certificates and degrees, and provide them the same value as baccalaureate and advanced degrees

Our current higher education policies and regulations were designed at a time when institutions did not collaborate. We need a higher education act that facilitates collaboration.

The Act must encourage freedom and flexibility to innovate. It must ensure accountability that is measured by results, not by processes.

The new higher education act must prioritize career and technical education certificates and degrees and provide them the same value as baccalaureate and advanced degrees. Businesses are pleading for higher education to fill their talent pipelines, but they have become frustrated at a system that is too slow and unresponsive.

To keep our economic engine running we need to educate and train all our students. Thank you for listening to my thoughts as to how we can make this a reality.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF JOE MAY]

We've all heard people make the following comment: "College is not for everyone". What they mean is a 4-year degree is not needed by everyone, however, almost all jobs today require some education beyond high school. The Higher Education Act was created at a time when there were great middle-class jobs that required no more than a high school diploma. Today, we live in a very different world. We need

a higher education system that values career and technical education in a manner that the current Act does not.

Access can be improved through collaboration. Innovation can be improved through collaboration. I'd like to discuss three ways that collaboration can be used to increase college access and student success-Employer Collaborations, K-12 Collaborations, and Collaborations with non-institutional education providers.

Today's economy demands a flexible and trained workforce. We need the flexibility to leverage private partnerships to get students skilled through short-term training, work-learn programs, and apprenticeships. This requires flexible and funded Short-term or Workforce Pell that allows more students to obtain higher paid career opportunities through short-term certifications.

In Dallas, we realize that we can't wait and only partner with employers. We created a transformative collaboration, between high schools, universities, employers, non-profits, and individuals that are dramatically improving upward mobility for thousands of our students. We call it the Dallas County Promise. As we continue to expand dual credit and grow the program, we hurt our scores on the White House Scorecard. I am asking that we recognize in our reporting systems actual student success.

The economy has changed, and there is a demand for more individuals with certificates and Associate's degrees. This is why so many for-profit, not-for-profit, and industry-based organizations that are not affiliated with any institutions of higher education are offering more and more educational programs and services.

Our current higher education policies and regulations were designed at a time when institutions did not collaborate. We need a higher education act that facilitates collaboration. The new higher education act must prioritize career and technical education certificates and degrees and provide them the same value as baccalaureate and advanced degrees. To keep our economic engine running we need to educate and train all our students. Thank you for listening to my thoughts as to how we can make this a reality.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. May.
Ms. Linderman, welcome.

STATEMENT OF DONNA LINDERMAN, UNIVERSITY DEAN FOR STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Ms. LINDERMAN. Thank you very much.

Good morning, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives at the City University of New York, the Nation's largest urban public university system, serving almost 550,000 students across the city of New York at our 24 institutions.

I am pleased to join you today to speak about one of our most innovative and effective initiatives that is changing the degree success of thousands of our students. Founded in 2007 with support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, or ASAP, aims to graduate at least 50 percent of students within 3 years.

In 2007, CUNY's overall 3-year community college graduation rate was only 13 percent and 24 percent for students who entered with no remedial needs. To date, ASAP has served 33,800 students and has an average 3-year graduation rate of 53 percent versus 25 percent for similar students.

ASAP offers a robust package of resources and services designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum. ASAP financial resources include tuition waivers for students with a gap need between financial aid and tuition and fees, textbook assistance, and unlimited New York City Metro cards. We offer a structured pathway that includes required full-time enrollment, locked

schedule first-year courses, consolidated course schedules, immediate and continuous enrollment in remedial courses, and winter and summer course-taking opportunities.

Our integrated support services include comprehensive and highly personalized advisement, tutoring, career development services, and prematriculation engagement. ASAP enrolls students who are representative of the CUNY colleges they attend, largely low-income students of color with some initial remedial need. Thirty-three percent of our students are black, 44 percent Hispanic, 83 percent receive Pell—or New York State TAP, 79 percent receive Pell, and 74 percent enter with remedial needs.

ASAP operates as a consortium made up of CUNY academic affairs and nine partner colleges. The program is committed to use of data for evaluation and program management purposes and operates on a continuous improvement model. ASAP has been rigorously evaluated and found to be highly effective. Our average 3-year graduation rate, as mentioned, is 53 percent versus 25 percent for similar students.

By race, ethnicity, gender, and Pell status, all subgroups of ASAP students met or nearly met our 50 percent graduation target. ASAP also was found to reduce gap needs in graduation rates between Hispanic and white students and black and white students, especially for males. Six years after beginning, 64 percent of ASAP students have earned either an Associate or a Bachelor's degree, or both, versus only 43 percent for comparison group students.

NBRC conducted a random assignment study of ASAP, 5-year study, and found that the program's effects were unparalleled, with nearly double the graduation rate for similar students. Henry Levin and Emma Garcia from the Teachers College Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education conducted a comprehensive cost study of ASAP and found that, despite higher upfront costs, ASAP is both cost effective and cost beneficial to the taxpayer.

ASAP will expand to 25,000 students next year, with support from the city and State of New York. Our expansion will include service to more STEM majors and a college-wide expansion at Bronx Community College in New York City's poorest borough that will serve almost all full-time freshmen at scale.

ASAP now makes up 30 percent of all CUNY Associate full-time freshmen. Next year, we will be at 50 percent. CUNY expects that, at scale, the ASAP program will help double the overall 3-year Associate degree completion rate for the university from a 2013 baseline of 18 percent to 36 percent for the entering 2019 full-time cohort, making it one of the highest Associate degree graduation rates in the country.

CUNY has also started to expand into the baccalaureate space. John Jay College Accelerate, Complete, and Engage is modeled on ASAP and is already demonstrating significant improvement in degree momentum and narrowing of achievement gaps between similar students and A students.

ASAP is also being replicated in other states. Three Ohio community colleges have adopted the ASAP model. Early findings from NBRC study of the Ohio demonstration indicate strong fidelity to the model and promising early outcomes. CUNY is also supporting

Skyline Community College in Valhalla, New York—excuse me, in San Bruno, California, and Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York, in the SUNY system to replicate ASAP.

Federal policy would be very helpful to support community colleges to adopt evidence-based models like ASAP to improve graduation rates. Colleges need resources to create comprehensive programs like ASAP that integrate rigorous evaluation and use of data to measure success.

I urge the Senate to consider legislation like the House's Community College Success Act and others that were mentioned earlier by the Chairman that propose discretionary grant funds and support for colleges to replicate strong, evidence-based models with innovation.

Thank you very much for your interest in our work, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Linderman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DONNA LINDERMAN

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives and the Executive Director of CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in the City University of New York Office of Academic Affairs. I am pleased to join you to speak about one of our most innovative and successful initiatives that is changing the degree success of thousands of our Associate degree-seeking students. ASAP has become a national model recognized for its outstanding impacts to improve the graduation rates of CUNY students and make rigorous use of data to demonstrate success.

City University of New York is the largest urban public university in the country, with an enrollment of nearly 275,000 degree seeking students and 250,000 adult/continuing education students across 24 institutions across New York City. We are deeply committed to ensuring that our students receive an affordable, first rate education and have every opportunity to achieve their education goals and increase their social mobility. ASAP has proven to be an outstanding vehicle for realizing these goals.

ASAP History

Founded in 2007 with support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (Now NYC Opportunity), ASAP aims to graduate at least 50 percent of Associate seeking students within 3 years through provision of comprehensive support services and financial resources that remove barriers to full-time study, build student resiliency and engagement, and support timely degree completion. At ASAP inception, CUNY's overall 3-year community college graduation rate was 13 percent, similar to the national urban community college rate of 16 percent, and 24 percent for fully skills proficient students with no remedial needs. We believed we could do much better and with the support of the Mayor, CUNY created a comprehensive, structured model designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum with integrated and structured supports. ASAP has consistently not only met, but exceeded its ambitious graduation goals. To date, ASAP has served 33,800 students across 11 cohorts since inception and has an average 3-year graduation rate of 53 percent vs. 25 percent of similar comparison group students.

The program has grown from an initial enrollment of 1,132 students at six CUNY community colleges to an expected FY18 enrollment of 21,400 students across nine CUNY colleges (Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Queensborough Community College, College of Staten Island, Medgar Evers College, and New York City College of Technology) ASAP is expanding 25,000 students in FY19 thanks to generous support from the city and State of New York and ASAP students will make up 50 percent of all CUNY full-time Associate-seeking freshmen. Additionally, the program model is being replicated in a CUNY baccalaureate setting and at several community colleges around the country.

Program Design and Core Elements

ASAP offers a robust package of resources and services designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum and provide a connected community of staff and peers. ASAP financial resources include tuition waivers for students in receipt of financial aid with a gap need between award and tuition and fees, textbook assistance, and unlimited New York City Transit MetroCards to allow them to travel freely between work, school and home.

We offer a structured pathway that includes required full-time enrollment every semester, block scheduled first-year courses with fellow ASAP students, consolidated course schedules (i.e.: am, afternoon, evening), immediate and continuous enrollment in any required developmental education courses, and winter and summer course-taking. Integrated support services include comprehensive and personalized advisement, tutoring and supplemental instruction, career development services, and early pre-matriculation engagement opportunities to build a connected community.

One of the hallmarks of the ASAP program, is close, personalized attention by caring staff members. Every ASAP student is assigned to a specific advisor who meets with their students, currently caseloads of no more than 150 students with whom they meet regularly. Meetings are conducted in both individual and group formats, and advisors provide academic and interpersonal support. Students consistently talk about the importance of the close bonds they form with their advisors and cite these relationships as essential to their success. Frequent contact between faculty and advisors ensures that students requiring additional support are referred to tutoring or counseling in a timely manner. A 2013 study found that the number of ASAP student advisor meetings had a significant impact on timely graduation (Kolenovic, Lindermnan & Karp, 2013).

ASAP students also have opportunities to develop their leadership skills and enhance connected community. The ASAP Student Leader Program provides an opportunity for ASAP students to build leadership skills and support campus-based recruitment for ASAP. Every year, a set of Student Leaders is selected from each college to participate in a series of interactive cross-site workshops that help students develop new skills in the areas of team building, public speaking, and self-assessment. The ASAP Peer Mentor Program provides an opportunity for advanced ASAP students or recent alumni to support key ASAP advisement and career development activities. Peer Mentors participate in a series of cross-campus training sessions to develop leadership skills; improve communication, advocacy, and problem-solving skills; learn group facilitation strategies; and, strengthen their own ties to ASAP and the campus community.

ASAP Students and Eligibility Criteria

ASAP enrolls students who are representative of the CUNY colleges they attend and are largely low-income students of color with some initial developmental education needs. A current profile of students finds the following characteristics: Race: 12 percent Asian, 33 percent Black, 44 percent Hispanic, 11 percent White; Mean Age: 21; Gender: 57 percent female, 43 percent male; Pell or NYS TAP Receipt: 83 percent; Initial Remedial Need: 74 percent.

ASAP sets ambitious enrollment targets each year and broadly recruits students as they are admitted to CUNY partner colleges or currently enrolled students who meet the following criteria. Students are recruited until all program slots are full:

-Eligible for New York City resident rate tuition (community colleges) or New York State resident rate tuition (all other colleges);

-Agree to study full-time (minimum 12 credits a semester; 15 recommended) in an ASAP approved Associate major (most majors are offered);

-Are deemed fully skills proficient or have no more than two outstanding developmental course needs in reading, writing, and math based on CUNY Assessment Test scores (Note: Students with more than two developmental course needs are guided to ASAP's sister program CUNY Start, which provides intensive instruction for up to one semester at low cost. Students are then welcomed into ASAP the following semester);

-Have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and New York Stat Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application. Students must apply for financial aid each year and accept any need-based grant aid offered; and

-If a continuing or transfer students, have no more than 15 college credits and a minimum GPA of 2.0.

The program also conducts extensive citywide outreach across the New York City Department of Education, community based organizations, city agencies, and affiliated CUNY pre-matriculation programs. Prospective students, counselors who work

with them, and family members are all targeted to ensure all stakeholders are aware of ASAP benefits and opportunities. All promotion and recruitment materials are available online and in print form, and ASAP also has a broad social media and marketing presence.

Program Organization and Management

ASAP operates as a consortium of the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs and a set of nine partner colleges that each have a set of specific roles and responsibilities that maximize program success and effective operations. Each college has a fully dedicated ASAP program team that delivers led by an experienced director, an Associate director, a set of trained advisors with a maximum caseload of 150 students, a career specialist, program coordinators, and administrative support staff. College teams deliver recruitment, direct services to students, support program integration across campus units, and monitor student data. The CUNY Office of Academic Affairs provides overall administrative support, fiscal oversight, research, evaluation and data management, and program wide staff training and professional development. The program is deeply committed to use of data for evaluation and program management purposes and operates on a continuous improvement model. Staff across the program work toward a common set of benchmarks to help reach overall program graduation goals and use a standard data management system that is used to produce reports and run queries to measure program efficacy at all levels.

ASAP benchmarks that pull from CUNY official data systems and the ASAP data base are assessed on a timed basis and include: Enrollment and progress toward enrollment targets, college and program retention, credits attempted/earned, GPA, movement through developmental education if required, skills proficiency, graduation(2, 2.5 & 3 year), contacts with advisor (number, type, and code), participation in career development activities, contacts with the ASAP Career Specialist, contacts with peer mentors, satisfaction and experience in first year (survey), future plans, experience and satisfaction at exit (survey), advisement support level, exit code and exit date. ASAP staff meet regularly within partner colleges and across CUNY to review data, share best practices, and discuss and address common challenges.

ASAP Costs

The comprehensive nature of the ASAP model has higher upfront costs, which have declined dramatically as the program has expanded and fixed costs are spread over larger cohorts of students. Currently the additional ASAP cost per student per year is $3,456 over and above usual CUNY FTEs. This cost is expected to decline an additional $100 per student per year in FY19 when the program reaches planned scale. As noted in the next section, despite higher upfront costs, ASAP has been found to be both cost effective and cost beneficial by external evaluators.

ASAP Research and Evaluation Agenda

ASAP has been rigorously evaluated since inception and has been found to be highly effective. ASAP outcomes as evaluated by the ASAP Research and Evaluation team. To date, across eight cohorts that have graduated, ASAP has an average 3-year graduation rate of 53 percent vs. 24 percent for matched comparison group students. The most recent graduating ASAP cohort that entered in fall 2014 (N=2,278 students) had a 3-year graduation 55 percent vs. 28 percent for comparison group students.

After 3 years, 46 percent of ASAP students with developmental needs (who make up 74 percent of all ASAP students) and 61 percent of fully skills proficient ASAP students have graduated vs. 20 percent of non-ASAP comparison students with developmental needs and 33 percent of fully skills proficient non-ASAP comparison students.

Examining ASAP impact by race/ethnicity, gender and Pell status across cohorts: All subgroups of students met or nearly met the 50 percent 3-year graduation rate goal; ASAP had a significant and positive effect on 3-year graduation rates for all subgroups; and ASAP reduced gaps in graduation rates between Hispanic and white and Black and white students, especially for male students (Strumbos & Kolenovic, 2016),

When longer-term outcomes are considered, ASAP students are more likely to earn a degree. Six years after beginning, 64 percent of ASAP students had earned either an Associate or Baccalaureate degree (or both) vs. 43 percent of comparison group students. In addition, more ASAP students had transferred to a baccalaureate program(59 percent vs 50 percent) and more ASAP students had earned a Bach-

elor's degree (27 percent vs. 18 percent). ASAP students also earn degrees more quickly than other students (Strumbos & Kolenovic, 2017).

MDRC conducted a 5-year random assignment study of ASAP and found the program's effects are "unparalleled in large-scale experimental evaluations of programs in higher education" (MDRC, 2015) with nearly double the graduation rate for similar students. In a follow-up study of the random assignment study cohort 6 years after program entry MDRC found "that ASAP both continues to increase graduation rates and enables some students to earn their degrees faster than they would have otherwise" (MDRC, 2017).

Drs. Henry Levin and Emma Garcia from the Teachers College, Columbia University Center for Benefit Cost Studies in Education conducted a comprehensive cost study of ASAP and found the program is both highly cost effective and cost beneficial. Despite having higher up-front costs, the average cost per ASAP graduate is lower than for comparison group graduates. ASAP also realizes large financial returns for both the taxpayer and the student in the form of increased tax revenues, social service savings, and increased lifetime earnings (Levin & Garcia, 2018).

ASAP Expansion and Impact

Thanks to generous support from the city and State of New York, ASAP will expand to 25,000 students by academic year 2018/19. ASAP expansion will have a special focus on serving more STEM majors to ensure that more low-income, minority New Yorkers have every opportunity to graduate with in-demand skills across a broad array of employment sectors.

In addition to expanding ASAP enrollments at individual partner colleges, CUNY is supporting a campus-wide expansion of ASAP at Bronx Community College. This ambitious undertaking will aim to enroll most incoming first-time, full-time freshmen into an ASAP pipeline by academic year 2018/19 with the goal of graduating at least 50 percent of students within 3 years. This undertaking has the potential of not only changing the lives of thousands of low-income minority students who make up the majority of Bronx, but the future economic prospects of whole families and entire communities in the City's poorest borough.

In addition to serving more Associate degree-seeking students, ASAP is also beginning to broaden its scope to meet the needs of Bachelor's degree-seeking students. CUNY received funding from the Robin Hood Foundation, NYC Opportunity and the Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women to adapt the ASAP model to a baccalaureate setting at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. John Jay Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) launched in fall 2015 with a pilot cohort of 250 students with plans to double four and 5-year Bachelor's attainment rates. A second cohort was added this past fall.

Analysis of most recent outcomes for the first ACE cohort, demonstrate they are making excellent progress toward timely graduation. Fall 2015 ACE students have higher retention rates and take and earn more credits than similar John Jay comparison group students. As of fall 2017, 65 percent of the fall 2015 ACE cohort are on track to graduate within 4 years (based on credit accumulation and academic standing) moving into their third year of study vs. 37 percent of matched comparison students. Additionally, achievement gaps are significantly narrowed between race subgroups in the areas of retention, credits attempted/earned, and being on track to graduate within 4 years.

Importantly, ASAP is having a major impact on CUNY's overall Associate degree graduation rates. In FY18, ASAP students comprise 30 percent of all CUNY full-time Associate seeking freshmen. In FY19, they will comprise 50 percent of the total pool. ASAP growth and strong outcomes has helped CUNY significantly increase overall 3-year Associate degree completion rates over the past few years from 10 percent in 2006 to a current high of 19 percent. CUNY expects that at scale, ASAP will help CUNY double the overall CUNY 3-year Associate graduation from a 2013 baseline of 18 percent to 36 percent for the 2019 entering full-time freshmen cohort. These bold goals are further animated by CUNY's recently launched strategic framework that commits the entire University to embracing a culture of completion for current and prospective students.

Replication of ASAP Outside of CUNY

ASAP has received much interest from colleges across the country and is being replicated in several states. Through a partnership with the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Great Lakes Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation, and MDRC, CUNY ASAP provided technical assistance to three Ohio community colleges that implemented programs based on the ASAP model. As part of the Ohio ASAP demonstration project, CUNY ASAP staff worked with Cincinnati State Tech-

nical and Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, and Lorain County Community College for 2 years (2014-2016) to support the startup and implementation of their ASAP-like programs. MDRC is conducting a random-assignment study of the Ohio demonstration project. Early findings published by MDRC (2016) indicate that students in the Ohio programs based on the ASAP model have higher enrollment rates and credit attainment than students in the control group. These short-term impacts are similar to those the MDRC found in their evaluation of ASAP at the same point in time.

Effective fall 2017, CUNY ASAP is providing technical assistance to support replication efforts in two additional states—New York and California—through a grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation "Moving the Needle" initiative. Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York and Skyline Community College in San Bruno, California will develop their own ASAP-like programs for launch in academic year 2018–2019. Skyline College will launch their Promise Scholars program at scale, serving an estimated 500 eligible full time first time students, while Westchester Community College will launch their Viking ROADS (Resources for Obtaining Associates Degree & Success) with a pilot cohort of 100 students.

Recommendations for Federal Policy

We believe ASAP demonstrates the power of comprehensively supporting Associate-degree seeking students, especially underrepresented minority and low-income students, at all stages of their degree pathway. An upfront investment in their success has yielded astonishing impacts on the degree attainment rates of our students and is helping them improve their future economic prospects. ASAP is part of CUNY's proud legacy as a powerful engine of social mobility, as demonstrated by a recent study by a group of esteemed economists led by Raj Chetty at Stanford. Their 2017 study found that CUNY moves more students from the lowest income quintile into the middle class and beyond than multiple Ivy league colleges combined. We are proud to have the opportunity to expand this sort of impact through ASAP to see many more CUNY students improve their economic mobility in the coming years by earning a CUNY degree.

We are also honored to have ASAP serve as a model for colleges and policymakers who wish to improve the degree attainment rates of students who all too frequently struggle realize their higher education goals. This should be mission critical to all levels of higher education and government and Federal policy would be incredibly important to ensure it happens.

It is essential that community colleges have necessary resources and are encouraged to adopt evidence-based models to improve graduation rates to help more low-income students attain degrees. In an era on constrained resources and increased accountability, it is important to invest in what works. A group of House Democrats introduced the Community College Success Act last year that proposes a discretionary grant program to support replication of ASAP-like models that fully integrates comprehensive supports for students with rigorous use of data for program management and evaluation purposes.

Colleges need the resources to create comprehensive programming and to infuse rigorous evaluation and use of data to demonstrate success, which will ensure Federal funds are well used. This sort of support should be seriously considered across both the House and Senate.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for your interest in ASAP and in supporting higher education innovation that aims to help many more students of all backgrounds and means earn a college degree. Helping them realize this dream is a collective responsibility across all levels of society and it is an honor to be part of the group of stakeholders who are actively working toward this goal.

Thank you.

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[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF DONNA LINDERMAN]

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives at the City University of New York. I am pleased to join you to speak about one of our most innovative initiatives that is changing the degree success of thousands of our students.

II-ASAP History and Background

Founded in 2007 with support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) aims to graduate at least 50 percent of students within 3 years.

In 2007, CUNY's overall 3-year community college graduation rate was 13 percent and 24 percent for students with no remedial needs. To date ASAP has served 33,800 students across 11 cohorts and has an average 3-year graduation rate of 53 percent vs. 25 percent for similar students.

II—Program Design and Core Elements

A-ASAP offers a robust package of resources and services designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum.

a. Financial Resources: ASAP financial resources include tuition waivers for students with a gap need between financial aid and tuition and fees, textbook assistance, and unlimited New York City MetroCards.

b. Structured Pathway: We offer a structured pathway that includes required full-time enrollment, block scheduled first-year courses, consolidated schedules (i.e.: am, afternoon, evening), immediate and continuous enrollment in remedial courses, and winter and summer courses.

c. Integrated Student Support Services include comprehensive and personalized advisement, tutoring, career development services, and pre-matriculation engagement

B-Students Served and ASAP Eligibility

a. ASAP enrolls students who are representative of the CUNY colleges they attend, largely low—income students of color with some initial developmental education needs: 33 percent Black, 44 percent Hispanic; Pell or NYS TAP Receipt: 83 percent; Initial Remedial Need: 74 percent

C-Program Management Model

a. ASAP operates as a consortium made up of CUNY Academic Affairs and nine partner colleges.

b. The program is committed to use of data for evaluation and program management purposes and operates on a continuous improvement model.

III-ASAP Research and Evaluation Agenda and Program Outcomes

A. ASAP has been rigorously evaluated and found to be highly effective.

B. Key Quasi-Experimental Findings:

a. Average 3-year graduation rate of 53 percent vs. 25 percent for similar students

b. By race/ethnicity, gender and Pell status, all subgroups met or nearly met the 50 percent 3-year graduation goal; ASAP also reduced gaps in graduation rates between Hispanic and white and Black and white students

c. Six years after beginning, 64 percent of ASAP students had earned either an Associate or Baccalaureate degree (or both) vs. 43 percent of comparison group students

C. Key External Findings:

a. MDRC conducted a 5-year random assignment study of ASAP and found the program's effects are "unparalleled" with nearly double the graduation rate for similar students.

b. Henry Levin and Emma Garcia from the Teachers College conducted a comprehensive cost study of ASAP and found that despite higher upfront costs, the program is both cost effective and cost beneficial.

V-ASAP Expansion and Replication

A. ASAP will expand to 25,000 students by academic year 2018/19 with support from the City and State of New York. ASAP expansion will serve more STEM majors and includes a college-wide expansion at Bronx Community College that will serve most full-time freshmen at scale.

B. Estimated Impact on Overall CUNY Associate Degree Completion

a. ASAP now makes up 30 percent of all CUNY full-time Associate freshmen, next year will be 50 percent

b. CUNY expects that ASAP at scale will help double the overall 3-year Associate graduation from a 2013 baseline of 18 percent to 36 percent for the 2019 full-time freshmen cohort.

C. Expansion into Baccalaureate Space

a. CUNY has started to expand ASAP into the baccalaureate space. John Jay College Accelerate, Complete and Engage (ACE) modeled on ASAP is demonstrating significant improvement in degree momentum and narrowing of achievement gaps.

C-Replication Work Outside CUNY

a. ASAP is being replicated in other states. Three Ohio community colleges (Lorain, Cuyahoga, and Cincinnati State) have adopted the ASAP model. Early findings from MDRC's study of the Ohio demonstration indicate strong fidelity to the ASAP model and promising early outcomes.

b. CUNY is also supporting Skyline Community College in San Bruno, CA and Westchester Community College in Valhalla, NY (SUNY) to replicate ASAP.

VI-Recommendations for Federal Policy

A. Federal policy could be very helpful to support for community colleges to adopt evidence-based models to improve graduation rates.

B. Colleges need the resources to create comprehensive programs like ASAP that integrate rigorous evaluation and use of data.

C. I urge the Senate to consider legislation like the House's Community College Success Act that proposes a discretionary grant program to support replication of ASAP-like models.

Thank you for your support and interest in the work we are doing at CUNY.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Linderman. Dr. Brittingham, welcome.

STATEMENT OF BARBARA BRITTINGHAM, PH.D., PRESIDENT, COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, BURLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. Thank you very much.

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity. We are proud that the HELP Committee has a Member from each of our six New England States, reflecting the commitment of our communities to high-quality higher education.

The history of American higher education is in many ways a history of innovation to increase access and bring higher education closer to the economy. Recently, accreditation has embraced distance education, competency-based education, and dual enrollment programs. Now, through EQUIP, accreditors are expanding to boot camps and a wider variety of third-party providers.

Today, I want to address four matters. First, quality in distance education. Our commission has found that in evaluating the quality of distance education the following are essential—institutional capacity; institutional control over academics, admission, and support services; faculty preparation and professional development; and monitoring student progression.

Distance education is no longer new. It is time to give accreditors more flexibility in how distance education is evaluated, specifically by allowing accreditors to determine when distance education should be considered a substantive change. I would be happy to provide you with an example.

Second, quality in competency-based education, or CBE. Going forward, much of lifelong learning will focus on competencies relevant to work often provided in short-term packages. In 2015, the seven regional accreditors issued a statement on competency-based education, and based on our commission's experience with CBE, the following are key considerations for Congress in ensuring quality competency-based programs.

One, competency means competent. Students should be required to reach a level of achievement that is excellent or near excellent.

Think of nurses and airline pilots. CBE represents a higher level of promise from the college or university about the quality of its graduates. Employers must find the competencies and their assessments to be trustworthy. They must know what a graduate can reliably do.

Two, competencies must have currency through credit-hour equivalencies. Imperfect as it is, the credit-hour is currently the only quantitative proxy for how much a student has learned. Six-credit courses represent more learning than do three-credit courses. Credit-hours can ensure that a CBE Bachelor's degree is the same size as a regular Bachelor's degree, and further, students need credit-hours on their transcript so they can apply for a higher degree or transfer to another institution.

In reauthorization, Congress could helpfully support accreditors, institutions, and the Department to explore together alternative measures of academic progress that are understandable to the public and can be used for Title IV disbursement.

Third, disaggregation of the faculty roles. Recently, some CBE and direct assessment programs have significantly disaggregated the faculty role, employing individuals as roles such as subject matter expert, coach, or assessor. This is not entirely new because, for decades, we have had lab assistants, advisers, and tutors.

In 2016, our commission completed its recent standards revision. What was our standard on faculty is now teaching, learning, and scholarship, rewritten to recognize the importance of professionals who engage in these disaggregated responsibilities. The question for quality assurance with respect to disaggregated faculty roles is do the roles add up?

One, is course content based on appropriate expertise? Two, is the course design appropriate to the learning goals, the student body, and the modality of instruction? Three, are assessments reliable and valid? Four, do students get appropriate help when they need it? And five, is the academic program coherent and periodically reviewed?

For Congress, this likely means clarifying in statutory language that "regular and substantive interaction" focuses on the above five functions. The regular and substantive interaction requirement was added by Congress to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in distance education, and while the premise is sound, it is time for Congress to modernize it, recognizing the changing roles of faculty in some programs. Accreditors, through the peer review process, are best suited to ensure compliance.

Fourth, experiments for accreditors. Through provisions in the current law, the Department of Education runs experiments in the disbursement of Federal financial aid. Accreditors welcome these experiments, and we learn from them. The reauthorized Higher Education Act should provide a way that accreditors can experiment with assuring educational quality. The House bill does this.

One way is differentiated accreditation. Regional accreditors pay much extra attention to institutions that cause concern, whether that be on graduation rates, loan default rates, financial stability, or more qualitative indicators. At issue is how accreditors can ensure that successful institutions have an accreditation process where their investment is commensurate with the outcome.

Another experiment is to consider the accreditation of systems of public institutions. At least in New England, where states are small, it might make sense to experiment with accrediting a system that makes its case about how it meets the accreditation standards.

More generally, some of today's innovations were not anticipated when the Higher Education Act was last reauthorized. For quality assurance to be relevant and trustworthy, accreditors must be able to innovate in ways that are robust enough to promote our common goals of access, innovation, and quality in higher education.

Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Brittingham follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BARBARA BRITTINGHAM

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Barbara Brittingham, and I am President of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, NEASC. Our Commission accredits 225 colleges and universities in New England and 11 American-style institutions abroad. We are proud that the Senate's HELP Committee has a Member from each of our six states, reflecting the historical and current commitment of our communities to high-quality higher education.

The history of American higher education is in many ways a history of innovation. Accreditation has supported these innovations and continues to do so. Earlier, accreditors embraced land-grant institutions and community colleges that broadened access and brought education closer to employment needs. Recently, accreditation has embraced distance education, competency-based education, and dual enrollment programs for high school students that further open higher education to new populations. Now, through EQUIP, accreditors are expanding to boot camps and a wider range of third-party providers.

Today I want to address four matters:

First, quality in distance education. Our Commission has found that in evaluating the quality of distance education, institutional capacity is important; institutional control over academics, admission, and support services is key; faculty preparation and professional development are key; and monitoring student progression is essential.

Distance education is no longer new. It is time to give accreditors more flexibility in how distance education is evaluated, specifically by allowing accreditors to determine whether the addition of distance education should be subject to the substantive change review. For example, by Federal regulation, this past year our Commission was obliged to review a proposal from Yale University to offer its physician assistant program online, even though it had gone through the governance process at Yale and had been approved by the specialized accreditor. This, frankly, was a waste of Yale's time and of the time of our volunteers.

Second, quality in competency-based education or CBE. While CBE has been around for decades, there is greater interest today. And there is every reason to believe that for today's generation, lifelong learning will be necessary. Much of that additional learning will be focused around competencies relevant to work, often provided in short-term packages.

In 2015, the seven regional accreditors issued a statement on Competency-Based Education; the statement provides guidance on the evaluation of CBE. The full statement can be found here: *https://cihe.neasc.org/sites/cihe.neasc.org/files/downloads/New—on—the—Website/C—RAC—Statement—on—CBE—June—2015.pdf*

Based on our Commission's experience with CBE programs, the following are key considerations for Congress in ensuring quality competency-based programs:

1. "Competency" means "competent." Students should be required to reach a level of achievement that is excellent or near excellent. Think of nurses and airline pilots. CBE represents a higher level of promise from the college or university about the quality of its graduates. Employers must find the competencies and their assessment to be trustworthy. They must know what a graduate can reliably do.

2. Competencies must have currency through credit-hour equivalencies. Imperfect as it is, the credit hour is currently the only quantitative proxy for how much a student has learned. Six-credit courses represent more learn-

ing than do three-credit courses. Credit hours can ensure that a CBE Bachelor's degree is the same "size" as a regular Bachelor's degree. Further, students need credit hours on their transcripts so they can apply for a higher degree or transfer to another institution.

With growing interest in CBE, Congress could helpfully support a way for accreditors, institutions, and the Department of Education to explore together alternative measures of academic progress that are understandable to the public and can be used for Title IV disbursement purposes.

Third, disaggregation of the faculty roles. Recently, some CBE and direct assessment programs have significantly "disaggregated" the faculty role. They employ individuals in a range of distinct roles, e.g., subject matter expert, coach, assessor. This phenomenon is not entirely new. For decades, we've long had lab assistants, advisors, tutors, graders, and clinical faculty.

In 2016, our Commission completed its recent standards revision. What was our Standard on Faculty is now Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship. And the standard was re-written to recognize the importance in many settings of professionals who engage in these "disaggregated" responsibilities.

The question for quality assurance with disaggregated faculty roles is: Do the roles add up?

(1) Is course content based on appropriate expertise;
(2) Is course design appropriate to the learning goals, the student body, and the modality of instruction;
(3) Are assessments reliable and valid;
(4) Do students get appropriate help when they need it;
(5) Is the academic program coherent and is it periodically reviewed.

For Congress, this likely means clarifying in statutory language that "regular and substantive interaction" focuses on the above five functions that faculty provide. The "regular and substantive interaction" requirement was added by Congress to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in distance education. The premise is a sound one, but it is time for Congress to modernize it, recognizing the changing roles of faculty in some programs. Accreditors, through the peer review process, are best suited to ensure compliance.

Fourth, experiments for accreditors. Through provisions in the current Higher Education Act, the Department of Education runs "experiments" in the disbursement of Federal financial aid. Accreditors welcome these experiments and we learn from them.

The re-authorized higher education act should provide a way that accreditors can experiment with assuring educational quality. The House bill does this.

One way is differentiated accreditation. Regional accreditors have a good track record of paying extra attention to institutions that cause concern, whether that be in graduation rates, loan default rates, financial stability, or more qualitative matters. At issue is how accreditors can ensure that stable, successful institutions have an accreditation process where their investment is commensurate with the outcome. Our Commission wants to make sure that no institution has a "free pass," but we would like more flexibility to tailor the comprehensive evaluation for institutions that do not hit triggers related to financial stability, state or Federal investigations, graduation rates, and/or loan repayment rates.

Another possible experiment is to consider the accreditation of systems of public institutions. At least in New England, where states are small, it might make sense to experiment with accrediting a system that makes its case about how it meets the accreditation standards.

More generally, the innovations that accreditors face today were not anticipated when the Higher Education Act was last authorized in 2008. And who can reliably predict the innovations in higher education that accreditors will face over the next five to 10 years? For quality assurance to be robust and relevant, accreditors must be able to innovate in ways that are flexible and robust.

Provision in the Higher Education Act for trusted accreditors to experiment can promote our common goals of access, innovation, and quality higher education.

Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

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[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF BARBARA BRITTINGHAM]

Pertinent to this hearing, regional accreditors deal with four matters related to access and innovation.

First, quality in distance education. Our Commission has found that in evaluating the quality of distance education, institutional capacity is important; institutional

control over academics, admission, and support services is key; faculty preparation and professional development are key; and monitoring student progression is essential. Distance education is no longer new. It is time to give accreditors more flexibility in how distance education is evaluated, specifically by allowing accreditors to determine whether the addition of distance education should be subject to the substantive change review. My full testimony includes an example.

Second, quality in competency-based education or CBE. In 2015, regional accreditors issued a statement on Competency-Based Education; the full statement can be found at c-rac.org Based on our Commission's experience with CBE programs, the following are key quality considerations for CBE: (1) "Competency" means "competent." Students should be required to reach a level of achievement that is excellent or near excellent. CBE is a higher promise of achievement—especially as relevant to employers—than is traditional higher education. (2) Competencies must have currency through credit-hour equivalencies. Students need credit hours on their transcripts so they can transfer to another institution or seek a higher degree.

Third, disaggregation of the faculty roles. Recently, some CBE programs have significantly "disaggregated" the faculty role to employ, e.g., subject matter experts, coaches, assessors. The question for quality assurance is: Do the roles add up? (1) Is course content based on appropriate expertise; (2) Is course design appropriate to the learning goals, the student body, and the modality of instruction; (3) Are assessments reliable and valid; (4) Do students get appropriate help when they need it; (5) Is the academic program coherent and periodically reviewed. For Congress, this likely means clarifying in statutory language that "regular and substantive interaction" focuses on the above five functions that faculty traditionally provide.

Fourth, experiments for accreditors. The re-authorized Higher Education Act should provide a way that accreditors can experiment with assuring educational quality. The House bill does this.

One way is differentiated accreditation. Accreditors have multiple ways to follow-up on institutions at risk. At issue is how accreditors can ensure that stable, successful institutions have an accreditation process where their investment is commensurate with the outcome.

Another possible experiment is to consider the accreditation of systems of public institutions. At least in New England, where states are small, it might make sense to experiment with accrediting a system that makes its case about how it meets the accreditation standards. The opportunity for trusted accreditors to experiment can promote our common goals of access, innovation, and quality higher education.

More generally, the innovations that accreditors face today were not anticipated when the Higher Education Act was last authorized in 2008. And who can reliably predict the innovations in higher education that accreditors will face over the next five to 10 years? For quality assurance to be robust and relevant, accreditors must be able to innovate in ways that are flexible and robust.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Brittingham.
Dr. Bushway, welcome.

STATEMENT OF DEBORAH BUSHWAY, PH.D., INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION CONSULTANT , AND PROVOST, NORTHWESTERN HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON, MINNESOTA

Dr. BUSHWAY. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to testify about competency-based education, or CBE.

Today, I hope to represent the thoughts of a larger community of educators who, along with me, believe that if we, as a Nation, are to expand prosperity and remain globally competitive, we must provide educational opportunities that lead to more equitable outcomes for our increasingly diverse population of students.

While CBE is not the solution for every student, we remain passionately hopeful that CBE is one essential part of the solution.

And we believe that now is the time for critical and careful decisions.

While CBE is not new, there has been a sharp increase in the number of institutions developing and offering CBE programs in the last 5 years. Why are we seeing this rise in interest? An introduction to one student, Jennifer, who the Chairman apparently has met, according to his introductory remarks, might help us understand.

Jennifer in my story is a nurse in her early thirties. After graduating from high school, Jennifer completed her LPN at a local community college. She loves her work at the local hospital, but new ownership is requiring that all nurses have a 4-year degree. She has attended many hours of continuing education, but none of these courses were based in the fundamental currency of the U.S. higher education system, the credit-hour. Thus, none of this work gives her any momentum toward a Bachelor's degree.

Indeed, many of higher education's structures and experiences were originally designed not for Jennifer, but for primarily first-time, full-time, 18-to 22-year-old students who are neither parents nor supporting themselves. Jennifer's situation is not unique. It has become the norm.

A CBE program allows Jennifer to move quickly through the parts of her degree program that she has already mastered and to slow down to focus on those critical areas where she needs either to gain new knowledge or brush up on old learning. Her academic program is intentionally designed with a focus on outcomes to support Jennifer in achieving the learning and the credential she needs for career advancement, deepened engagement in her community, and socioeconomic mobility.

To understand how CBE programs provide these solutions, it is important to understand what we mean by "competency." A well-defined competency integrates—it articulates knowledge, skills, and ability and mandates the integration of theory and practice in the demonstration of mastery. Thus, in CBE, the time it takes to demonstrate competency and the sources from which students can learn may vary, but expectations about learning are held constant.

Students progress toward their credentials, often at a personalized pace, based on their ability to demonstrate mastery of the defined competencies in an integrated curriculum. CBE can be less expensive for both students and taxpayers because it disaggregates courses into competencies demonstrated, and this modularization allows for more efficiency and precision as well as personalization.

Without question, competency-based education also presents challenges. In my written testimony, I have offered more detail, but there are two large areas that emerge from the field. One, there is no shared definition of competency-based education. Currently, no definition of CBE exists in Federal law or regulation. This contributes to many regulatory challenges and inhibits responsible innovation.

One particular caution. CBE is sometimes conflated with distance education, but there are important distinctions, and failure to understand this can lead to risky and damaging policy changes.

Second, confusion exists over the best ways to integrate CBE programs into Federal financial aid. The assumption of the credit-hour

as currency in higher education is prevalent across all financial aid regulation, and this challenges institutions faced with awarding aid.

What can Congress do? First, we can—we ask that you create a definition for CBE. Congress should define CBE in the HEA in a way that correctly emphasizes its focus on learning outcomes and differentiates it both from distance education and correspondence courses.

Second, authorize a CBE demonstration project to responsibly test out meaningful changes on a pilot scale before deploying them more broadly. A carefully designed and evaluated pilot could be created under the structure of the demonstration project and could allow us to learn how students and institutions would behave in an actual program with additional freedoms, thus identifying which guardrails are needed in future policy to protect both students and taxpayers.

In summary, responsible innovation in our higher education system is vital for this country. CBE programs are an essential part of this needed solution. Additional innovation is needed to fulfill the promise of CBE, and yet there is reason to proceed with caution in order to maintain quality and protect against fraud and abuse when developing policy to support these innovations. Balancing innovation and caution is difficult, but students such as Jennifer deserve our solutions.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing me this time, and I look forward to the rest of the conversation.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Bushway follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEBORAH BUSHWAY

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to testify about competency-based education (CBE). I have been an advocate of CBE since the early 1990's, when I worked as a faculty at a State university in Minnesota that had been founded as a "university without walls" in the late 1970's and was rooted in a competency model. I have been delighted to be able to apply that experience to the growth of a newer wave of CBE programs in my roles at various institutions, and through my participation in the Competency-Based Education Network. Today, I hope to represent the thoughts of a larger community of educators who, along with me, believe that competency-based education is an essential component in the effort to increase the percentage of our Nation's population who possess high-quality, post-secondary credentials of value. We believe that this increase in efficient, effective and high-quality post-secondary education is essential for individual and community prosperity, as well as critical to our Nation's ability to remain globally competitive.

If our country is to have a vibrant middle class in the future, we must innovate to provide high-quality post-secondary opportunities that lead to credentials of value, and to advance more equitable outcomes for our increasingly diverse population of learners. As a Nation, we must commit ourselves to developing all of our talent. This is the only sure path to becoming a country capable of solving its problems and leading on the global stage. We are urgently aware that our country must expand on the design and delivery of high-quality postsecondary opportunities that better meet the needs of today's learners and employers, and that it must do so in affordable and efficient ways. We remain passionately hopeful that CBE is one essential part of the solution, and we believe that now is the time for critical—and careful—decisions.

Current Context & Future Possibilities

While CBE is not new, there has been a sharp increase in the number of institutions developing and offering CBE programs during the past 5 years. In fact, a field scan conducted in 2015 by Public Agenda and the Competency-Based Education

Network found that upwards of 600 institutions of higher education were in the process of developing, launching or scaling CBE programs. (*https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/10/amid-competency-based-education-boom-meeting-help-colleges-do-it-right*)

Why this rise in interest? A look at the learners, Jennifer and Samuel, help provide the range of answers to this question.

Jennifer is a nurse in her early 30's. After graduating from high school, Jennifer completed her LPN degree at a local community college. She loves her work in the local hospital and plays an important role in her community. Her hospital has joined a larger system, and this system is requiring all nurses to have a 4-year degree. At this point, Jennifer began to look for options that would allow her to earn the BSN while working and caring for her son. She also hoped to broaden her education to prepare herself for possible leadership roles in the future. In the years of working as a nurse, she had attended many hours of continuing education, but none of these courses were based in the fundamental currency of the US higher education system—credit hours. Thus, none of this work gave her any momentum toward the Bachelor's degree. She realized that there were areas in which she would benefit from traditional classes, but the idea of sitting through hours of lectures about nursing skills that she used on a daily basis was discouraging, at best.

Samuel is a young man who graduated from high school last year. He attended four different schools during his high school career, and his academic strengths are varied. He aspires to complete college, but is worried that he won't qualify for college-level courses due to his uneven academic performance. Current assessment and placement systems for college entry are relatively blunt instruments that will likely place him in developmental or remedial courses which could discourage him as well as cost him time and money.

Our traditional models of higher education, due to the ways they are structured from entry to completion, present significant barriers to each of these individuals. Many of higher education's structures and experiences were originally designed primarily for first-time, full-time 18-22 year old students who were not parents or supporting themselves. This student profile fits only a minority of students currently enrolled in our colleges and universities, and these structures and experiences designed for this minority do not address the diverse needs of our current student population. While this model may still work well for students who fit that profile, it presents the following challenges for others:

- Doesn't address the knowledge, skills and abilities previously gained by many students, such as Jennifer above
- Too often fails to provide a coherent educational experience that connects life, learning and work
- Sometimes neglects to provide personalized support for students and specialized support for different types of learners, leaving many students on their own to navigate a confusing maze
- Contributes to wasting time and money for students, as well as taxpayer dollars, by providing a cookie-cutter experience for the diverse range of today's students, such as Samuel above
- Remains disconnected from the issues that matter most for our economy and nation: labor market and civic engagement outcomes for graduates

CBE as a Solution

A CBE program allows Jennifer to move quickly through the parts of her degree program that she's already mastered AND slow down to focus on those critical areas where she needs to either get new knowledge or brush up on old learning. All of her educational experiences, from the curriculum to the design and support from facultymembers and coaches, and through use of technology, are designed to efficiently and effectively allow Jennifer to achieve the learning and credential she needs for career advancement, deepened engagement in her community and socioeconomic mobility.

A CBE program could also support Samuel by modularizing the academic content necessary for his successful progression toward and completion of his post-secondary credential. Crisply defined competencies offer a more precise replacement for the blunt instrument of the "course" that is currently used to define readiness and allow access to higher education.

How might CBE programs provide these important solutions? Let's start by creating a shared sense of what CBE programs look like.

The Competency-Based Education Network, or C-BEN, is an organization with 86 members, (including 66 higher education institutions with over 100 campuses, 4 corporations, 8 individuals, 8 K-12 Institutions, Associations or Other Non-Profit Orga-

nizations, Government Entities, and Non-U.S. Institutions of Higher Learning) who are active with CBE program development. C-BEN defines CBE as follows:

Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.

Understanding of what constitutes a competency is pivotal to understanding CBE. A well-defined competency articulates required knowledge, skills and abilities, and balances theory and application in a demonstration of mastery. It is essential to emphasize that both knowledge and the ability to apply it are required for a full demonstration of competency. Many times, competency is misunderstood as simply the demonstration of a disembodied skill. High-quality CBE programs recognize that the ability to generalize learning and succeed in our knowledge economy requires the mastery of underlying theory as well as the ability to perform the requisite skill—not simply the stand-along skill.

CBE has several distinguishing features designed to meet the needs of our Nation's 21st-century students:

- Intentional backward design. In CBE programs, the educational journey is designed with the end in mind and the student at the center. Faculty begin by answering the question: "What ought a graduate of this program know and be able to do?" From this starting point, teams of faculty members, employers and instructional designers develop a set of clearly specified competencies that illustrate what the learner must know and be able to do in order to progress in and complete a credential. These competencies are integrated and scaffolded so that the integrity (or gestalt) of the academic credential is maintained.
- Outcomes emphasis. Competency-based education is an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on the competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) that students must master rather than the amount of time they have spent in class (as measured by credit hours). This allows students with some existing knowledge or skill to spend their time on new content rather than reviewing already mastered material.
- Agnostic regarding learning source. Because well-defined competencies mandate the integration of knowledge (theory) and practice (application), CBE programs can be agnostic as to the source of students' learning. A student may have learned the practice or application component of a competency in a work setting and the theoretical component in a traditional classroom, but what matters is the student's ability to knit this together and demonstrate the competency as required by the credential being earned. The institution enrolling the student and offering the credential must provide the student with proactive, relevant, and substantive educational support that leads to this demonstrated learning. This is very important to our student Jennifer.
- Rigorous requirements. Many people wrongly assume that CBE programs are easier or shorter, but in reality a high-quality CBE program offers a very rigorous instructional model in which students must demonstrate acquisition of all the competency sets required to master a program of study. In fact, for some students, CBE programs will take longer to complete than traditionally structured programs—but a high-quality CBE program will guarantee the learning outcomes—competencies—of the students, unlike most traditional programs.
- *Students at the center*. In CBE programs, the student educational journey becomes a primary organizing principle. Rather than enrolling in a series of courses taught by individual faculty members, the CBE student is engaged in a carefully designed set of learning experiences and assessments built to allow the student to demonstrate the required competencies when she or he is ready to do so.
- Modularization. Rather than relying on the traditional method of clustering chunks of learning into a "course," CBE disaggregates courses based on competencies demonstrated as a result of learning. Each competency is clearly articulated, and demonstration of each competency is assessed and transcribed. Modularization not only allows for more trans-

parency, it also supports stacking of competencies into diverse credentials.

- Personalization. Such modularization allows for more precision and personalization in developing the student learning journey. For each student—from Jennifer to Samuel in our introductory examples—the path to a credential can be customized by acknowledging where competencies already exist and "prescribing" additional learning where competency is absent or incomplete.
- Transparency. Student learning outcomes (competencies) are clearly articulated and transparently transcribed so that students, employers, and the public can all know what any given credential means. This is much more meaningful than the traditional "grade" offered for a course.

In high quality CBE programs, these features are interwoven to produce value for the students in unique ways, including increased transparency of learning outcomes, potential lower costs of both tuition and time for some students, and the ability to personalize each student's learning pathway with increased precision and intentionality.

Current Barriers to CBE

Without question, competency-based education presents new challenges with which policymakers must contend. First and foremost among these is the question of what students are paying for in an educational offering.

In quality CBE programs, students are paying for an intentionally conceptualized, designed and delivered educational experience with learning outcomes at the forefront. These programs may be agnostic as to the source of learning (for example, it could come from an instructor, an interactive technology or open educational resources), yet they are dedicated to clear, rigorous and demonstrated learning outcomes for students and provide full support along the way. Rather than simply being propelled through a program, CBE students in a high-quality program have demonstrated mastery of the skills required to comprise a degree. Graduates are able to prove their knowledge and to succeed in the workforce; employers have faith in the graduates' skills; and policymakers are confident that their investment has supported high-quality programs at which clear, rigorous, and demonstrated learning outcomes take precedence above all else.

In such programs, innovative learning models are emerging, with new approaches creating opportunities for personalized, relevant, responsive and substantive support for learning that involves faculty, peers, employers and others.

We must acknowledge that not all programs that claim to be CBE live up to this potential, and there is reason to proceed with caution when developing policy to support CBE in order to avoid the creation of new, lower quality higher education programs that could be harmful rather than helpful to students. The emergence of poor-quality competency-based education programs would threaten the reputation and promise of CBE, while putting both students and the integrity of taxpayer dollars at risk. For that reason, it is critical that the higher education field—and CBE providers in particular—move from primarily relying on inputs and proxies for learning to instead supporting the provision of high-quality educational opportunities for students that lead to demonstrated competencies. Importantly, in any expansion of Federal student aid dollars to more programs and providers, the Federal Government should mandate that CBE providers meet minimum benchmarks for student outcomes and withhold taxpayer dollars from low-quality programs.

One specific form of CBE program is called "Direct Assessment". This term comes directly from the HEA (*https://ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN1310.html;* 34 CFR 668.10). In Direct Assessment programs, the student is awarded financial aid based on demonstration of competency rather than accumulation of credits. Since the approval process is appropriately rigorous, there are only a handful of institutions with approved direct assessment programs. These programs continue to create crosswalks between the competencies being earned and credit hours. These crosswalks support students' needs for transfer options, employer reimbursement and application to graduate schools.

Existing high-quality providers of competency-based education providers recognize the importance of preserving the integrity of the academic credentials being earned. To that end, they have sought to provide assurances of the quality of their programs and ensure continuous improvement. However, some barriers to the expansion of high-quality CBE programs make further reform challenging. In recent discussions with many of the institutions that offer CBE programs, the following were some of the most significant barriers to fulfilling the promise of competency-based education:

(1) There is no shared definition of competency-based education programs. Currently, no definition of competency-based education exists in Federal law or regulation. This absence generates confusion over what competency-based education is, and what it is not. Substantial differences exist even within competency-based education programs (for instance, direct assessment programs function differently from course-based programs), and this confusion only furthers misconceptions of competency-based education programs. Some wrongly assume that CBE programs simply certify prior knowledge, which in actuality represents its own sub-field of prior learning assessment. This confusion contributes to challenges with financing students' tuition, transferring student credit, and ensuring accreditors are able to review and approve satisfactory programs in a timely manner.

(2) Confusion exists over the best ways to integrate CBE programs into Federal financial aid. Competency-based education programs do not necessarily cleanly operate within the framework created for traditionally structured programs. They may face challenges in appropriately assessing student progress against a standardized benchmark of a term, given the self-paced nature of the programs. Whereas faculty and administrators at most colleges understand what a credit hour is, CBE providers lack a similar shared definition of a competency that can be used to accurately calculate a student's Federal student aid. The assumption of credit hour as currency in higher education challenges programs to calculate satisfactory academic progress and award aid in CBE programs. As a more specific example, students want to enroll in both direct assessment and credit bearing CBE programs concurrently, and this is prohibited under current regulations. There are additional important questions regarding the definition of the academic calendar and weeks of instructional time as well as issues with modular programs. The issues surrounding a requirement of regular and substantive interaction with faculty are knotty but critical to address. Each of these challenges requires careful and thoughtful consideration of how best to treat them within the context of Federal student aid, and demands testing of the most promising solutions that will work both within the multitude of CBE frameworks that exist and in the broader scope of other higher education offerings.

The Path Forward for Responsible Innovation

Defining a workable path forward is admittedly a challenging prospect. As we seek to support innovation in the higher education space that includes adequate guardrails to protect students and taxpayers, we must approach our work with a blend of caution and openness.

Today's students of higher education are a very diverse set of people, inclusive of all classes, races, developmental stages of life, ages and abilities, and we have to challenge ourselves to create a range of higher education solutions that can support all of these types of students toward their goals. We must ask ourselves what our overall goals are for our higher education systems. In our current global environment, do we believe that learning only occurs in a formal setting? What should we do about learning that occurs outside of our institutions? Our current financial aid system is rooted in the assumption that students pay tuition to be given opportunities to acquire new knowledge. What if we also supported systems that validated learning that has occurred in other settings, such as the military or the workplace?

Competency-based education offers a way to respect learning wherever it occurs while still insisting on demonstration of integration and synthesis of essential knowledge, thus maintaining the integrity of the earned credential. CBE does not give "credit" for experience. It is always focused on progress toward demonstration of robust competencies—each consisting of knowledge, skills and abilities. CBE also does not give "credit" for independent bits of learning, but rather CBE programs create an integrated learning experience which has its own form or Gestalt, and in which existing learning can be leveraged as appropriate.

CBE can be delivered in a variety of ways: online, face-to-face or in a hybrid model. CBE is sometimes conflated with distance education, but there are important distinctions, including the program design, the intentional use of student support and the transparency of the learning outcomes. In fact, conflating distance education and CBE can lead to risky and damaging policy changes.

What Congress Can Do

- Create a definition for CBE. CBE must be defined within the HEA, and new expectations must be set for the CBE category to differentiate it from correspondence courses and distance education, and to address the concern that students might be "left to learn on their own." These expectations should be focused on outcomes. They can be rooted in C-BEN's new Quality Framework and

inclusive of new capabilities to personalize the learning pathway for students. This definition should not be conflated or confused with delivery modalities, including distance education.

- Authorize a CBE demonstration project to responsibly test out broader changes. While no one wishes we were ready to move away from a time-based measure of learning more than I, I also recognize that we're not ready to just throw out the credit hour. While the credit hour is an undeniably flawed measure, we don't yet have a replacement. Removing the tie back to credit hour without careful work can harm students, leaving them stuck without ability to transfer or apply for advanced degrees. There are a number of regulatory and statutory provisions that are tied to time that are worth exploring in a demonstration project. A carefully designed—and evaluated—pilot could be created under the structure of a demonstration project and could allow us to learn how students and institutions behave in an actual program, thus identifying which guardrails are needed to protect students and taxpayers. Even good ideas can easily turn harmful when Federal financial aid dollars are available without a clear sense of how new regulatory flexibilities could be abused—and how they can and should be guarded against.

In this approach, C-BEN's newly released Quality Framework should be used to both inform the definition of CBE and to provide guidelines regarding which programs meet this new definition and thus can be included in the demonstration project. Through this effort, new expectations can be defined and tested to provide support for learning and differentiate CBE from correspondence education. This project, with well-defined guardrails to both protect students as consumers and guard against fraudulent use of Federal tax dollars, could also support the creation of shared competencies and explore ways to safely wean our systems away from complete reliance on the credit hour as the sole currency for higher education in our Nation.

Once a program meets the criteria of a CBE program according to the new definition, the Department of Education could launch a full-throated pilot project to find the best ways forward and make specific recommendations to Congress. This would allow for responsible innovation and reconsideration of current requirements such as regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty, weekly academic engagement, academic year definitions and existing satisfactory academic progress definitions. Since these CBE programs would be held to a higher bar for approval—and that higher bar would include personalized, relevant and substantive support for learning—the requirement for "regular and substantive interaction with the instructor" could be tested. CBE programs would be free to leverage educational technologies, instructional design and learning sciences applications to provide support for learning outcomes without being restricted to narrow, outdated, and input-driven definitions.

Conclusion

In summary, CBE can serve as a vital part of the solution to the challenges facing our Nation's higher education system. CBE programs will not meet the needs of every student, but they do offer a useful pathway to a post-secondary credential for some students. A growing number of institutions offer CBE programs, and the field has taken steps to define quality in this space. A well designed demonstration project could allow the next phase of innovation to occur with the protection of important guardrails. Within the context of this space for responsible innovation, new solutions could be developed and tested, supporting future, more permanent policy changes.

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[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF DEBORAH BUSHWAY]

Today, I endeavor to represent a community of educators who, like me, believe that competency-based education (CBE) is an essential component of our Nation's collective effort to increase the percentage of our population who possess post-secondary credentials of practical and personal value. If we are to maintain a vibrant middle class, we must provide educational opportunities that lead to more equitable outcomes for our increasingly diverse population of learners, in affordable and efficient ways. Now is the time for critical and careful decision making about the way forward.

CBE is an approach to teaching and learning that focuses on the competencies (knowledge, skills and abilities) that students must master rather than the amount of time they have spent in class (as measured by credit hours). There is a mis-

conception that CBE competencies are simply the demonstration of a disembodied skill, but high-quality CBE programs recognize that the ability to generalize learning and succeed in the global knowledge economy requires the mastery of underlying theory as well as the ability to perform the requisite skill. Both are needed, so CBE values both.

In CBE, the time it takes to demonstrate competencies and the sources from which students can learn may vary, but expectations about learning are held constant. All students earn their credentials by demonstrating mastery in multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace. Some people wrongly assume that CBE programs are easier or shorter than traditional programs, but in reality, a high-quality CBE program is quite rigorous, as students must demonstrate acquisition of all the competency sets required to master a program of study. Still, CBE is quite often less expensive for both students and taxpayers than traditional programs because it disaggregates courses based on the competencies demonstrated, rather than relying on the traditional method of clustering chunks of learning into a "course." Such modularization allows for more efficiency and precision, as well as personalization.

More work is needed to standardize the definition of CBE across the post-secondary education field and regulatory bodies. I submit that Congress should define CBE within the HEA in a way that correctly emphasizes its focus on learning outcomes and that differentiates it from both distance education and correspondence courses. I further suggest that Congress authorize a CBE demonstration project to responsibly test innovative changes on a pilot scale before deploying them more broadly. These changes would include methods for moving away from the credit hour as the fundamental currency of U.S. higher education as well as new ways of delivering Federal financial aid to students enrolled in CBE programs. Importantly, in any expansion of Federal student aid dollars to more programs and providers, the Federal Government should mandate that CBE providers meet minimum benchmarks for student outcomes and withhold taxpayer dollars from low-quality programs.

Defining a workable path forward is admittedly a challenging prospect. But until we commit to embracing innovations like CBE, we will remain—and only grow increasingly—disconnected from the issues that matter most for our economy and our Nation: beneficial labor market and civic engagement outcomes for graduates.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Bushway.
Mr. Larsson.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL LARSSON, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, MATCH BEYOND, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Mr. LARSSON. Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with you.

I strongly believe that thoughtful innovation in higher education, paired with the right support services, can significantly increase the number of traditionally underserved students who earn college degrees. Such innovation should be accompanied by public transparency around rigorous outcomes.

I am cofounder and president of a nonprofit that currently serves 200 students in Greater Boston called Match Beyond. Our mission is to help students earn college degrees and the jobs that they gain access to when they earn those degrees. The average age of our students is 24. They are graduates from more than 80 high schools. Almost all are working at least full-time. Most have previously attended college.

We help students in two ways. We provide intensive, highly personalized, professional coaching from enrollment through graduation and into and during a job. And we provide support services that help students focus on school. These include a quiet, accessible workspace open long hours 7 days a week; daily lunch and dinner;

computer and Wi-Fi access; and daycare or transportation help when needed.

All of our students are enrolled in the nonprofit NEASC-accredited Southern New Hampshire University. SNHU has a unique competency-based direct assessment online degree program called College for America, built specifically with working adults in mind. It is rigorous. The curriculum is intentionally designed. Students learn. And importantly, the competency-based online delivery model allows for a flexibility and affordability that breaks down real barriers to student success.

The narrative often told that anyone who is smart enough and works hard enough can earn a college degree is wrong. Many people who have what it takes academically to earn a degree are not earning degrees because the circumstances of their lives and the rigidity of the college schedule makes it impossible, no matter how hard they work. It is unfair to suggest that the millions of underserved young adults in this country can put school ahead of job.

I want to tell you about Tina. Tina today is on our staff as a coach. Up until recently, she was also a student. Tina grew up in Boston and finished in the top 10 percent of her high school class and was accepted to one of Boston's most exclusive private universities. It was her dream school.

She earned a partial scholarship. At the end of freshman year, she ran out of money and could not reenroll. She assumed she would make it back to college someday but was now 19 and had to jump into the workforce, working primarily in the youth services field. At each job she held, she hit a ceiling. Advancement was only available to those with degrees.

While working, she was also enrolled in community college. But her work and life responsibilities did not fit into the rigid college schedule. So she was only able to enroll in one or two classes per semester and, at that pace, was years away from earning an Associate's degree. Tina was stuck.

Tina's story is not unique. The Georgetown Center for Workforce and Education recently reported that 500,000 students who finish in the top half of their high school class will not earn any sort of degree or credential. That is a half a million students every single year.

We believe these students and the broader population of 6.5 million students who are currently enrolled part-time in college will benefit greatly from thoughtful innovation. Back to Tina.

She found us in July 2015, took full advantage of both the flexibility and supports that this new pathway offered. She earned credits 12 months a year. She worked closely with a coach who kept her on track. This May, she will be crossing the stage at Southern New Hampshire University to receive her Bachelor's degree diploma. She will do so without accumulating any additional debt and in under 3 years. She is one of 70 students who we have worked with who have earned their AA or BA degree from SNHU so far.

I firmly believe that innovation, particularly focused on providing college access and supports to the millions of hard-working, but underserved students, will increase college graduation rates. We believe that the work we do at Match Beyond and the partnership we

have with Southern New Hampshire University is a very early, but promising sign of that.

In my written testimony, I have submitted concrete policy ideas that may help improve the opportunities that underserved students have to access and earn college degrees. As you consider reauthorizing the Higher Education Act, I do ask that you keep in mind these four principles that I find to be especially important.

First, innovation is desperately needed in higher education from both existing higher education providers, institutions, and new providers.

Second, by lowering the cost of education delivery through technology and innovation, colleges should use the savings to provide the support services students need.

Third, innovation must be done thoughtfully. Outcomes must be tracked and evaluated. Students, as consumers, should be protected.

Fourth, the focus on consumer protection should not just be on innovative models but should extend to the existing system. Outcome data should be clear and readily available to students. Colleges that overwhelmingly do not serve students well should be held accountable by the Federal Government, states, and accreditors.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murray, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts today and the experience of the students I work with. I am excited to hear that you are taking up this important issue.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Larsson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MIKE LARSSON

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Committee Members, thank you for this opportunity to share my experience in higher education with the Committee on Health, Education, Pensions, and Labor (HELP). My testimony today comes from what I have learned founding and running a non-profit based in Boston called Match Beyond.

Based on this work, I believe that careful policy and regulation can increase dramatically the rate at which traditionally underserved students can access and succeed in affordable, high-quality colleges that prepare them for middle class jobs.

I. Overview of Match Beyond

Three years ago, I helped launch a non-profit called Match Beyond where I am currently President. Our mission is to help students from low-income households earn quality college degrees at affordable prices and to leverage those degrees into career-track, middle class jobs.

A. Student Demographics: Serving Students who are Unable to Access the Traditional College System.

We currently serve 200 working adults from Greater Boston. We will grow to serve 600 hundred students in Boston over the next few years, and we are working with non-profits across the US to replicate our model. Our students' demographics are as follows:

- Our students have graduated from approximately 80 high schools in Greater Boston, mainly large public district high schools.

- The average age of our students is 24. We serve students who range in age from 18 to 55.

- 77 percent our students have previously enrolled in at least one college.

- 85 percent of our students work a full-time job while working toward a degree with us.

- Our students are 50 percent Black/African American, 30 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 9 percent white.

- Our students come to us partly from word of mouth and partly via referrals from mission-aligned community partners, including YearUp and uAspire, that also work with students who lack affordable, quality college options.

The Greater Boston area is home to 50,000—60,000 adults who graduated from low-income high schools in the last 10 years and who—like our initial student body—have a high school degree but no college degree. Often these students are academically prepared to succeed in college but stop out of college or never go because it is too expensive or not designed to fit their ongoing lives and careers.

Nationally, the picture is similar. A recent Georgetown Center on Education and Workforce study reported that each year approximately 500,000 students finish at the top-half of their high school class but never go on to earn a college degree. The study reports that 47 percent of these students are low-income.

B. Place-based and Relationship-based Services: Our Intensive 1-on–1 Coaching Model

Match Beyond provides students with four categories of wrap-around services and support.

- **Enrollment Coaching.** We provide personalized coaching to prospective students. We counsel them in full transparency on the nature of our model and seek, in true partnership with them, to determine if our model is right for them. We are our students' ally from the moment we meet them. A particularly technical and vitally important part of our enrollment coaching involves guiding our students through the financial aid process and helping them construct an overall financial plan for college.

- **College Coaching.** All students enrolled in our program receive a full-time, professional coach who helps guide them through their academic experience. In their multi-year relationship with our students, our academic coaches act mainly as a personal academic trainer who offers enthusiasm, thought partnership, time management advice, and general problem-solving advice every step of the way. Our coaches nudge our students constantly, check up on them, and hold them accountable to plans and goals. Over time, our coaches form deep and knowing bonds with our students and, when times get hard, serve as critical advisors and friends to our students as they manage competing demands of their families, jobs, and studies.

- **Location-based Support Services and Access Supports.** In addition to pairing our students with coaches, we also provide them certain crucial location-based services. In particular, we operate a safe, professional, quiet campus in downtown Boston. It is accessible easily by public transportation and open until 10pm and on weekends. At this site, we offer our students free Wi-Fi, free computers, free lunches and dinners, parking and transporting vouchers, and free childcare on weekends. Many of our students take advantage of this space as a location to study, to socialize with other students in what is otherwise a purely online course of study, and to meet with their coaches. For students who cannot access our downtown location, we schedule drop-in hours at cafes and public libraries in various neighborhoods of Greater Boston.

- **Jobs and Career Coaching. All of our students have access to career coaches.** These dedicated coaches work with our students from the moment they enroll to graduation. They help our students access jobs all along the career ladder. Our coaches help our students evaluate potential employers and careers. And in highly practical ways, they help our students with resume preparation, interviewing skills, and networking. They also continue to coach students while they are on the job.

We consider coaching to be our core competency. It is the most essential component of our work. Earning a college degree requires sustained work and self-discipline and benefits from coaching—from an authentic relationship with a person who can be helpful to you, who cares about you, and who can keep you accountable.

C. Academics and Course of Study: Our Partnership with Southern New Hampshire University

Our academic model relies on a close partnership with Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). SNHU is a non-profit, NEASC-accredited university. Our stu-

dents enroll specifically in a program at SNHU called College for America (CfA), which is an online, competency-based, project-based, and direct assessment program that awards Associate (AA) and Bachelors (BA) degrees.

We are excited that our students have access to SNHU's CfA program for the following reasons:

- **Relevant to Work and Reputable.** CfA offers AA and BA degrees in general management, communications, and healthcare. For our students, these degrees are well-designed to prepare them for a wide set of quality jobs in Greater Boston. Employers in Greater Boston trust the SNHU brand.

- **Rigorous Academically.** CfA's academic standards are demanding. The competency-based standards from which assignments and assessments on CfA are derived are rigorous and on par, in our view, with any campus-based offering.

- **Flexible and Self-paced.** When enrolled in CfA, students generally work at their own pace and on their own schedule. The CfA learning experience is designed around a ladder of multi-faceted projects. When students submit a project, they received detailed feedback within 48 hours and clear guidance on how to resubmit a project if it did not meet standards. Students are allowed to resubmit projects as many times as needed to meet CfA's competency-based standards. This means that our students can take individual paths and lengths of time to make progress, but they are held to a common, high academic bar.

- **Affordable.** The total cost to our students is $3,000 per semester. SNHU shares part of that revenue with Match Beyond to help fund our wrap-around, in-person student services. In our model, payment is structured as an all-you-can-learn model, which allows students, in any given semester, to complete as many projects and earn as much mastery as they wish. This allows students to control the overall cost and time to completion for their course of study.

D. Our Results and Goals

Our goal over the next decade is twofold. First, we want 70 percent of our students to compete their degree on time, which we define as 3 years for an AA degree and 5 years for a BA degree. Second, we want our students, upon graduation, to qualify for middle class jobs, salaries, and careers.

To date and after 2 years of work, of 256 students who have enrolled in our AA degree program, 72 percent are on track to finish, or have already finished, their AA degree. That data point is promising, in our view. We do not yet have reliable data on the rate at which our students finish the BA degree or at the rate at which they qualify for jobs that meet our salary standards.

II. Learnings in Practice from Match Beyond

From our work over the past few years at Match Beyond, I can share the following four insights from the field and as a practitioner:

- **Coaching and Relationships Marry Well with Quality Online CBE programs and Are Essential to Success.** Competency-based education ("CBE") designs create clear ladders of success and clear goals for students, and data are constantly available on student progress. As a result, coaching can be unusually effective in CBE settings since coaches have rich, constant data on student goals, student progress, and student productivity. The student data that come with CBE designs allow for highly targeted coaching and interventions.

- **Flexibility Matters to Students and College Should Come to Them.** In CBE models like CfA, students are no longer being asked to make the choice between work or family obligations and their studies. This tradeoff vanishes in CBE designs because they largely allow students to set their own pace and time of study. For example, if a student enrolled in SNHU's CfA program is suddenly offered an extra shift at work, she can adjust her study schedule. Similarly, if a student needs an extended break to tend to a sick family member, she can adjust to that unexpected event in a CBE setting. In a conventional college format, she might have dropped out. Conversely, if a student has extra time available for school, he or she can use that time to advance their degree. For example, if a student has a free Saturday because personal commitments were canceled, she can use all of that Saturday to work on school. The self-paced and flexible nature of CBE designs is absolutely vital to student success.

- **Competency-based Online Learning Design is Powerful and Will Continue to Improve.** CfA's CBE design—and other early CBE offerings—are not only rigorous but also surprisingly personal. Our students receive large

amounts of quality feedback on their work, in many cases more than they would in conventional college settings. And as good as online CBE designs are already, they will only improve over time, as more entrants take up the model and innovate.

- **Innovation Can Lower and Optimize the Cost of College.** CBE designs can be strikingly low-cost to students and state and Federal funding streams, and can optimize resources in ways focused on student access and support. For example our partnership with SNHU is focused on the costs—mainly a rigorous online CBE curriculum and on place-based coaching—that we believe matter most.

III. Policy Recommendations

Below are suggestions for policy and regulation. I make these recommendations based on my experience at Match Beyond and from my fundamental outlook that innovation can increase college access and success for students traditionally underserved by the existing college system.

A. Proposals to Support Existing and Emerging CBE Providers.

The competency-based sector of higher education is promising but small. Program like SNHU's College for America should be supported, and other IHEs should be encouraged to join them in delivering innovative CBE designs. To this end, we make the following three proposals.

- **a. Stabilize, Clarify, and Validate the Federal Regulatory Process Whereby CBE Providers Seek Permission to Operate Direct Assessment Models.** CBE programs can be assessed via direct assessment. I believe that this way of assessing students can improve student learning outcomes and provide the flexibility that many students need to succeed. Currently, for CBE providers to assess competency directly (as opposed to assessing seat time), they must seek permission from the USDOE. The current regulatory process to secure permission for direct assessment is time-intensive and generally a deterrent to innovation in CBE designs. Streamlining and simplifying this process would encourage more high quality CBE providers to enter this space.

- **b. Thoughtfully Amend Minimal Progress and Fulltime Student Provisions within Financial Aid Regulations to Enable CBE Designs**. Online CBE designs, by nature, do not specify the amount of work a student completes in a given semester. CBE designs let students proceed as quickly or as slowly as is needed for mastery. As a result, true CBE designs conflict with the "minimal progress" requirements and "full and part-time status" criteria in the HEA and related regulations that control whether a student is eligible for Title IV support, including Pell Grants. We urge you to thoughtfully amend these requirements to enable ambitious CBE designs.

- **c. Encourage Accreditors to Consider CBE Designs That Improve Access for Traditionally Underserved Populations.** We encourage you to consider changes to law and policy that will encourage accreditors to create quicker, clearer, and more supported pathways for CBE programs to acquire accreditation. Relatedly, accreditors should be encouraged to create pathways for entirely new institutions to get initial institutional accreditation and to enter the higher education sector.

B. Proposals to Create Outcome Accountability for IHEs and Data Transparency for Students.

When choosing among colleges, students lack access to thorough, reliable data on what matters to them—their odds of graduating, their chances of getting a job after college, their likely salary prospects after college, their full costs of college, and their likely debt load if they graduate (or worse, fail to complete). Historically, colleges have done little to report this data, and their state and Federal regulators, though at times committed to forcing data transparency, have general failed to create a rich, reliable data environment to inform consumer choice. Furthermore, colleges face little true accountability. They are rarely closed or sanctioned purposefully by accreditors or the USDOE even when the fail to serve students.

In response to the related issues of low outcome accountability for IHEs and low data transparency for students, we recommend the following.

- **a. Push with Renewed Purpose for Colleges to Share Data on Core Outcomes and Seek to Create and Enforce a Data-rich Environment for Consumer College Choice.** We recommend a revived push, in law and in regulation, to force colleges to disclose core data on student outcomes, including graduation rate data cut by sub-group, full cost data, likely debt outcomes for both graduates and non-completes, and employment and salary results for graduates after graduation. These data sets—though so essential to consumer choice and protection—remain either missing entirely to students or poorly assembled by state governments, the Federal Government, and related third parties. Forcing colleges to disclose clearly their results will not only police low-quality colleges. It will also reward successful colleges and fundamentally encourage innovation and the further pursuit of quality designs that serve students in novel ways.

- **b. Push With Renewed Purpose to Tie Federal Funding to Institutional Outcomes.** Unequivocally, we encourage you to consider new and plain-spoken ways to condition Federal support for higher education—mainly in the form of Pell Grants and federally subsidized loans—on the basic measures of college quality, notably degree completion rates and job and salary outcomes after graduation. Holding colleges accountable for outcomes will not only police low-quality colleges. It will also reward successful colleges and fundamentally encourage innovation and the further pursuit of quality designs that serve student in novel ways. A determined move to connect Federal funding to IHA outcomes can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including via reform of accreditation and from increased, Federal supervision of IHE's under the Federal aid provisions of the HEA.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murray and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this important discussion on innovation and access in higher education, particularly for underserved students.

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[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF MIKE LARSSON]

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Committee Members, thank you for this opportunity. I run a non-profit called Match Beyond located in Boston, Massachusetts. Our mission is to help students from low-income and lower middle-income households earn quality college degrees at affordable prices and to leverage those degrees into career-track, middle class jobs.

At Match Beyond, we recruit and enroll working adults ages 18–55, from Greater Boston. These students are overwhelmingly from low-income households. Our students study online in a competency-based program called College for American (CfA), operated by Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). As our students study online, we staff them with intensive coaching (enrollment coaches, academic coaches, and jobs coaches) and a variety of wrap-around services and supports. Coaching is the most essential component of our work. Moreover, our model is affordable. The full cost of our college model—including online studies in CfA and access to our coaching and wrap-around services—is $3,000 per semester. Our goals are for 70 percent of our students to complete their degrees on time and to qualify for middle class jobs, salaries, and careers after graduation. We are young, but on track to reach those goals.

Our main learnings from the field and as practitioners can be summarized as follows:

- Coaching and relationships are essential to our students' success in their online studies, and coaching marries well with the data-rich environment provided by quality competency-based education (CBE) designs.
- Flexibility matters to students. College should come to them, not vice versa, so that students can integrate college with their day-to-day lives, families, and work responsibilities.
- Competency-based online learning designs—exemplified by CfA—are already compelling, and they will continue to improve as more institutions of higher education enter the CBE field.
- Our work is an example of how innovation alone—without further public subsidies or price controls—can lower dramatically the overall cost of college to households and governments and still deliver strong outcomes.

I make to the Committee the following recommendations for changes to law and regulation:

- Stabilize, clarify, and validate the US Department of Education regulatory process whereby CBE providers seek permission to operate direct assessment models.
- Thoughtfully amend minimal progress and full-time student provisions in Higher Education Act and related regulation to enable CBE designs.
- Encourage accreditors to consider CBE designs more enthusiastically and to create pathways for new entrants in higher education, a sector that lacks entrepreneurship.
- Push with renewed purpose to force colleges to share data on core outcomes and seek to create and enforce a data-rich environment for consumer college choice.
- Push with renewed purpose to tie Federal funding to colleges' outcomes, notably degree completion rates and jobs outcomes post-graduation.

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The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Mr. Larsson, and thanks to each of you. Very, very helpful information.

We will now begin a 5-minute round of questions. And Senator Enzi has deferred to Senator Hatch, our former Committee Chairman.

Senator Hatch.

Senator HATCH. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to congratulate you and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing. It has been an excellent hearing, and I appreciate these witnesses and what they have said.

Innovation in higher education, of course, can take many shapes and forms, as far as I am concerned, and it is not easy. And oftentimes, innovation and access can be one and the same topic, as I think we have seen from today's testimony.

I have a larger statement I would like to make and submit for the record, but I would first like to highlight some of the innovative things going on in my home State of Utah and then turn it over to the panelists for some questions.

[The prepared statement of Senator Hatch can be found on page 62 in Additional Materials]

Utah is home to Western Governors University, which offers distance education and competency education. They enroll over 80,000 students across the country, many of whom reside in states that are represented by Members of this Committee. The average age of the students is 37.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to submit testimony from the Western Governors University. If that is all right, Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

[The following information can be found on page 64 in Additional Materials:]

Senator HATCH. Salt Lake Community College in Salt Lake City also offers competency-based education and offers an array of innovative learning models, such as distance learning and open educational resources. I believe it is important to keep these constituencies in mind when we are talking about innovation in higher education.

I support competency-based education largely because it benefits both students and communities by preparing students to respond to rapidly changing workforce needs. So I look forward to working with Chairman Alexander and the ranking Member and other Members of this Committee to introduce legislation that will ad-

dress the proper framework for competency-based education and deliver on our promises to students, institutions, and consumers.

Let me just ask, Dr. Brittingham, in your testimony, you suggest Congress define "regular and substantive interactions." Now these terms are currently defined in regulation, and it is up to the accreditor to assure competency based on education—the education providers are providing students with "regular and substantive" interactions with faculty Members.

There has been a longstanding principle of allowing the accreditor, not the Federal Government, make quality assurance determinations and help schools provide students with high-quality education. If we define those terms in statute, how do we ensure that accreditors maintain the important role they currently play?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

I think that part of the challenge right now is that when that provision was originally written, the idea in people's heads was the traditional faculty Member doing all of those various aspects—those five points that I pointed out about course content, appropriate design, reliable assessments, help for students, and coherence in review of the faculty. And as some of the programs have evolved, different people are doing those different roles. So I think it would be appropriate for the Senate to, in rewriting the regular and substantive interaction component, which I think is a legitimate point, to recognize how the faculty roles have evolved in some cases.

Senator HATCH. Okay. Ms. Linderman, your testimony—in your testimony, you recommend Congress provide support for community colleges to adopt evidence-based models to improve graduation rates and help more low-income students attain degrees. You may know that I introduced the 21st Century Classroom Innovation Act with Senator Bennet in the 114th Congress.

Now that bill established tiered grants for evidence-based innovation to be used to support student achievement and attainment for high-need students. In order to receive a grant, recipients would be required to rigorously evaluate innovative programs to ensure the best programs were supported by taxpayer dollars. Do you believe that type of approach can be adapted to higher education programs, and should Congress consider that approach when discussing a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act?

Ms. LINDERMAN. Absolutely. I think that it is critical that precious taxpayer dollars are invested in what we know works. It is important that innovation flourish, of course, and new ideas come up.

I think if we are going to talk about the millions of students that come to college and expect to get a degree, we need to invest in programs that we know have the guardrails, to adopt Ranking Member Murray's term, and demonstrate that they have been tested and rigorously evaluated and prove that they are helping the students who need support to graduate.

I completely agree that is critical. That is one of the reasons in New York City why our Mayor's office and the state invested so heavily in the expansion of the ASAP program. The program demonstrated success year after year after year, consistently exceeding very ambitious targets, overwhelmingly serving low-income stu-

dents of color who struggled mightily not just at CUNY, but at colleges across the country, to enter and complete a degree program.

It is not enough to increase enrollment and access. It is absolutely essential that money, that taxpayer dollars are going—are investing in programs that are demonstrating the ability to help students earn degrees or certificates of value so that they can improve their own economic prospects and improve the economic development of the local municipality, the state, and the Federal Government.

But Dr. Levin and Garcia's cost-benefits study——

The CHAIRMAN. We are well over 5 minutes.

Ms. LINDERMAN. Oh, I am sorry. Excuse me.

Senator HATCH. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. LINDERMAN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, thank you, Senator Hatch.

No, thank you. It was a very interesting answer, but I am going to try to keep the questions and responses to 5 minutes so every Senator will have a chance to participate.

Senator Murray.

Senator MURRAY. Well, thank you. Thank you all for your testimony.

Mr. Larsson, let me start with you and thank you for the work your organization is doing. It is extremely important to support the full spectrum of today's students, including recent high school graduates and adults whose needs may not be met in a traditional college setting.

I am troubled by the research that has consistently found that pure online education isn't the right answer for low-income students or students who need additional support. In your experience working with low-income and minority students, what are some of the additional challenges students face that require intervention or support from an organization like yours?

Mr. LARSSON. Thank you for the question, Senator Murray.

I think a lot of the challenges that low-income students face in online, pure online, are also a lot of the challenges they face on campus as well. Things like really a safe, quiet space to get work done. You know, I know that when I go home from work every day and I get home, I can't get a lot of schoolwork done. It is very reasonable that a lot of our students can't either, and space that is accessible to them lots of hours during the day.

Certainly things that are really simple but can break down real barriers to just creating the time for students to get work done. So daycare help, transportation services to get to that space that you have for them, and a warm meal when they get there, to get that schoolwork done. You know, if someone is worrying about finding something to eat, then they are certainly not going to be able to focus on schoolwork.

Senator MURRAY. I think a lot of us don't recognize how many students are in college who are homeless. And you can't be successful if you don't have a space and a place that you can—that is safe that you can do those things. So thank you.

As we work to strengthen some of the different models of online education, what best practices would you recommend we examine

to help replicate your efforts in supporting students in an online environment?

Mr. LARSSON. Well, I think in terms of ensuring that the college, the entity that is delivering the curriculum, is really high quality, is ensuring that students are learning. It is one of the things that we really love about partnering with Southern New Hampshire University, we really feel like our students are getting a lot out of it.

Also that they are building something specifically for students that have challenges finding time to get schoolwork done. As opposed to a lot of innovation is about trying to fit students into an existing structure, really taking a step back and thinking how can we build a completely new structure around students' lives and like make this student-centered?

Senator MURRAY. Okay. Dr. Bushway, I am really concerned that there are several proposals out there that actually remove Federal rules related to safeguards around faculty interaction in online education. And removing those safeguards could lead to the creation of an expansion of schools without teachers in ways that may not be good for students or, actually, the Federal taxpayer.

As someone here today who has worked for and designed both online and competency-based education programs, talk a little bit about what are some of the key ways CBE programs differ from online programs.

Dr. BUSHWAY. Thank you for that question.

I think one of the key ways that CBE differs from online is that there is an intentional design wrapped around the student need and with attention to learning outcomes and longer-term outcomes. So it is not an experience that is designed in a fragmented way, but it is, in fact, a cohesive experience that supports the student through to completion.

Senator MURRAY. So not just taking an online course just to take an online, but rather looking at what do you get at the end of the day?

Dr. BUSHWAY. At the end of the entire program, right?

Senator MURRAY. Right.

Dr. BUSHWAY. And so this is the big distinction is online courses can simply be courses delivered in distance ED. Where a comprehensive CBE, high-quality CBE program—and I want to make clear that it has to be high quality—does start from the end and build back a curriculum that supports the student through to completion in all these ways that we have discussed.

Those models, I think, in the safety of a well-designed demonstration project, we could begin to experiment with what I like to call more proactive and comprehensive substantive support for learning rather than regular and substantive interaction with a faculty. In regular online distance ed programs, I would not support moving that to that level of freedom.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. So do you think that Congress should eliminate requirements for faculty interaction?

Dr. BUSHWAY. I do not at this point in time. I think we need to learn more in a demonstration project, and I think a demonstration project offers us more freedom than an experimental site. I can explain more about that.

Senator MURRAY. Yes, tell me what you mean by that.

Dr. BUSHWAY. So experimental sites are limited by the current law in terms of what the Department is able to flex, to waive, and there is no definition for CBE. So that restricts our ability to use the ex sites in those ways.

Senator MURRAY. Okay. Thank you. Thanks very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Senator Murray. I know that Senator Collins and Senator Isakson have an 11:30 a.m. meeting. I think we will have time to get to both of you before then, and I will try to make sure of that.

We will call Senator Enzi is next. Senator Isakson, do you want to go next? Or do you want—why don't we go to Senator Collins and then to Senator Isakson? Is that all right?

Senator Collins.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. Thank you to my colleagues for being so gracious.

Dr. Brittingham, I know you are very well aware of the seven independently accredited universities within the University of Maine system. And in the interest of full disclosure, my brother was the recent chair of the Board of Trustees of the system, and a very close childhood friend is the chancellor. So I just want to expose all of my conflicts of interest right up front.

In 2015, the University of Maine launched its One University Initiative to strengthen the system as a whole, but by law, accreditors still have to accredit each individual institution. In your testimony, you mention considering accreditation of the university system as opposed to each institution within the system. Could you expand on what the benefits would be of a system-wide accreditation, perhaps using Maine as an example, since I know you are very familiar.

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. I am familiar, and I just want to say that in New England, Maine is the big state, and the others are all smaller. And I was impressed to learn that the county in Maine, Aroostook County in the very northern part, is bigger than Rhode Island and Connecticut in land mass. So we are talking about large distances. We are talking about very challenging demographics.

With the One University Initiative, the chancellor and the board want to make sure that they do everything possible to make as many educational opportunities available to Maine students of all ages as possible. And one of the things that they are doing is trying to make educational experiences from one institution available to students at another.

When we accredit one institution at a time, part of what that is going to mean, if they get very successful at that, is that the seven universities are going to become so entangled that it is difficult to impossible for us to look at, to hold each one accountable for what they are doing.

It is a good thing to do educationally, but it runs up in a very difficult way, or it could, with accreditation. If, on the other hand, we could, as an experiment, accredit the system, then we would look at the whole seven universities at once in the system to see if they were meeting the educational standards set by the accrediting commission.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Dr. Bushway, this past fall, the University of Maine at Presque Isle, which is in the northern part of the state in Aroostook County, began offering a competency-based education Bachelor of business administration degree. I believe that UMPI is the first public university in New England to offer that kind of CBE degree program, and I can see Dr. Brittingham is nodding yes.

The goal of this program is to give individuals with some college experience and credit a pathway to complete their degree, and I think it is fascinating that 53 percent of the students who have enrolled in this online competency-based program are between the ages of 40 and 65. So it is reaching an older population and giving them the skills that they need.

The tuition is also far less expensive, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle developed this after consulting with the business community about what their needs were. In your testimony, you noted that some people wrongly assume that CBE programs are less rigorous than traditional programs, and yet what I hear from administrators at UMPI is that their students must demonstrate excellence or near excellence in each competency.

What key reforms to the Higher Ed Act could be made to ensure that we do have high quality in these programs?

Dr. BUSHWAY. It is an important thing to note that in traditional education, the students pass through courses in which assignments are sort of average, and so your performance is averaged across different aspects. In CBE programs, you have to demonstrate a high level of competency in each individual competency, which is what makes it much more rigorous, and people don't always understand that.

I think I will go back to the point that as we move forward, we have to maintain a definition of quality, and those quality indicators have to be rooted in student outcomes, learning outcomes and longer-term outcomes for those students. So we ought to be paying attention to gathering and reporting data, everything from progression to graduation rates, to learning outcomes, to performance after graduation.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. And thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and my colleagues, for letting me jump the line.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Collins. Senator Hassan?

Senator HASSAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to all of the witnesses this morning.

Dr. Bushway, I want to follow-up a little bit about what you were just talking about with Senator Collins. As you could probably tell from my introduction of Mr. Larsson, I am a supporter of high-quality competency-based education programs and fortunate to come from a state that has been leading the effort in both the higher education and K-12 space. So I have seen firsthand that additional flexibility and project-based assessments can increase access and completion for students, especially for more nontraditional ones.

Southern New Hampshire University has engaged in this work successfully without compromising student rights or student success, which must remain our number-one priority in all our discussions of higher education.

You were just talking about the things you really need to focus on to make sure that there is quality in the CBE programs. As we move forward to reauthorize the Higher Education Act and more higher education institutions look to add and scale CBE programs, what guardrails must be in place—you talked about that a little bit just now—to ensure that students are not taken advantage of?

Maybe the way to put it is what distinguishes a high-quality CBE program from a low-quality one?

Dr. BUSHWAY. It is a great question, and there are a number of ways that we can distinguish it. One of the documents that I would point back to is CBEN, which is the Competency-Based Education Network, a national organization, has recently released a set of quality standards or a quality framework. I think that this tool could be very useful.

It includes things like making sure that the program is designed with the student experience in mind, with an intentional attention to student data regarding progression, graduation rates, actual achievement of the learning outcomes that are being promised, and longer term sort of career and civic-minded sorts of outcomes as well. So attention to that data, collection of that data, reporting on that data, and a continuous improvement mindset about making sure these programs are paying attention and improving their quality.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you. That is very helpful.

Dr. May, I wanted to focus a little bit on another aspect of how we can improve access. In New Hampshire, we have a dual enrollment program facilitated by our community college system called Running Start. During the 2016–17 academic year, over 75,000 of our students were enrolled in this program across 99 different high schools.

The courses at the high schools cost $150. So they save students thousands of dollars to complete one or more course and go on to pursue 2-or 4-year degrees. The community college system of New Hampshire tracks student success rates, comparing between students who took a Running Start course in high school and those who did not. So these are courses that qualify you for college credit at our community college system, but you are taking them during your high school time.

There is some data that indicates that students who took one or more of these courses end their first college term with more credits and with a higher GPA. Can you explain to us the results you have seen firsthand from students who participate in dual enrollment opportunities and how collecting additional data around these programs could help us scale and improve these kinds of programs?

Dr. MAY. Thank you. Thank you very much for the question.

We currently partner in Dallas with 31 high schools in which we have early college high schools P-TECH, which would be Pathways to Technology and so forth——

Senator HASSAN. Right.

Dr. MAY ——where we enroll roughly about 13,000 students in those programs. What—we work with the most challenged school districts and challenged schools, and what we find is we can take school districts that have an average rate of students going on to earn a postsecondary credential of 11 percent and change that. In

fact, we can more than triple that number in a very short period of time.

What we have is that the barriers are not the inability to learn. The barriers are really not understanding higher education, not feeling like they can afford it, have access. So we talk about this a lot, that it is the handoff between institutions are the real challenge, not what is taking place within those institutions. And we remove friction from that process. We see individuals that would take advantage of it. They just can't figure out how to navigate that in a manner that is meeting their needs.

I think that, too, that we need to make sure that dual credit is offered with intent and in line with pathways leading to degrees, and that really needs to start with a partnership with the school as far back as the eighth grade, where we begin to put those in place, so that the student is prepared when they enroll in the college-level courses to be successful because that is what we all want—higher numbers.

We see that this is a transformative effort when these type of partnerships can come together in a way that really is focused on the student primarily.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you very much. Pathways, helping students identify pathways is critical.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you again to all of the panel.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, Senator Hassan.

Senator Enzi.

Senator Isakson.

Senator ISAKSON. I will be quick, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the courtesy of Senator Enzi.

You know, Senator Enzi, I was sitting here thinking during this hearing, it is deja-vu all over again for you and I because 19 years ago, President Clinton created the Web-based Education Commission to look into this thing called the computer and see if there would be any role in delivering educational content in the 21st century. We spent a year doing that.

The decision we came up with, one of them was called the seat-time rule, where you had to have at least 50 percent of your time in a seat being instructed by a teacher in order for the curriculum to count toward that graduation if you were taking the rest of it on a computer. Meaning we didn't quite trust the computer yet.

Now, of course, the delivery of content on the Internet and use of Web-based education proliferates everywhere in business, in our great universities. So I really commend Ms. Bushway's, your recommendations, Doctor, in talking about competency-based education and doing a demonstration project or getting a good definition of it and being sure we get our arms around distance learning and recognize what it really is and not what a lot of us thought it was.

The United States Army today is delivering college content, and soldiers are graduating by taking their classes in cyber cafes in Europe and in the Middle East because we deliver content on the Internet.

Urban universities like City University of New York is delivering great content to a student that before it was out of the reach of— going to college was out of the reach for them because the delivery

system was you went to a building and sat in a building and listened to a teacher. And that wasn't—the capability of doing that for an urban student was not possible.

I really commend the Chairman on putting this Committee together, this hearing together today. I think we are learning a lot of great information. I appreciate it very much.

I will ask one question to really—I will hopefully prod Ms. Linderman to make a couple of statements about the urban university. The Georgia State University has a program called Panther Grants and a predictive analytics computer software that it uses to predict the likelihood of a student falling between the cracks before they get to graduation time.

In fact, the Panther Grants are small grants up to $500 they give to a student that is in need of $500 more to finish their senior year or to finish their senior final semester. And the use of predictive analytics, they take the information of the student's work in school to predict whether or not they are going to be able to finish on their own. If they can't, they give them the aid if the financial aid will help, or in some cases, instructional aid will help.

Are you using computer programs with things like predictive analytics or something like that to track your students, go to the students and find one that is in trouble and bring them some help?

Ms. LINDERMAN. So we are great admirers of the Panther program that you are mentioning in Georgia. Predictive analytics is something that CUNY is moving toward using increasingly. We use algorithms to determine the likelihood that a student is going to need remedial need on their way in the door and try to get them into interventions.

A program like ASAP uses kind of a combination of computer and actual people studying the patterns of a student and trying to identify the types of problems that you mentioned ahead of time. We are increasingly moving toward adopting programs like the EAB Predictive Analytics Program to look in advance to see what is the likelihood a student is going to get into trouble.

I would say that is the heart and soul of our ASAP program. We are looking for those exact patterns that you are describing, intervening before a student gets in trouble, and making sure they get the support they need, whether it is financial, tutoring, advisement, or counseling support.

Senator ISAKSON. I thank all of you for your leadership in education, getting education to our children and our young adults and our seniors, who are now enrolling in college at ages we wouldn't have thought of possible 20 years ago, but because the world is changing.

Mr. Chairman, thanks to you for bringing this before us.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Isakson. Senator Isakson is former Chairman of the Georgia State Board of Education. So he has had a long role in all this.

Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Murray.

This is very interesting, and I am hearing a very common theme around innovation, yes, but innovation that is responsible and that has some guardrails—is the language we have been using—that is

thoughtful and that is really focused on how do you measure quality. So I appreciate that.

I want to go to this question of how we can make sure that students not only can get access to higher education, but then once they are there, they are successful. And it strikes me that so many of the barriers here are actually outside of the classroom. That is very much a common theme here, including barriers to housing, access to childcare, transportation. You know, runs the gamut, the things that are traditionally thought of as in some ways—traditionally thought of as being outside of the responsibility of the school.

We certainly are in Minnesota working on this. For example, providing access to childcare or maybe, as Senator Isakson is talking about, kind of micro grants like Panther Grants to help people on an urgent need that will make sure that they don't fall through the cracks because of an urgent problem.

So I am wondering, especially Ms. Linderman and also Mr. Larsson, with your experience, if you could just talk a little bit more about what you have learned, what works, as we think about that more holistic approach—really, anybody—but more holistic wraparound approach as we have been saying?

Ms. LINDERMAN. Thank you. It is such a critical piece of the student success puzzle, the needs outside of tuition and fees.

When we created ASAP, we really tried to look at what the key barriers were to students going full-time at our community colleges. And a big—what we found big pieces were, were gaps in financial aid that forced a student to drop to part-time status or stop it, move in and out; transportation, which is extremely expensive in the city of New York. An unlimited Metro card is more than $100 a month. That is groceries for a low-income student. And the cost of textbooks. Many students just opt not to get textbooks.

What we tried to do was study these barrier patterns and remove as many of them as possible so that students could maximize their financial aid. We also wanted to try to identify barriers that emerge that make students drop out. So struggles in a class, difficulty speaking to a faculty Member.

We invested heavily in very comprehensive advisement so that there was a caring adult that was guiding each student and talking about these problems as they emerge. Food security issues, immigration, domestic violence. The adviser can't solve all those problems, but they are very knowledgeable about the referral services available and get the student to those services or to access resources before they have to drop out of school.

These are a couple of things we are doing in ASAP to address those exact barriers.

Senator SMITH. Thank you. Anybody else?

Mr. Larsson.

Mr. LARSSON. Thanks, Senator.

The only thing I would like to add is for us, while we do provide practical supports, our biggest support that we provide for our students is a coach. So every single one of our students has a full-time coach that works with them to help them navigate the college experience and navigate their lives, basically act like a personal trainer for their education.

One of the awesome things about this competency-based education program is it is flexible, but it is also really hard, right? We all struggle in our lives trying to take on things that where the payoff is far down the road, right? Especially when we have a lot of things in front of us.

What we find is the biggest support that our students receive is, is this coach that helps them navigate what they need.

Senator SMITH. Thank you very much.

I would like to go to Dr. May with this. This is it sounds like we have similar issues in Minnesota that we do in the Dallas area, which is this forecast worker shortage, and how can we make sure—we think it is in Minnesota about 100,000 people gap between the jobs that are being created and the people that are prepared to do those jobs.

Could you just talk a little bit about kind of the work that you have done to help build partnerships between businesses and community college and what we could more at the Federal level to support those kinds of innovations?

Dr. MAY. Well, I think one of the main challenges is that many of these jobs that are going unfilled don't require a year's worth of education even. Many of them are certificates that can be 6 months or even shorter, and yet we have such a shortage of workers in some of the IT fields, some of the construction, some of the healthcare and others, that with these jobs there, we require the student to pay out-of-pocket for those in most cases.

Where I believe this is really a value judgment on the part of society, and the Higher Ed Act specifically, where we have said certain types of skills and knowledge and abilities are more important than others. When, in reality, we need everyone in the workforce to contribute, and we need to support those efforts.

Senator SMITH. Right. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Enzi.

Senator ENZI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you and the ranking Member putting together this hearing. It has been extremely enlightening, particularly with the testimony that you submitted beforehand. There are lot of good suggestions in there that I know you had to condense to put in here. And of course, I appreciate the Chairman's experience, having been the president of the University of Tennessee, as well as the former Secretary of Education. He has tremendous credentials in all of these areas.

I have some credentials. When I was in the Wyoming State legislature, I was on the National Higher Education Commission, and I was at that commission when the Western Governors that Senator Hatch mentioned made their announcement, and it was televised nationally. Five states going together to create a university online. And we stopped the meeting and put on the television and watched this thing.

After the announcement was done, these college presidents that I was with said, "So how are we going to know whether to charge in-state tuition or out-of-state tuition?"

[Laughter.]

Senator ENZI. Just for the record, everybody pays the same tuition at that university. And when I got here, I got to be involved in creating the demonstration program for competency-based education, using it at the Western Governors University.

It has been a delight working here. I married an extremely brilliant woman. Probably the only lapse she ever had was agreeing to marry me, and she agreed to marry me when she was just finishing her sophomore year of college.

While she was raising a couple of kids and helping run a shoe store, she finished up her education, her first degree. And part of it, she had to travel 70 miles each way, 3 days a week, to get classes. When she worked on her master's degree, she was able to do some of the competency-based education.

One difficulty with that was that part of it was in D.C. through the University of Wyoming, and there is a 2-hour time difference. So the 8 p.m. class out there was 10 at night for her. But she did wind up getting her master's degree, and so we have learned quite a few things during that process as well.

To actually get to a question, we have been interested in the labor force, of course, having had shoe stores. So, Dr. May, the value of a degree is largely dependent on the value that employers place on it. In your experience, how are employers embracing this expansion of competency-based and distance learning? And to what end and how do you envision these partnerships between education institutions and employers, and how do you foster those?

Dr. MAY. Let me comment first on the value of competency-based education. We look at what employers are investing their own money in to develop. Almost all the time, they are competency-based programs that are designed around the skills that they need for their own company and their own business and their own organization in order for the employees to be successful with that.

Therefore, when we have conversations with them, they are looking at what we can do to dovetail with the investments that they are already making themselves, but also they understand that those have very little transportable ability within the market. So how can we help and work with them to not only get the skills that they need, but then align that with the credentials that they want to have when they graduate?

Also the partnerships as used with business with industry, that is really where we have to start today, as we have seen a dramatic shift in terms of the needs of employers. Recently, the Dallas Regional Chamber of Commerce did a survey of roughly 2,000 employers in the North Texas area. The number-one concern was where they were going to get the talent in order to be successful in their business. The number-two concern was how they were going to retain talent because the competition for skills and abilities were causing people to steal from each other in the process.

It really is how do we invest locally so that we can grow the workforce? That needs to happen, and I believe that is why we need to have workforce or short-term Pell in order to help meet those needs.

Senator ENZI. Thank you, and my time is almost expired. I will have questions for each of the rest of you, particularly, Dr.

Brittingham, where I want to get some more information about this regular and substantive interaction.

I remember some of the college courses that I took where there were a couple hundred students and no opportunity for any interaction, but I was in the classroom. So I will be getting some of those questions to you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Enzi.

Senator Warren.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here today.

I know that many of our witnesses have been talking about the importance of innovation in higher education to be able to meet the needs of nontraditional students, students who haven't come directly from high school. I have to say, this discussion also hit home for me. I was not a traditional student. I dropped out at 19. I got married, and I got my degree at a commuter college later and many hundreds of miles away from where I had started.

I support the whole idea that we can innovate and find more ways to serve nontraditional students. But I want to start with a question around this, if I can. Dr. May, what proportion of your students would you describe as nontraditional?

Dr. MAY. Of our 150,000 we serve, about 70,000 are credit, and fully 75 percent of those would be what you would consider nontraditional students.

Senator WARREN. So about 75 percent of the students you are serving.

Dr. MAY. That is exactly right.

Senator WARREN. Ms. Linderman, how about you?

Ms. LINDERMAN. So within the ASAP program, it is about 15 percent, which is similar to the incoming Associate freshman rate at CUNY.

Senator WARREN. Okay, and Dr. Brittingham?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. For the—for all of New England——

Senator WARREN. I am sorry. I should have done Dr. Bushway. That is right. I realize you don't have a school. I should have jumped over. Dr. Bushway?

Dr. BUSHWAY. In the CBE programs where we have data, it ranges from about 75 to 85 percent of the students are nontraditional.

Senator WARREN. Wow.

Dr. BUSHWAY. Over age 25.

Senator WARREN. A lot of variation here, and Mr. Larsson?

Mr. LARSSON. Ninety percent of our students work full-time, if that is your definition?

Senator WARREN. I will take that one.

Mr. LARSSON. Yes.

Senator WARREN. So, clearly, more of today's college students are nontraditional. Veterans back from tours of duty, single mothers trying to build a future for their families, and many schools like yours are doing a great job in trying to adapt and trying to serve these students. But this same population has been a prime target for fly by-night for-profit and online colleges looking to suck down

more Federal student loan and Federal student aid money without actually teaching these students anything.

For many of these sham schools, innovations like online education have been clever tactics to avoid the costs of instructional— of having professors available to them and a way for these outfits to maximize profits while the students rack up more debt. So before we have a conversation about making it easier for those schools to put more students in debt, I think students need to know more about the options that are available to them.

Let me just ask you, Dr. May, given what we are asking students to spend on a college education, should students have as much information as possible to avoid wasting their money at lousy schools that could leave them deeper in debt?

Dr. MAY. I don't think any of us could disagree with that.

Senator WARREN. Good. I am glad to hear that. But let us get to the harder parts. Right now, do you think that nontraditional students and adult learners have all the information they need to be able to sort out whether or not a school is a good investment for them?

Dr. MAY. That information is really not clearly available for the adult and older learner.

Senator WARREN. All right. So if a student wants to compare debt and employment outcomes, for example, of a program at one of your schools to a program online that is also based in Oklahoma, does this student currently have the tools available to do that?

Dr. MAY. You know, they could look at the Scorecard, but there is not enough information on there to really make a meaningful distinction because there is no programmatic information.

Senator WARREN. Okay. And why is that so? Why is that information not available?

Dr. MAY. You know, we really don't count every student right now in the process. As I commented a little earlier that we seem to value certain students more than others in our tracking process, those that are coming out of traditional high school right into college, we—first time in the fall semester, we track those. We don't count others that we should be looking at so the students can make meaningful distinctions, and so that institutions can understand what is happening as well.

Senator WARREN. Yes. You know, I think that the key to innovation is to start with having better data. And more data from innovative pilots and experiments to see if they are actually working for students, more data about how well colleges are actually serving their students. That is why Senators Hatch, Cassidy, Whitehouse, and I have introduced the bipartisan College Transparency Act to put more information about college outcomes in the hands of students so that they can invest their time and money at schools that will actually pay off for them.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you and with Ranking Member Murray and the rest of the bill's sponsors to be able to include this bill in the Higher Education Act reauthorization.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Dr. Brittingham, you are involved—you are an expert on accreditation, I think. You are involved with a lot of accreditation agencies.

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. I am.

The CHAIRMAN. Is it clear that the accrediting agencies on which you participate are free to spend more of your time on schools who have had problems and less of your time on schools that have historically not had problems? Can you differentiate between, among schools?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. Absolutely. And I would be happy to——

The CHAIRMAN. You can? I thought there was a reluctance on the part of some accreditors to do that because they thought the law wasn't clear?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. I think—I think the issue is that—when schools are in trouble, accreditors spend a lot of time with them. I think the issue is for robust, successful institutions, is there more flexibility to tailor a review for them that would provide value to them?

I have a chart that I put together, and I would be happy to share it with you and your staff, that demonstrates for our commission, for example, how much more time we spend with struggling schools. That is not an issue, I don't think.

The CHAIRMAN. It is not? Okay.

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. I don't believe so.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, we had testimony that where it was resisted pretty strenuously that you should be allowed to spend more time with one school and less time with another school based upon the history of that school. So that is—we are wrong about that?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. We have "frequent fliers" on our agenda.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, but I am quite serious because if it is not an issue, we can drop it. But I was—I thought——

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. I am serious, too. Our commission——

The CHAIRMAN. My sense is if you are accrediting Harvard and if you are accrediting a school that historically had a lot of problems, did it make a lot of sense to spend time on the school with a lot of problems rather than with a school which has fewer problems?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. That is correct. And what my chart shows is that a school, a very robust school—Harvard is an example, our commission sees it twice in 10 years. With other schools, we see them at least once a year and sometimes more often.

The CHAIRMAN. Does everybody else agree the law is clear that accrediting agencies can spend less time on some schools and more time on other schools, based upon whether they are—or do you know? Is that an expertise of yours?

Ms. LINDERMAN. That is not an expertise area.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me go to a second area. On the definition of computer—I mean, of competency-based education, I sense a strong interest in making sure that our laws keep up with the world as students try to receive competency-based education. And it would be very helpful to us, and I have seen your testimony, following this if you could answer your own recommendations—for example, Dr. Bushway, Dr. Brittingham—and if we need a new definition for competency-based education, why don't you write one for us and

give it to us in a follow-up and let us—let us consider what that ought to be?

If we need specific guardrails that you think are not in law, which Senator Murray talked about, you have mentioned this in your testimony. But if you want to be very specific and say, "If I were in your shoes, this is what I would do," that would be very helpful to us and to our staff.

I gather you think that, that a—you did say a demonstration project is better than an experimental project. We have an experimental project today that is not very successful. How can we—and I used the example earlier, if McDonald's is introducing a new gravy, it doesn't do it at all 14,000 stores. It tries it out in Dallas and Nashville first to see if it tastes good.

How can we be aggressive about encouraging competency-based education, but at the same time define it correctly and be appropriately cautious? I mean, we don't want to go to all this trouble of a new law and then authorize another experimental site, which most campuses won't participate in.

Dr. BUSHWAY. I will take a first stab at that. And first of all, we will definitely follow-up on the definition request, and thank you for it.

The problem with the experimental sites are sort of twofold. One is that, and this is sort of down in the weeds, but the lack of a definition in the statute means that you can't waive certain requirements for CBE alone, which limits the kind of innovation that can be allowed in the experimental site.

That limitation, combined with the second factor, which is that the experiment then gets sort of clunky and convoluted, has made it so that it wasn't worth the while for many institutions to put the energy into that. They weren't going to get enough lift out of the work to actually do it.

I think defining CBE as a separate entity in the statute, or allowing us to have that as a separate category of work, would then allow us to build a demonstration project against that and with very specific expectations, but also streamlined so that institutions will get benefit, students will get benefit, but it is not overwhelming in terms of the sort of regulation involved in it.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, my time is up, and we can come back to it when it—maybe at the end of a second round. But I would invite any of you to describe definitely how you would—how you would authorize a demonstration project and how you would define CBE and what the guardrails ought to be so that we can move ahead as rapidly as is appropriate.

Senator Jones.

Senator JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the panelists not only for being here today, but for all you are doing for students of all ages to try to help them succeed.

Mr. Larsson, I was particularly interested in your program at Match Beyond, and I am wondering if you have any thoughts about how Members of Congress can look to make these amenities? I mean, I firmly believe that education is far more than just a classroom learning. And especially in low-income areas, access and

transportation and the ability to have a quiet study place and food is just as important as a really good professor.

Can Congress do something? Can we do something to kind of make these amenities more available? And I would also like you to briefly address the criteria that you use for these students, for selecting these students and outreach to try to let people know these programs are available.

Mr. LARSSON. So in terms of what Congress can do about these amenities, I think it is complicated because one of the things that we are able to do with our students is select literally based on what students need today and help them with what they need today.

Somebody may need transportation help today. Somebody may need help with transportation next month. We can bounce that. I do think it is important, though—I do think it really ties up with the discussion around outcomes and how colleges are being held accountable for results.

I think if a college lets in a lot of students who they know provides access to a lot of students who they know need these supports, who have Pell Grants, who do come from low-income high schools, and if they are providing the right supports for them in that context for the city or town or neighborhood they are in, they should be reaching those outcomes, you know? So it goes back to my testimony where it is really not about how smart or hard-working a student is.

In terms of how we see if someone is a good fit for our program, students practice or enroll with us for a month. So Southern New Hampshire University has a 30-day period where you can take part. You can submit projects. You can work on it. We can work with the student. And at the end of those 30 days, if it didn't work for you, then you don't owe any money, and then you can come back another time.

Since most of our students haven't been in high school for a while, since they are older, we don't look to traditional measures. We just say if you can make this work now, great. And if it doesn't work for you right now, come back in a couple months. Southern New Hampshire University enrolls monthly. So find a time that works for you.

In terms of where our students come from, right now it is actually mostly word of mouth, which we are excited about. We also work really closely with a lot of the community-based organizations in Boston who have the same mission of college success for the students they serve—high schools, social service organizations—who are running up again the same problems that we saw of a lot of their hard-working, smart students just were not getting degrees.

Senator JONES. All right. Well, thank you.

A similar question, Dr. May, to you because I also like the dual enrollment programs, and especially I was struck by the testimony earlier about one of the problems that we have is the handoff. I think that is especially a problem for low-income students, students in rural areas, and often students whose parents or siblings never went to college, and they are first-generation colleges.

How can we do a better job of getting access to those dual enrollment programs to give those kids the confidence to continue their education? Specifically with low income, transportation is an issue,

especially in rural areas where there is not a program right onsite. Have you got any thoughts on that?

Dr. MAY. One, I think specifically encouraging those types of relationships would make a big difference in terms of establishing more dual enrollment programs, but high-quality ones, ones that are really meaningful and leading to degrees and, as I said earlier, that follow very specific pathways so that students can see not only where they begin but have an understanding of where that they are going to end.

I think also encouraging, there is kind of a tendency in the process, if you look at it, to build a wall around the college and say that the college has to control everything. Well, frankly, that is limiting us today.

What we need is collaboration. We need to—instead of trying to hoard everything, we need to be not hoarding and sharing and realizing that we share a common responsibility. You know, the average student that we see is going to multiple institutions at the same time.

So recognizing that as they are coming out of high school that we have got to prepare them for a future that no matter where they start or where they are going along the way, that they have got a pathway to a high-value certificate or degree.

Senator JONES. Well, thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing. And again, I want to thank all of the panelists for the wonderful work you are each doing in your respective areas.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Jones.

Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Well, thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member, for holding this critical hearing on access and innovation in higher ed.

Today, I am introducing legislation that would preserve and enhance innovation in our higher education system. What I am calling the Innovation Zone Act will reform what is an underutilized and inefficient program in existing law, the Experimental Sites Initiative in the Higher Education Act.

The Experimental Sites Initiative has been around since the mid 1980's, but a lack of evaluation has led to an unknown impact of many experiments. These experiments are a vital part of understanding where flexibility is needed and how to ensure that students have every opportunity to be successful.

Out of the 10 ongoing experiments, only one has published outcomes. Some of these experiments started over 7 years ago. In my home State of Indiana, we have four institutions of higher education that are authorized to participate in the Experimental Sites Initiative. They all have varying experiences.

One institution was approved 2 years ago, but it hasn't begun due to complications with the framework of the experiment. On the other hand, there are institutions that have been actively participating and submitting timely data for years.

So the legislation I am introducing would require the Secretary to establish the methodology of capturing data before the experiment ever begins. That would give colleges a clear direction in re-

porting data. It would also allow institutions the opportunity to submit suggestions for future experiments.

I look forward to working with Members of this Committee in incorporating these key elements in the next reauthorization. I would add, Dr. Bushway, that I believe this legislation, through our allowance for Title I experimentation, would accommodate your concerns.

For Dr. Brittingham, I have a couple of questions. As the president of the Commission of Institutions of Higher Ed, which accredits over 225 institutions, one, is there value in institutions of higher education experimenting? To put differently, in innovating? And if so, are there barriers you have seen that prevent institutions from participating in experiments?

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. Thank you for the question.

We have had several institutions in New England participate in these experiments, and I think they have benefited from them. I applaud your interest in strengthening the evaluation component and would suggest that one perspective on that would be that of the accreditor. Because when institutions participate in these experiments, they must bring the proposal to the accreditor as a substantive change to be reviewed and approved before they begin, and then we send out teams of peers to look at them.

We would like to learn not only what we are learning from this experiment, but what others around the country are learning, and I think we would have a contribution to make there.

Senator YOUNG. That is very helpful. Thank you.

I am going to turn, because my time is limited, to competency-based education. Going back to Dr. Bushway, in your testimony, you mentioned Congress should authorize a demonstration project for CBE to test innovative changes on a pilot scale before deploying them more broadly.

I tend to think we need to do a lot more of this in Government. Pilot, rigorously evaluate, scale up the things that are working. Admit we have achieved suboptimal outcomes in those areas that aren't working.

You are likely aware that the Department of Education has two ongoing experiments on CBE with 13 participating institutions in one and 10 participating institutions in the other. However, no outcomes data has been reported since they began in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

If outcomes or any data whatsoever for these ongoing experiments would be consistently reported to Congress and published online for your and other stakeholders' review, would there even be a need for an additional pilot program?

Dr. BUSHWAY. Great question. It would—if data were rigorously collected methodologically and reported, that would greatly reduce the need for a demonstration project. The nuance here is that the waivers allowed in those ESIs are restricted due to the fact that there is no definition for CBE in the statute, and so that limited the opportunity to test out some additional freedoms that could be learned from.

Senator YOUNG. And so that is why we are allowing experimentation under the bill I am drafting immediately—dropping immediately after this hearing, experimentation in Titles I and IV. And

the experimentation allowed in Title I, we believe would accommodate changes in definition.

Thank you so much for your testimony, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Young.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank Senator Young for that line of questioning. I actually had a question here on the Experimental Sites Initiative. It has been going on for 20 years, and the Department of Education has yet to produce much meaningful data about what they have learned from it. We can do a lot better by that program. So I will look forward to maybe talking to him about his legislation.

I wanted to ask a broader question about how we get accountability right in the face of increased innovation, and I will direct this to the panel. I imagine Ms. Linderman and Dr. Brittingham will have something to say about it. So maybe I will direct it through you.

But listen, innovation stinks without accountability, and so I am—I want this Committee to be at the forefront of innovation. I think it is ridiculous that colleges don't have the ability to build more innovative models, and competency-based education is a perfect example of where we failed as a Congress.

But there are different ways to do accountability. You can have a market-based accountability, and I have a feeling that is what Republicans will probably want, where the accountability is in the students' hands. But the data doesn't exist right now for students to hold colleges accountable. We have a ban in the Higher Education Act on a unitary student record, which would allow students to know whether graduates of a particular college are actually making money or not making money, are in the field that they want to go into or not in the field that they wanted to go into.

The other worry with student-based accountability, market-based accountability, is that the college's marketing, with millions of dollars behind it, will blot out the good data that students may technically have access to.

The other way to do it is by regulator-based accountability. Change the way that we regulate colleges, and instead of holding them accountable through accreditation or regulation for a whole host of things that don't have to do with outcomes today, just say, listen, we are going to really pay attention to how well your students do when they graduate and do something about it.

We technically do that today with student default rates, but it is really hard to get dinged today, given the high bar that we have for failure. So my question is where should the accountability come? Should it be student-based accountability? Should it be regulator-based accountability? How do we think about those questions?

I am going to put it in the center there and ask others, if time permits.

Ms. LINDERMAN. So I will jump in quickly, leaving time for my fellow witnesses. I think it is absolutely critical, and I think accountability begins with the institution itself, setting rigorous outcomes data and saying we are going to move toward this. And if we don't, we are willing to put our money where our mouth is.

Senator MURPHY. But that is not satisfactory.

Ms. LINDERMAN. So for the ASAP program——

Senator MURPHY. That is not accountability.

Ms. LINDERMAN. So for ASAP, for example, when we were funded when the program began, 2007, we were told by the city, we are going to give you $20 million. You are setting a rigorous 50 percent, double the graduation rate. We will take your money away from you if you don't—if you don't succeed. If you do, we will baseline your funding so the program can continue and then grow.

CUNY took that challenge very, very seriously, and here we are, 10 years later, moving from 1,100 students to 25,000 students.

I do believe in rigorous regulation. I think that there should be regulation holding colleges to outcomes that they set, and I do think that we should look at labor market data as well to see if students are moving into jobs that pay.

I think accountability has to be a 360 enterprise. But I feel very strongly, and we have proven in ASAP, that saying you set rigorous completion rates, and you don't reach them, you should not be funded anymore. So we stand by that.

Senator MURPHY. Anybody else?

Dr. Brittingham.

Dr. BRITTINGHAM. Yes, thank you for your question.

I think one of the—to me, it looks like one of the challenges for Congress is to come up with a framework for innovation and how to test it because I am not sure anybody can predict what those innovations are going to be 5 or 10 years from now that we will want to look at.

A general framework seems like it would be helpful, and the exact measures would need to be determined with respect to each of the experiments. Maybe having experiments that are educational experiments and not just financial aid disbursement experiments would be a good idea.

Certainly, the criteria for the experiments on second chance Pell would be different than direct assessment. So I think the evaluation needs to be outcome-directed, but it needs to be tailored to what the experiment is about. I think that is a big challenge.

I will, just one more thing, say that the accreditors, regional accreditors together, have a project, and we expect a report out by the end of this month about looking at institutions with low graduation rates. And we will make a copy of that available to you.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Chairman, I asked the question because—and I do worry about the Congress or regulator directing what innovation is allowed to happen and what isn't. At the same time, I worry about putting all of that responsibility in students' hands.

If we simplify the regulation of colleges and got rid of some of the weeds but made sure that they were paying attention to outcomes, I think that would make it a lot easier to allow for a little bit more freedom of innovation underneath.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Murphy.

Senator Murray, do you have any concluding remarks, questions?

Senator MURRAY. I just have an additional question. But I think this has been a really good hearing, and I think we have heard a

really convincing case about competency-based education that we can start our framework on.

But Dr. Bushway, I did want to ask you, because you are an expert in the field and while you are here, what do you believe are the top three essential elements a rigorous and well-designed CBE program must have? And tell me what, in your opinion, is the biggest danger or unknown that we need to guard against?

Dr. BUSHWAY. Thank you.

I would say the top three key elements for a quality CBE program is this—the curriculum design, that there is a backward design with the outcomes in mind and that it is a cohesive, integrated pathway for the student to gain and demonstrate the competencies that are being promised from that credential.

Second, that there is a method of integrated and proactive support for student success that is mandated in that program.

Third, that there are transparent, validated, and responsive outcomes upon which this program is built. And by "responsive," I mean responsive to the needs of the community and business, these skills gaps that are being identified.

I think, if I were to be asked, which you just did, the greatest risk, I would have to say that as much as I want this innovation to move forward and as much as no one wants to sort of move away from things like credit-hour or fix the problems with some of the expectations about faculty interaction within CBE more than I do, but I think we also have to move cautiously as we move forward with this.

One of the greatest risks I think we have is to move to solution before we understand the implications of those solutions not only for CBE, but for broader higher ED. I don't want to see a race to the bottom, where we get soured on innovation in higher ED more broadly.

Senator MURRAY. Right. Okay, very good advice. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks. Thanks, Senator Murray.

I think Senator Murray correctly assesses our interest in competency-based education. My only comment would be that the demonstration project, which you have suggested is a better approach, could be measured and cautious, but it needs to be large enough to help us understand what we can do. Because we are talking about several thousand campuses in America and tens of thousands of programs that could use more competency-based education.

I think, to simplify, that the major—that one major impediment to that, maybe the major impediment, is how do we relate Federal financial aid to competency-based education? How do we relate the credit-hour?

Now there are all these things we need to do in connection with that, but fundamentally, we have to understand how do we adjust credit-hour or Federal financial aid in a way to make it possible to have responsible competency-based education. Would you agree with that?

Dr. BUSHWAY. Completely agree. At the core, it is that problem, right?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. And that is—so we need a demonstration project that is large enough or more than one demonstration

project that try different things so that we can—that we can move. We don't want to get 50 years from now and not have gotten anywhere while the rest of the world passes us by.

So from all of you, I welcome any—I think all of us would welcome your specific suggestions and recommendations about how we adjust Federal law in demonstration projects to move to encourage competency-based education. I, for one, am not willing—I don't think it is a good idea just to say, "Oh, we got a good idea. Let us do it for everybody," before we know what we are doing.

Dr. May, this is my last question. I was interested in your dual enrollment students, and I have seen that in our state in Tennessee. And what it has caused me—a state where 2 years of postsecondary education is now free, tuition-free. But it seems to me that dual enrollment or high school students taking college courses is something that is appropriate for states to pay for.

I mean, we have had a lot of testimony here about how states have not been stepping up to support higher education. I can see the difference of the time when I was Governor 30 years ago to today, and it is about half as much. And I have resisted Federal mandates on states to require them to do more. I don't think that is appropriate for the Federal Government.

But the dual enrollment systems are very popular. They have got a broad base of support among parents and students, and they really help turn the high school, which is often obsolete in some respects, into a more interesting and useful and constructive experience.

I wonder—and also we do have an experimental program about whether to allow the use of Pell Grants for dual enrollment. And I am sure if there were an unlimited amount of money available, that would be a useful thing to do. But we have lots of uses for Pell Grants. You have mentioned displaced adults. If we simplify the Federal aid and student loan repayment system, we would expect, testimony has been many more Pell Grants could be awarded.

As competency-based education encourages and as people reach for postsecondary education, we would expect many more Pell Grants. Some Senators think Pell Grants should be larger. So I wonder what you think about the appropriateness of thinking that dual enrollment costs are an appropriate and useful function of state and local funding.

Dr. MAY. One, and thank you for that question, I do believe very strongly that we all need to be invested in the success of our students coming through. And by not having the state put dollars into that, frankly, we create barriers. We create silos where individuals, rather than cooperate, they compete for funds, feeling like that if they go over here, then I am not getting them at my college or my school.

By coming together around a common problem, which is how do we increase the education level of our population and really looking at how we all play a role in that, whether it be high school or college, or employers as well, I think need to come together. And the states need to be investing in that effort.

The CHAIRMAN. Does Texas pay for—how does Texas—who pays for your dual enrollment students?

Dr. MAY. The way—and it is because Texas has 50 separate community college districts around the state, and each one of them is a little bit different. But state dollars do go both to the high school and to the college to support dual credit.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thanks to each of you for your time and your being here.

The hearing record—unless there are other comments, the hearing record will remain open for 10 business days. Members may submit additional information and questions to our witnesses for the record within that time, if they would like.

The CHAIRMAN. The next scheduled hearing before the Committee will be this afternoon at 2:30 p.m. on the nomination of Frank Brogan to be the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.

Thank you for being here today.

The Committee will stand adjourned.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR HATCH

I'd like to thank Chairman Alexander for holding this hearing. Innovation in higher education can take many shapes and sizes, and often times innovation and access can be one in the same topic as I think we've seen from the testimony.

Utah is home to Western Governor's University which offers distance education and competency education—they're completely online and enroll over 80,000 students across the country, many of whom reside in states represented by Members of this Committee. The average age of their student is 37.

In my home State of Utah, Salt Lake Community College provides career and technical education students with nationally recognized CBE courses that allow them to make more rapid progress by demonstrating what they know through prior coursework, on-the-job-training, military training or through other life experiences. Salt Lake Community College faculty members work closely with employers in the state to ensure students are learning skills that are in demand. These faculty members also evaluate their CBE programs based on workforce outcomes and not solely on input measures like financial resources and material resources.

I believe it's important to keep these constituencies in mind when we're talking about innovation in higher education. Competency Based Education is utilized by many non-traditional students who take advantage of the flexible, affordable, performance-based offerings. I support CBE largely because it benefits both students and communities by preparing students to respond to rapidly changing workforce needs.

As we approach a higher education reauthorization, it will be important to define competency based education and provide a distinction between distance learning and correspondence learning. We must provide appropriate flexibility to ensure that innovative models are not stifled by Federal bureaucracy and needless restrictions.

To that end, I look forward to working with Chairman Alexander to establish a framework for competency-based education—one that allows flexibility for innovation, promotes education for the 21st century workplace, empowers accreditors, and ensures students have access to quality programs that result in transferable credentials and certifications.

I also hope to work with this committee to support initiatives that empower institutions to develop evidence-based practices to increase access to higher education for high-need students, increase degree attainment, and improve efficiency in our higher education systems.

Students deserve high quality programs—quality assurance can be achieved by providing students and consumers with more transparency in higher education. Making programmatic and workforce data available to the public would allow prospective students to shop for the best higher education program that fits their individual goals and needs. My bipartisan legislation, the College Transparency Act, cosponsored by Senators Cassidy, Warren, and Whitehouse does just that—and I think any conversation related to innovation should necessarily include a discussion of improving consumer access to information.

I look forward to working with Chairman Alexander and other Members of this Committee to introduce legislation that will address the proper framework for Competency Based Education, and deliver on our promises to students, institutions, and consumers.

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Hon. LAMAR ALEXANDER
Hon. PATTY MURRAY
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ALEXANDER AND RANKING MEMBER MURRAY: On behalf of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), thank you for holding the hearing on "Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Access and Innovation." SLCC has a particular interest in competency-based education (CBE) and writes this letter outlining our position on the matter for the hearing record.

As Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) referenced in his remarks, SLCC has become a leader in innovation for all students, especially adult learners. SLCC serves over 61,000 students across ten sites throughout Salt Lake Valley and CBE is a key part of our strategic goals to serve these students and our community's workforce needs. A $2.5 million Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant and existing college resources enabled us to convert 20 programs within the School of Applied Technology (SAT) to CBE. We plan to continue converting these career and technical education programs and others to CBE. As one of only a handful of participating institutions in the Department of Education's CBE experimental site initiative, we are eager to share our lessons learned and promising data on student engagement and completion rates.

SLCC supports legislative efforts to allow students enrolled in CBE programs to receive Title IV financial assistance. However, as the Senate HELP Committee drafts provisions governing CBE programs, we strongly encourage each Committee Member to consider the following to ensure bad actors are held accountable and Title IV programs are protected against fraud, waste, and abuse:

- **Definition of CBE**. Currently, there is no definition for CBE, which has caused confusion and delays in the implementation of the Department of Education's CBE experimental sites initiative. SLCC requests that lawmakers ensure the definition of CBE: (1) requires programs to assess credit or clock hours to minimize challenges, such as how to assess credits when a student transfers from a CBE program to a credit hour program; (2) requires faculty interaction and support; and (3) recognizes knowledge, skills, abilities, and intellectual behaviors demonstrated by a student in a subject area as elements of the definition and not optional factors. These elements must be integrated into and generally accepted by CBE programs to maintain the overall integrity of the credential earned.
- **Quality Assurance Thresholds**. In addition to what we outlined above, we strongly encourage the HELP Committee to ensure that if the Federal Government allows students to use their Title IV funds to enroll in CBE programs, these programs are of high quality where students benefit and are not placed at risk. As the HELP Committee considers what accreditors should review, we request that the following quality threshold provisions are included, among others:
  - the quality of demonstration of competence is judged at mastery for each competency assessed;
  - a standard for the amount of learning that is included in a unit of competency;
  - standards for determining when to deny, withdraw, suspend, or terminate the accreditation of the program if the reasonable benchmarks outlined above are not reached; and
  - reasonable benchmarks for graduation rates and/or job placement rates. We believe that with certain safeguards in place, job placement rates serve as a useful completion measure. At SLCC, CBE programs are fully integrated into our career and technical education programs

and the demand for jobs in our region affords students the opportunity to secure jobs prior to graduating from our programs because of the competencies they have mastered. SLCC also supports using time-to-completion rates and student satisfaction as additional reasonable benchmarks. As an open access institution, however, we have some concerns with using debt-to-earnings ratios and loan repayment rates as benchmarks because there are a number of underlying factors, independent of the college, that may be attributed to lower numbers for these rates.

- **Data Collection.** SLCC believes that the proper and reasonable collection of data is another quality assurance mechanism and helps to significantly inform decisions on how to best improve instruction and student outcomes. Therefore, SLCC urges the HELP Committee to include provisions that require the regular evaluation of whether a CBE program meets the reasonable benchmarks we discussed above.

The Senate's HEA reauthorization measure should allow for institutions of higher education to innovate as freely as possible, but not in a manner that puts students at risk and makes the Title IV program vulnerable to abuse and waste. If the Committee pursues a full authorization of CBE programs, instead of a demonstration project, guardrails must be in place to ensure the reputational value and sustainability of CBE programs. Otherwise, there will be an emergence of bad actors that are not properly held accountable and a need for a legislative or regulatory response that may result in overcorrection and burdensome regulations for good actors.

SLCC welcomes the opportunity to discuss our position with you and to serve as a resource given our background, expertise, and success in CBE. We also encourage policymakers to use the Competency-Based Education Network's (C-BEN) CBE Quality Framework to help inform how the HELP Committee authorizes CBE programs.

Sincerely,

TIM SHEEHAN
Vice President for Government and Community Relations
SALT LAKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Cc:
Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT)
Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY)
Senator Richard Burr (R-NC)
Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA)
Senator Rand Paul (R-KY)
Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)
Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA)
Senator Todd Young (R-IN)
Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS)
Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)
Senator Tim Scott (R-SC)
Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)
Senator Robert Casey, Jr. (D-PA)
Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)
Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
Senator Christopher Murphy (D-CT)
Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA)
Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH)
Senator Tina Smith (D-MN)
Senator Doug Jones (D-AL)

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WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and Members of the Committee, Western Governors University (WGU) is an online, nonprofit university founded in 1997 by a visionary group of U.S. Governors, including former Utah Governor Michael O. Leavitt and former Colorado Governor Roy Romer. These Governors saw technology

advancement as both an opportunity to dramatically expand access to quality higher education by making it possible to learn independent of time and place, and also to design and demonstrate competency-based education (CBE) as an effective model for improving educational quality and student outcomes.

We applaud you and the work of the Senate HELP Committee Members to improve access and affordability, especially for under-served populations, while enabling innovation in higher learning. Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) should aim to reinvigorate the promise of higher education for the 21st century. The HEA should support and encourage higher learning innovations that help Americans throughout their lifetimes with post—secondary learning opportunities that lead to developing and sustaining productive lives.

WGU's defining principle is a focus on the student—every decision and initiative starts with our students. Student success and support are the obsession of all faculty and staff. WGU faculty work as specialists: curriculum developers, who design programs, materials, and assessments; course instructors, who provide individualized instruction and subject matter expertise; program mentors, who provide regular guidance, augmented instruction, and coaching for the duration of a student's journey to graduation; and evaluators, who anonymously review and evaluate student assessments to ensure academic integrity.

The success of WGU's learning model is demonstrated in outcomes—student, graduate, and employer satisfaction levels that are significantly higher than the national average; dramatically lower debt levels which decrease annually; and better employment outcomes for graduates. WGU works with independent third parties to track and monitor student engagement and outcomes, and we have included some highlights below.

Gallup—Alumni Survey

- 88 percent of WGU graduates said they had a mentor who encouraged them (national average of 54 percent).
- 83 percent of WGU graduates were challenged academically (national average of 77 percent).
- 92 percent of WGU graduates said their experience was worth the cost (national average of 65 percent).
- WGU alumni are almost twice as likely as graduates of other institutions to be thriving in all elements of well-being—purpose, social, financial, community, and physical.

National Survey of Student Engagement—Students gave WGU high marks, well above the national average, in the following areas:
- Quality of interactions with faculty—16 percentage points higher.
- Academic support—13 percentage points higher.
- Rating of entire educational experience—6 percentage points higher.
- Challenging coursework—16 percentage points higher.

Harris Poll—Graduate Survey & Employer Surveys

- 88 percent of WGU graduates are satisfied with academic help (national average of 81 percent).
- 87 percent of WGU graduates are satisfied with overall experience (national average of 67 percent).
- 89 percent of WGU graduates are employed in degree field (national average of 84 percent).
- 91 percent of employers said WGU graduates meet or exceed expectations.
- 97 percent said that they would hire another WGU graduate.

Other Key Metrics

- 78 percent 1-year retention rate (74 percent among public 4-year institutions)
- $21,200 increase in annual income within 4 years of graduation among WGU graduates
- 49 percent 6-year graduation rate (10 percentage points higher than comparable institutions)
- Undergraduate tuition less than $6,500 per year; Bachelors complete on average in 2 years 4 months
- $12,500 median Federal debt at graduation (for WGU undergraduates who borrow)
- 4.6 percent 3-year loan default rate (vs. national average of 11.5 percent (all institutions))

- 91,000+ enrolled students in all 50 states, D.C., Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and U.S. military bases worldwide
  - Business College—33,600 (37 percent)
  - Health Professions—24,600 (27 percent)
  - Teachers College—20,000 (22 percent)
  - Information Technology—13,300 (14 percent)
  - 100,483 degrees awarded
  - Student demographics:
    - Average age: 37, ranging from 16 to 79
    - 73 percent work full time; 12 percent work part time
    - 65 percent female; 35 percent male
    - 71 percent classified as under-served in at least one of the following categories:

1AFirst-generation college student: 40 percent

1ALow income: 23 percent

1AEthnic minority: 29 percent

1ARural: 16 percent

As an innovator in higher education, and an institution focused on student success, WGU supports policy and legislation that encourages and supports innovation in:

- Advancing quality and relevancy of learning and its path to opportunity;
- Improving access and affordability;
- Optimizing student outcomes;
- Improving transparency and accountability for both students and institutions.

Education remains the single biggest catalyst for individuals to change their lives. We believe that good Federal policy must not only recognize, but also encourage innovation in the design, delivery and flexibility of higher learning to improve institutions' ability to serve a broad and increasingly diverse student body. A key example of such innovation is Competency-based Education (CBE), which challenges higher education convention by measuring learning rather than time. It recognizes that adults have different levels of knowledge and learning styles, so rather than having fixed course times, students advance as soon as they demonstrate proficiency. Where CBE advances innovation in learning modality, the Internet enables similar advancements in delivery method—improving institutions' ability to deliver high quality curriculum, individualized faculty engagement, and technology-enabled interaction, all at a distance. Institutions can reach and teach students where they are, thus dramatically expanding access to place-or time-bound adults. With shifting student demographics (nearly 40 percent of students over 24 years old), rapid adoption of distance learning (6.3 million students or 31 percent of total taking some or exclusively online programs), and greater need to link learning with opportunity and workforce readiness, we should only expect accelerated innovation in the design and delivery methods of higher education.

Recent surveys also suggest that a decreasing percentage of adults believe that higher education is accessible (61 percent in 2015, down from 67 percent in 2013) and even fewer believe it is affordable (21 percent). We know how vital Federal loan and grant programs are in serving adults, particularly the under-served. We encourage sound policy that simplifies financial aid options, student application and disbursement models consistent with innovation in modes and methods of education delivery. We also believe that without reasonable conditions and standards, unfettered access to funding may diminish institutions' effort to control costs and advance alternative models that are key to improving affordability. The principle of responsibility also applies to the student. Through its industry-recognized "Responsible Borrowing Initiative", WGU improves clarity on total costs of attendance and lifetime loan cost in providing recommended loan amounts to students. It holds true that with more and better information, individuals make better choices, and WGU has reduced annual borrowing per student by 41 percent. Affordability is key to expanding access, and Federal policy should encourage institutions to reduce cost, while simplifying access and funding options for students.

WGU is proud of its heritage—clearly, our innovative academic delivery model provides a significant return on investment for students and taxpayers. We are obsessed with ensuring that our students receive a quality, affordable education that expands their opportunities and enables them to lead sustaining and productive lives, throughout their lifetime. Our success is attributable to being flexible and nimble as education technology improves and learning science continues to evolve. We believe that WGU would have neither survived, nor scaled, had it invested in innovation that did not work. We imagine all would agree that only responsible innovation is worth supporting.

In closing, we respect the challenges and risks of innovation designed to improve quality, expand access and increase affordability, and we encourage higher education policy and legislation that supports learning and delivery models that produce positive outcomes. Responsible, impactful innovation — focused on student success—are critical to reinvigorating the promise of higher education for every American. In turn, such innovation expects, rather requires transparency and accountability, both from institutions and students. Principles of fairness would evaluate eligible institutions against reasonable standards of quality, attainment and economic outcomes, regardless of academic model.

Again, we are grateful for the work of Senate HELP Committee, and the many other legislators who are seeking to advance Federal policy as we look forward to the next wave of innovation in higher education.

[Whereupon, at 12 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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