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Funding of the Pell Grant Program:



A Super Important Decision for Supercommittee

The federal Pell Grant program is a financial assistance program aimed at low-income students pursuing higher education. This federal grant program was created under the Higher Education Act of 1965, during the Johnson Administration, and is administered by the U.S. Department of Education; and to be eligible students must be actively attending universities.

Currently, because of the reality of the country's tight budget, many programs are having their funding reduced. One of these programs facing reductions is the federal Pell Grant program. This is a major issue as many students are dependent on these grants to help them enter and complete college. As a result, these students must find different ways to pay for their education; many must resort to jobs, working 30 or more hours per week while balancing schoolwork, while others exit college for what they hope is a temporary period of time.

As mentioned, due to federal budgetary constraints legislation is being proposed with

provisions identifying the programs from which funds should be cut. Most recently on September 29th, a draft U.S. House of Representatives appropriations bill was released and revealed itself to be very harmful to the Pell Grant program. The bill proposes to cut 44 billion dollars from the program over the next ten years, which would most immediately amount to an estimated 1.3 billion shortfall for the 2012 fiscal year. Although it promises to keep the maximum Pell grant at \$5,550, the bill, known as the House Labor, Health and Human Services Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations Act, plans to cut from the program in several ways. One of these ways is by requiring the Secretary of Education to reduce the maximum Pell Grant if the number of qualified students exceeds the Congressional projections from the previous year. Another way funds are reduced is by recalling recent eligibility expansions; in addition new limits on the program will be introduced. There has also been a major reduction in the Income Protection Allowance (IPA). The IPA is money that

families are allowed to keep in order to cover basic living expenses before being expected to pay for college costs. Another reform under the bill is the lifetime eligibility. Prior to the bill it was at 9 years, with the proposed reform it would be reduced to 6 years. With all the reductions in aid and growing tuition costs, many students question whether they can continue their education.

Low income individuals and families, many of whom benefit from the Pell program, will bear the brunt of these cuts. Latino students, in particular, have been significant beneficiaries of Pell grants and would therefore be significant losers in the 2012 budget battle if these cuts to Pell materialize. During academic year 2007–2008, more than 39% of Hispanic undergraduate students received Pell awards, representing 20% of all Pell recipients that year.¹ When Six U. S. senators and six members of the U.S. House of Representatives — who make up what's known as the Supercommittee — vote on a package of cuts on November 23, the fate of hundreds of thousands of hard working low-income students will be in their hands.

Sources

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Endnote

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Rights of English Language Learners Violated in Los Angeles

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), within the Department of Education, focuses on creating equal access to education for all students through enforcement of civil rights laws. The office works to investigate possible incidents of discrimination and negotiates ways to resolve these civil rights problems.

In the past, one of OCR's cases involved enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act. They made sure that students with disabilities were not facing discrimination in schools. The rights of historically marginalized student groups are under on-going investigation, including recent investigations focused on English Language Learners.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bans educational discrimination on the basis of national origin. The Supreme Court ruled in 1974 that language is so closely tied to national origin that failure to provide reasonable accommodations for English language learners constituted a violation of the Civil Rights Act. Despite this federal ruling over 35 years ago, non-native English speakers still receive unequal educational services in many places. Based on reports of violations received by OCR, the Department of Education conducted an investigation into the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) beginning in March of 2010. The LAUSD was charged with various civil rights violations involving English Language Learners (ELLs) and African American students and the quality of their instructional programs. According to the OCR these students were not given education opportunities equal to those of their classmates.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest district in the nation, serving close to 680,000 students in grades K-12 during the 2010-2011 school year. Nearly three quarters of the students are Latino, about 12 percent are African American, and the remainder of students comprise a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander, and white students. Roughly one third of LAUSD students are classified as English language learners (ELL). The OCR investigation looked at schools in the West San Fernando Valley (located just North of Downtown LA) as well as Southeast Los Angeles. The academic achievement for students as a whole in LAUSD is low, but it is particularly bad for



African Americans and ELLs. Neither African American nor ELL students are meeting math and English standards. According to an article in the L.A. Times, during the 2010-2011 school year only 29% of LAUSD's English language learners were proficient in math and only 38% of African American students were proficient in English.¹ If these levels of achievement were found to be due to unequal treatment, the potential penalties would be a reduction of federal funds and the possibility of court injunctions. On October 11th U.S. Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, held a meeting in Los Angeles to discuss the outcome of the investigation. Duncan was joined by Los Angeles Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa and LAUSD Superintendent, John Deasy.

The investigation revealed disparate treatment of students and the Secretary met with local officials to determine how the district would need to move to address these inequities. The meeting came to an end with a resolution agreement. The agreement, also known as a Voluntary Resolution Agreement, is between LAUSD and the OCR. The agreement will launch a district-wide revision of the

ELL program, a focus on the achievement gap of African American students and their peers, and place an emphasis on college and career preparation programs. The ELL program will have an entire transformation, with most changes in the monitoring of teachers and ELL students. The agreement does call for greater active involvement from the parents of ELL students and for African American students, the agreement will add greater attention to the educational needs of the students. To ensure that the agreement is being fulfilled, the OCR will monitor it through performance data of the students. Despite the proposed accountability measures, many are skeptical about the effectiveness of the agreement.

In the wake of the investigations into LAUSD, there has been greater internal and external scrutiny of the services in place for ELLs in other districts and states. One recent example is the state of New York. In New York City, many of the schools are not attending to the needs of students still learning English. According to state education officials, if these schools do not show signs of improvement,

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Lone Star District Turns Around with Focus on College and Career Readiness

The county of Hidalgo is a small and rural area in South Texas nestled near the Rio Grande. The town is known for its historic pump house museum and its many forested bird trails.



In addition to its historic landmarks, Hidalgo has recently gained notoriety through its standout independent school district. The district is not one that has previously been associated with academic achievement, but rather with many of the same challenges that poor districts throughout the country face. According to 2000 census data, the reported median household income in Hidalgo was \$17,841 and only 6% of residents age 25 or older had a Bachelor's degree. The community is primarily Hispanic, which is seen represented in the county's school district. Within the school district, 99% of the student population is Hispanic and 53% of those

students are English Learners. All 6 schools in the district are considered Title 1 schools. Despite low levels of education and income, students in Hidalgo County are facing a brighter future.

The school district, which serves about 3,500 students, made a historic transformation in 2005. In partnership with local Texas Universities, like the University of Texas- Pan American, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the district made all of their high schools "Early College High Schools". In Early College high schools, students simultaneously take classes to fulfill graduation requirements while also taking classes that will give

them college credits. These classes offer the rigors that a normal college class offers. There are other schools throughout the nation with similar programs; however, Hidalgo is the first to implement elements of an Early College program into all of the schools in its district. The transformation includes elementary and junior high schools in the district, as well as high schools. Many of the elementary schools have emphases on bi-lingual education, creating a quality learning environment, and a focus on getting students and parents to think about college. For example, at Salinas Elementary, where there are 24 classrooms, each of these classrooms chooses a univer-

sity to do research on. The teachers have students write to their chosen university to request information as well as school supplies with the college logos on them. The students receive t-shirts from the universities, which they then wear on a designated day, instead of their usual school uniforms. The school works closely with the parents, ensuring that they are taking the necessary steps to help their children improve their academic performance to keep them on track for college. Some of the other things being done at the elementary school include: tutoring programs in literacy and writing and having university representatives attend school as-

in the STEM fields at the local universities. Finally, when students reach the eighth grade they must enroll in a course focused on career pathways and then meet with counselors to discuss education plans for high school as well as the college courses they will take when they get to high school.

Hidalgo High, the focal point of the Hidalgo Independent School District, continues the pattern of displaying college banners and information about test dates, applications, and financial aid throughout the campus. In addition to an annual college fair, the school also holds a career fair each year. In addition to the career fair, the district has articulated

high levels. Typically, the college program served about 400 students. In the Hidalgo school district, with four elementary schools, one junior high, and one high school, there was a total of about 900 students. Although it was a challenge, the district was able to make the transition possible with the help of partnerships, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the University of Texas Pan-American, the concept of early college was applied to all the schools in the district. When implementing the changes to the school district, leaders and members of the district aimed to get everyone involved to help get support for the new program and the district and partner colleges put forth a college-going culture for students, parents, teachers and the community. Many of the families and children live in the "colonias," a rural housing area near the field where most families cannot afford computers and in some cases basic school supplies. Despite the low income, families have made a commitment to maintaining schools facilities by voting for local tax bonds to increase funding for school maintenance. As part of the district's program there is also the opportunity for the parents to further their education, the district offers classes in English, GED, and computer usage. All of this helps contribute to the overall success of the Early College program in the Hidalgo School District.

The school district graduated its first class in 2010. In the class of 2010 more than 95% of students graduated with college credit, and two-thirds of students had earned a semester or more of college credit. Continued signs of success are evident in the class of 2011, wherein a majority of students have chosen to attend four-year universities. The mission statement for the school district states that all those involved are committed to providing rigorous school curriculum and a diverse cultural learning environment that enable high school graduates to be prepared when entering college or the workforce and to become active members of a global society. The school district's success has been hailed by many, including the New York Times, The Washington Post, and U.S. News & World Report. In response to the district's success, Carlos Cardoza, treasurer of the school board, states that "That's why we call this [Hidalgo] a little treasure on the border".



semblies.

At the junior high level the focus is to shift from college attendance as an anomaly to postsecondary education as the norm. Similarly to the elementary schools, Ida Diaz Junior High — the only junior high in the district — has college banners posted everywhere. The school provides trips to the local colleges for students to get a feeling of the academic culture in a higher education setting. The trips are not just tours; they focus on different academic departments and making contact with professors. After the trips, students choose pick a subject area and prepare to take pre-AP courses in that subject. The junior high also has programs with local colleges for students who have interest in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, students have the opportunity to participate in labs and classes

agreements with local community and technical colleges, for students who choose a more immediate career path. The articulation agreements allow a student's college credit from high school to be transferred to community and technical colleges and result in a certificate. The focus on education and career gives students a variety of post-secondary options. The dual focus on 4-year universities and technical career options has increased the number of Latino students going on to institutions of higher education.

The initiative to get the entire school district under the Early College program was met with one major barrier: programs of this type had not been designed to serve all schools, and all students, within a district. These programs were only done at the high school level and had never been implemented at the elementary and junior

Sources

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What's Up in Washington

It's a busy time here in our nation's capital. Here's a brief look at what's happening with reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Pell grants, and other activities of the Department of Education:

ESEA:

As Congress continues to fail to reauthorize the ESEA (currently known as No Child Left Behind), the Department of Education prepares to grant states waivers from some of the law's provisions. The purpose of these waivers is to allow states flexibility with regard to meeting the requirements of current law. As of November 3, 2011, 39 States, D.C. and Puerto Rico had submitted their intent to apply for waivers. They may do so in either of two periods — the first deadline is November 14th and the second will be in mid-February of 2012. Recently, the Alliance for Excellent Education — a partner in the Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE) — hosted a [webinar](#) to provide details on the waiver process. Information is also available on the Department of Education's [website](#), and CHSE has created a [toolkit](#) for local advocates.

Pell:

Six U. S. senators and six members of the U.S. House of Representatives — who make up what's known as the Supercommittee — face a November 23 deadline to cut the deficit by a staggering \$1.5 trillion. Pell Grants help millions earn their way into the middle class and strengthen our economy, yet Pell is a prime target for crippling cuts. Cutting Pell now would cut short the college careers of millions of students and hurt our nation's economy. These cuts would come at a significant cost to Latino students. During academic year 2007–2008, more than 39% of Hispanic undergraduate students received Pell awards, representing 20% of all Pell recipients that year. Visit LULAC's [action center](#) to contact your Members of Congress today!



ED:

The Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Defense, has released a new tool intended to enable existing educational portals and online systems to publish, consume and share important information about learning resources with each other and the public, while respecting the privacy of individual users. It is the hope of the Department of Education that this tool, called the "Learning Registry," serves as an open source community and technology to improve the quality and availability of learning resources in education. To learn more, visit the Registry website at www.learnin-gregistry.org.

Rights of English Language Learners Violated in L.A.

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they will face sanctions. Data collected in 2010 showed that only 7% of ELL students in the city were able to graduate on time and ready for college or jobs. Within K-12, only 12% of ELL students in the lower grades were proficient in English and 35% were proficient in math. On October 13th the city released a 31-page pledge for improvement, which essentially showed that the city had not been providing services and was therefore in violation of students' rights. The pledge includes a plan to start 125 new bilingual programs in schools over the course of the next three years. Similar to the resolution in Los Angeles, where teachers will be held accountable for carrying out the terms of the resolution, New York State will hold principals accountable. But with no money set aside for the initiative, the city will be forced to rely on existing resources in its cash-poor budget, making fidelity of implementation a concern.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has been increasingly active in recent years, which is a positive step toward greater compliance, but is also a sad indication of many students' experiences, that have not changed much since the Civil Rights Act was passed. It is also important to note that even the best intentions will not result in meaningful change if states and districts lack the political will, leadership, and resources to make the necessary adjustments.

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Endnote

1. See article from 10/11/11: "LAUSD agrees to revise how English learners, blacks are taught" at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-1012-lausd-feds-20111011,0,4458591.story?track=rss>



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