

Skills for the New Economy: Preparing Students for College and Careers

President Obama has encouraged all Americans to commit to at least one year of higher education or career training and has set the ambitious goal that America will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. Reaching this goal is crucial if we are to maintain our economic competitiveness. The United States is often outranked in the rigor and relevance of the education provided to young people in their middle and high school years, with many nations offering the opportunity to enroll in educational programs that develop more of the skills essential for college and career success. In a time of intense global economic competition and increasing income inequality, the United States must find innovative and cost-effective ways to help students and adult learners gain the education and credentials they need to participate fully in our economy and society – recognizing that many lack the basic foundation skills necessary to do so.

The President's 2015 budget request proposes investments that promote innovation and collaboration among secondary and postsecondary education, business and industry so that students gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in today's economy.

- **High School Redesign (\$150 million).** The budget supports a new competition that will fund competitive grants to school districts and their partners to redesign high schools in innovative ways that better prepare students for college and career success so that all students graduate from high school with college credit and career-related experiences or competencies, obtained through project or problem-based learning, real-world challenges, and organized internships and mentorships. Grantees would work to: (1) align academic content and instructional practices more closely with postsecondary education and careers; (2) personalize learning opportunities to support the educational needs and interests of individual students; (3) provide academic and wrap-around support services for those students who need them; (4) make available high-quality career and college exploration and counseling on options for students after high school graduation; (5) offer multiple opportunities to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school; and (6) strategically use learning time in more meaningful ways, such as through technology, a redesigned school day or calendar, or competency-based progressions.
- **Skills Challenge Grants (\$20 million).** The budget provides an additional \$20 million through the Adult Education program for competitive grants to partnerships—among States, adult education providers, institutions of higher education, private organizations, and industry—to support innovative and effective adult education models. These grants would scale up evidence-based programs that combine basic skills education with training and improve alignment of services so that participants have access to high-quality programs that equip them with the skills necessary to find jobs in high-demand fields or transition into credit-bearing postsecondary education and training.
- **Improving students' non-cognitive skills (\$10 million).** The President's budget would provide competitive grants to district and research partnerships to improve students' non-cognitive skills in the middle grades, which are foundational to students' academic achievement and life success. The middle grades are a critical time in students' academic trajectories: during this period, many children lose interest in, engagement with, and motivation for academic work, increasing the likelihood of dropping out of high school. This initiative would support the development and testing of non-cognitive interventions, which research suggests can have as much, if not more, impact on students' grades and perseverance than academic interventions.

- **STEM Innovation Networks (\$110 million).** This program would provide competitive awards to LEAs in partnership with institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, other public agencies, and businesses to transform STEM teaching and learning by accelerating the adoption of practices in P-12 education that help increase the number of students who seek out and are effectively prepared for postsecondary education and careers in STEM fields.
- **Reauthorized Perkins Career and Technical Education program (\$1.1 billion).** The President's budget would fund a reauthorized Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The reauthorization proposal will strengthen alignment among secondary and postsecondary CTE programs and business and industry; create a better accountability system for improving academic outcomes, technical skills, and employability outcomes; and provide competitive funding to promote innovation and reform in CTE.
- **Getting students through middle school and into college (\$1.1 billion).** This investment will support the GEAR UP and TRIO programs, which provide intensive services to students in middle school through college. GEAR UP, which serves students beginning in the middle grades, provides early college preparation and awareness activities to entire cohorts of students at individual schools to help them set on a path to higher education. The 2014 GEAR UP competition will encourage projects that provide students more customized college application and selection counseling and that are designed to assist students at risk of needing remediation. The TRIO programs, which include Upward Bound and Talent Search, play an important role in supporting low-income, first generation students' access and success in postsecondary education. The 2015 request would continue the Department's efforts to expand the reach of TRIO projects and expand their effects on schools that need the greatest help in sending more students on to college.
- **College Pathways and Accelerated Learning (\$74.8 million).** This program will increase graduation rates and college enrollment and success by providing college-level and other accelerated courses and instruction in low-income middle schools and high schools, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.