

Innovation in Higher Education

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you today.

It is an honor to support Results for America's recent report "Moneyball for Education: How federal leaders can use data and evidence to improve student outcomes", and to make brief remarks on the need for innovation in higher education.

As a proud University of Michigan alum, I can confidently say that America's research universities are the finest in the world.

The ideas generated, and the research performed, within our institutions of higher education are unparalleled anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, though, we know that not every American will experience the full range of opportunities that our very best institutions offer, and that many students in America – even if they make it to college – may not complete their course of study.

It is imperative that policy makers and policy experts do more to reach these students and to ensure that every American

who wants to go to college can, and that every student who begins a course of study can complete it.

We know that a college degree remains one of the best tickets for social mobility in America, and that a graduate with an Associate's degree can expect to earn almost 400 thousand more dollars over her career than one of her colleagues without a college education. We also know that a student with a bachelor's degree can earn almost a million more dollars over their lifetime.

Unfortunately, however, many students start on the path toward the goal of college completion only to find themselves with partial credit and unmanageable debt several years later.

I am here to say that this is not necessarily a problem without a solution. Some colleges are succeeding in educating students who may be more likely to drop-out than others, and they are doing so much more effectively than other institutions. They are also doing so in a manner that is heavily data-driven.

Take, for instance, the City University of New York in my hometown of New York City.

They launched a pilot program in 2007 called the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (or ASAP) that nearly doubled

the rate of community college graduations from 20 percent to 40 percent in just 3 years.

CUNY accomplished this through a heavily data-driven approach that provided dedicated advisors and academic support to targeted students, covered the cost of travel to class and textbook purchases, and provided students with referrals to childcare and social services when needed.

While more expensive per student per year than the standard track, experience has shown that by the time an ASAP student graduates the total cost of educating that student actually ended up being cheaper than their average non-ASAP peer who graduates from CUNY.

I am thrilled to see the many wonderful ways that ASAP has worked for CUNY, and to report that the program has now been scaled up to support 21,000 CUNY students. It is even being adapted and scaled to work in other community colleges around the country.

I cannot stress how important these results are.

Community colleges enroll nearly half of all undergraduate students and the majority of all undergraduate students of color. If the future of America lies with these students – and it does – access to college is not enough. Access means little without degree completion.

With that in mind, and in an effort to extend the successes of ASAP to other institutions who wish to replicate it, I have introduced H.R. 2960, the “Community College Student Success Act”.

This legislation is modeled directly after the ASAP program at CUNY, and would enable targeted students to be provided with dedicated advisors and academic support, cover the cost of travel to class and textbooks, and provide referrals to childcare and social services when needed.

The Community College Student Success Act would provide funding to public community colleges across the country, with priority given to under-resourced colleges with high percentages of low-income and minority student populations.

This funding would directly assist institutions in developing and implementing their own data-driven programs that boost degree completion through the provision of comprehensive support services.

It is my hope that as Congress continues to engage in discussions regarding its current rewrite of the Higher Education Act, that it will seriously consider approaches such as ASAP and what my bill seeks to support.

Evidence-based social policy making should ALWAYS be our preferred course of action instead of rote adherence to ideological doctrine.

American students' futures depend on the policies and programs we support. And the future of higher education may as well.

Polls have begun to show that many Americans are becoming increasingly skeptical of the value of a college degree.

According to a poll published in the Wall Street Journal this past September, only 49 percent of Americans believe that earning a four-year degree will lead to a good job and higher lifetime earnings. That skepticism is particularly strong among white working-class voters. 57 percent of them believe that attending college will “result in more debt and little likelihood of landing a good paying job.”

If these trends continue, the support that higher education has enjoyed among the American public since the passage of the GI Bill may continue to erode. And if that happens, the next Higher Education Act reauthorization could make our current efforts look quaint in comparison.

If we are to avoid this path toward the jeopardization of the entire higher education enterprise, federal policy must

support innovative and evidence-based solutions that lead to quicker completion rates with far less debt.

We must identify what works and what does not, and we must pursue some of the paths that you will no doubt discuss on today's incredible panel.

As the mother of two young boys who will attend college a decade from now, I thank you for the discussions you will have this morning and for allowing me to speak.

Thank you.