



October 20, 2021

Honorable Robert C. Scott  
Chair  
U.S. House Committee on Education  
and Labor  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Education  
and Labor  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, & Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable. Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor, & Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Scott and Murray and Ranking Members Foxx and Burr:

On behalf of our local, state, and national organizations committed to building and using evidence and data to improve outcomes, we are writing to express our support for the evidence-based policy provisions contained in the *Build Back Better Act* advanced by the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor on September 10th. Further, as this bill continues to move through the legislative process, we submit recommendations for strengthening the impact of the investment without adding additional funding by enhancing the evidence provisions.

One of the most significant shifts in federal policy in the last ten years has been the commitment to building and using evidence and data to improve outcomes. We urge you to continue this trend in the *Build Back Better Act* so that this historic package will continue to build knowledge and evidence about effective programs.

The following provisions contained in the House legislation must be maintained throughout the legislative process as they will improve the impact of these investments:

1. **Retention and Completion Grants.** The House bill authorizes \$9 billion for retention and completion grants to devote federal dollars to scaling evidence-based college completion efforts. In addition to its core goal of complementing major federal investments in higher education access by helping more students to attain a degree or credential, the proposed program would set aside 30% of funds for interventions that meet moderate and strong levels of evidence, with two-thirds going to the highest tier. The proposed program would also set aside 3% of state-level funds for evaluation to build the evidence base of what works.
2. **Community College and Industry Partnership Grants.** The House bill authorizes \$2 billion for community college and industry partnership grants that would establish,

improve, or scale high-quality, evidence-based education and training programs and work-based learning programs.

3. **Industry or Sector Partnership Grants.** The House bill authorizes \$10 billion for industry or sector partnership grants and requires that not less than 50% of these funds be used to provide or arrange to provide high-quality, evidence-based training in the sector or occupation.
4. **Direct Care Workforce Grants.** The House bill authorizes grants to support the direct care workforce and inserted the term “evidence-based” five times throughout in order to encourage state and local grantees to use evidence-based approaches to providing childcare and developing the childcare workforce.

Additionally, we urge you to make the following improvements to the bill that would help ensure federal programs deliver results for the American people by strengthening the evidence provisions in the House bill.

**Recommendation #1: Maintain and improve college retention and completion grants.**

*The recommendations below are consistent with recommendations made by a coalition of policy, advocacy, and research organizations that [support evidence-based student success initiatives](#) (Education Trust, IHEP, New America Higher Education Program, Results for America State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, Third Way, TICAS, and The Center for American Progress).*

**Recommendation 1.1:** Maintain \$9 billion for retention and completion grants but revise the House language to require that 50% of funds be set aside for programs that meet the two highest levels of evidence (top: expansion grants, second-tier: mid-phase grants).

**Rationale:** States will likely face pressure to spend any funds not covered by the set-aside on other, possibly weaker interventions. Thus, we urge the Committee to raise the set-aside to 50% to ensure that at least half of grant dollars are invested in programs that are likely to achieve the most impact for students and be the best use of taxpayer funds.

**Recommendation 1.2:** Maintain \$9 billion for retention and completion grants but authorize the U.S. Secretary of Education to set aside 1% of funds at the national level to evaluate initiatives that are not included in the evidence-based set-aside.

**Rationale:** This proposal would enable policymakers and educators to build the evidence base about what works in college persistence and completion as well as labor market outcomes and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of federal dollars.

**Recommendation #2: Set aside 1% of each funding stream to invest in research and knowledge building related to those programs.**

Authorize the relevant federal agency, overseeing each major program in the legislation, to set aside 1% of national-level program funds for relevant research, evaluation, evaluation capacity building, knowledge building, and promoting the utilization of evidence-based programs and practices by state and local grantees.

**Rationale:** Most federal programs are [rarely if ever, evaluated](#) to determine if they are meeting the need and how to improve them. According to a [2017 study](#) by the Government Accountability Office, only 40% of federal program managers reported an evaluation had been completed on any program they managed over the previous 5 years. The Committee

is considering authorizing billions of dollars in federal spending; evaluation can help ensure that the intended outcomes are being met, provide recommendations for how to improve services, and build evidence of what works to make significant progress toward community outcomes. Such an [evaluation set aside](#) was included in the *Childcare and Development Block Grant Act of 2014* and the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*. Annual appropriations bills since FY12 have also [authorized](#) the U.S. Department of Labor to set aside funds, across programs, for evaluation.

**Recommendation #3: Apply an evidence definition to additional grant programs in K-12 education and workforce training.**

Several recent laws have defined the term “evidence-based” and then applied it to various grant programs, requiring that some or all federal grant funds be spent on evidence-based programs or practices. These include the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (CTE Act)*, and *Juvenile Justice Reform Act*. The House bill included the definition from both *ESSA* and the *CTE Act*. We urge you to apply these definitions specifically to the programs below to ensure that federal dollars are spent on proven solutions that are likely to generate better results.

**K-12 EDUCATION**

**Recommendation 3.1:** Maintain \$198 million for teacher residency programs but specify that programs should be evidence-based as defined in *ESSA*. And set-aside 50% of funds for programs meeting the strong (tier 1) or moderate (tier 2) levels of evidence in *ESSA*.

**Rationale:** The [evidence base](#) for teacher residency programs, including a [2015 report](#) by the Institute of Education Sciences, is growing and strong enough to merit directing funds to programs that meet the *ESSA* definition, including half of the funds for the top levels. The *ESSA* definition is tiered and includes a lower level of evidence that allows for innovation and programs not yet meeting the requirements. Consistent with the direction of Congressional action, the Higher Education Act, which the House bill references to define residency programs, already specifies that programs should be “based upon models of successful teaching residencies” and that residents receive “effective preservice preparation.”

**Recommendation 3.2:** Maintain \$198 million for school leadership programs but specify that programs should be evidence-based as defined in *ESSA*. And set-aside 25% of funds for interventions meeting the strong (tier 1) or moderate (tier 2) levels of evidence in *ESSA*.

**Rationale:** The [evidence base](#) for school leadership programs is growing and strong enough to merit directing funds to programs that meet the *ESSA* definition, including half of the funds for the top levels. The *ESSA* definition is tiered and includes a lower level of evidence that allows for innovation and programs not yet meeting the requirements. Further, *ESSA* already includes a priority for programs that have a demonstrated track record of improving outcomes and already encourages grantees to use funds on evidence-based programs and activities.

**WORKFORCE**

**Recommendation 3.3:** Maintain \$3.6 billion for reentry employment opportunities but specify that programs should be evidence-based as already defined in the *CTE Act*. And set aside 25% of funds for programs meeting the highest two levels of evidence.

**Rationale:** The evidence base for reentry programs is quite strong and merits directing funds to [programs that meet the ESSA definition](#), including 25% of funds for the top levels. The ESSA definition is tiered and includes a lower level of evidence that allows for innovation and programs not yet meeting the requirements. Further, the U.S. Department of Labor's existing Reentry Projects grant already provides preference points based on past performance.

**Recommendation 3.4:** Maintain \$5 billion for registered apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships, and pre-apprenticeships, but require the U.S. Secretary of Labor to give a priority to applicants who can demonstrate their programs meet the highest two levels of evidence as defined in the *CTE Act*.

**Rationale:** The evidence base for apprenticeship programs is moderate and growing. [Evidence-based models](#) such as Per Scholas or the Urban Alliance high school internship program provide significant positive results for their clients. A priority would direct funding toward proven models like these and create an incentive for other models to improve their evidence base.

**Recommendation 3.5:** Maintain \$1.305 billion for national service programs but require the CEO of AmeriCorps to give a priority to new grant applicants who can demonstrate their programs meet the [highest two levels of evidence](#) as defined by the Social Innovation Fund.

**Rationale:** The evidence base for national service programs is moderate and growing thanks to past investments in the Social Innovation Fund. A priority would direct funding toward proven models and create an incentive for other models to improve their evidence base. Further, under the [AmeriCorps state and national grants program](#), the agency already allocates up to 44 out of 100 points to organizations that submit applications supported by performance and evaluation data, including up to 20 points for an applicant's incoming level of evidence and the quality of the evidence.

**Recommendation #4: Authorize results-based contracting.**

Authorize the relevant federal agency, overseeing each major program in the legislation, to use federal funds for results-based contracting that conditions receipt of funds on achieving agreed-upon outcomes thus paying for results rather than inputs.

**Rationale:** State and local grantees frequently sub-grant federal funds or use some type of contracting process with another entity. Results-based contracting focuses those sub-grants on outcomes rather than inputs. Our recommendation would not require grant recipients to utilize results-based contracting but merely allows them to do so if they choose, serving as a moderate incentive. Such an approach has already been taken in the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014* and the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)*.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. Please contact Nichole Dunn at [nichole@results4america.org](mailto:nichole@results4america.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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