



BILL SUMMARY

EDUCATION & THE WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

H.R. 1949, The Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act

In recent years, the federal government has taken steps to improve data collection and transparency in the higher education system. Under Republican leadership, the 2008 reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* included several provisions to provide students and their families with the information needed to make informed decisions about their postsecondary education opportunities.

For the first time, the law required colleges and universities to make information about price, financial aid, and basic facts and figures, such as demographics and graduation rates, readily available to the public. Students also have access to a number of products designed to help them learn about their higher education options, including the College Navigator, financial aid shopping sheets, net price calculators, and the College Scorecard.

While many of these initiatives are helpful resources, students still report confusion when researching their postsecondary education options and trying to choose a college or university that is best for their unique situation. Meanwhile, higher education leaders have raised concerns about the overwhelming amount of federal data and reporting requirements, some of which are duplicative of state and local efforts and partially contribute to the increase in college costs.

To help shine a spotlight on the challenges and opportunities in higher education transparency, Rep. Luke Messer (R-IN) introduced the *Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act* (H.R. 1949). The bill directs the Department of Education to convene an Advisory Committee on Improving Postsecondary Education Data to conduct a study on the factors students and families want, need, and already consider when choosing a higher education institution. The legislation directs the advisory committee to issue its recommendations within a year of enactment to assist congressional efforts to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act*. The bill recently passed the Committee on Education and the Workforce by voice vote.

Evaluating Current Efforts before Layering More Requirements

The *Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act* requires the advisory committee to review existing federal, state, institutional, and private-sector transparency initiatives to determine which programs are most helpful to students as they research their postsecondary education options. The legislation specifically directs the advisory committee to explore opportunities to provide better, more consistent and effective data to the public, while also identifying data that is no longer useful and should be considered for elimination.

Making Higher Education Data Relevant for Today's Students

The dynamics of higher education have shifted dramatically. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), non-traditional students now make up around 70 percent of all undergraduates. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years; in

fact, NCES expects enrollments of students older than 25 to rise by 20 percent between 2010 and 2020. The *Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act* requires the advisory committee to examine both traditional and non-traditional students, including student veterans, and determine the information each group wants and needs to assist their search for the right higher education institution. The legislation also directs the advisory committee to solicit feedback from students and families.

In recent years, states, researchers, business leaders, and Members of Congress have discussed the possibility of reporting the salaries of college graduates from public and private universities. To that end, the *Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act* requires the advisory committee to explore the feasibility of reporting post-graduation earnings data and whether that information will improve the usefulness of federal transparency initiatives for students and their families. The legislation also instructs the advisory committee to consider the effect such information will have on student privacy.

The advisory committee's report will assist the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's efforts to reauthorize the *Higher Education Act*. During this process, the committee plans to take a comprehensive approach to maintaining and strengthening the information found to be most useful to students, families, and taxpayers while streamlining the regulatory and reporting burden imposed on institutions of higher education.