
The Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act

To help strengthen higher education for students and families, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and Reps. Luke Messer (R-IN) and Gregorio Sablan (D-MP) introduced the *Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act*. The legislation (H.R. 3178) will help students and families make informed decisions about their higher education options by:

- Ensuring straightforward and useful information is easily accessible to students;
- Delivering higher education data that includes the entire college going population;
- Improving coordination between federal agencies that publish information about colleges and universities.

Ensuring Straightforward and Useful College Data

The deluge of available information is often conflicting and confusing for students and families trying to make informed decisions about their higher education options. The *Higher Education Act* (HEA) alone requires that 26 different categories of information be available on the College Navigator, as well as the College Affordability and Transparency Lists, the State Spending Charts, and the Multi-year Tuition Calculator. This information is in addition to data being pushed by various federal entities, such as the College Scorecard and the Paying for College tool.

The *Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act* will begin to streamline the overwhelming maze of information with a consumer-tested College Dashboard. The College Dashboard will provide students with key pieces of information on enrollment, completion, net price, and average loan debt. The College Dashboard will also include wage data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and ensure most information is provided in disaggregated form. Additionally, the legislation will allow students to easily compare institutions as they make their college decisions and require the Secretary of Education to provide a link to the College Dashboard page for each institution listed on a student's FAFSA form.

Making Higher Education Data Relevant for Contemporary Students

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "non-traditional" or contemporary students now make up more than half of all undergraduate students. These students tend to be older, have families or jobs, and often go to school part-time or have previous college experience. However, the secretary of education is only required to publish information regarding first-time students who attend classes full-time – ignoring the majority of the current college population. In order to ensure the federal government provides a complete picture of the higher education landscape, the *Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act* requires the commissioner of education statistics to ensure completion data is reflective all of students, both traditional and contemporary students alike.

Improving Coordination Among Federal Agencies

To avoid duplication and reduce confusion for students, the *Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act* directs the secretary of education to coordinate with other federal agencies to ensure all published higher education data is consistent with information available on the College Dashboard.

Improving Institutional Net Price Calculators

The *Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act* improves current policies governing net price calculators. Specifically, the bill requires that net price calculators be easily identifiable and prominently posted on institutions' websites where other cost and student aid information is already available. Calculators must include information on cost of attendance, available grant aid, and veterans' educational benefits. The legislation prohibits any personally identifiable information provided by users from being sold or made available to third parties.