
The Accessing Higher Education Opportunities Act

Congress created the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) program in the *Higher Education Act* to help promote access to education opportunities for Hispanic students and help HSIs increase the quality of education provided to their students. There are now more than 400 HSIs, and the number of Hispanic students aged 18 to 24 enrolled in a two- or four-year college has more than tripled since 1993.

Still, the Hispanic population remains largely underrepresented in various industries, particularly in the health care field. More can be done to prepare students for careers in this field and provide greater access to postsecondary education more broadly.

To enhance existing support for institutions serving Hispanic students, Reps. Joe Heck (R-NV), Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX), and Raul Ruiz (D-CA) introduced the *Accessing Higher Education Opportunities Act* (H.R. 5529), which will promote access to graduate-level education and encourage Hispanic students to pursue doctoral degree programs in health care. This bill also allows HSIs to partner with local school districts to start or enhance dual enrollment opportunities and early college high school programs, which will help Hispanic students gain acceptance to college and earn college credits earlier in their academic career. When Hispanic students are able to successfully complete college, the chance of them obtaining a post-baccalaureate degree increases. The legislation will:

Encourage Doctoral Degrees in Health Care

The bill will increase the flexibility of current law to allow HSIs to use their funds to encourage post-baccalaureate students to enroll in doctoral degree programs that prepare students for health care occupations. Funds could be used for purposes such as mentoring, counseling, advising, and other student support services specifically designed for successful enrollment in doctoral programs in the health care field.

Promote College Access

Grants awarded to HSIs allow for a number of activities to improve the institution's capacity to serve Hispanic students. The legislation will improve the current list of options to allow these funds to support developing or growing dual enrollment programs. Concurrent enrollment affords students the opportunity to earn college credit while still attending secondary school. This early access to higher education will help more Hispanic students complete a postsecondary degree.