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President Obama Proposes Bold Steps to Ensure College Access and Success

(Oakland, CA) – We applaud the bold steps the President announced today to ensure college access and success for all Americans. The President’s plan continues to invest in Pell Grants and need-based student assistance that enable millions of students to attend and complete college and limit their student debt. It also provides incentives for states and colleges to prioritize affordability and student success and ensures students and families have the tools they need to make informed decisions about where to go to college.

Using the savings from reforming the student loan program, the President’s plan increases the maximum Pell Grant to \$5,635 next year. However, even with this increase, the maximum grant is projected to cover less than one-third of the cost of attending a four-year public college this fall--the lowest share in the history of the program. This underscores the need to do more, not less, to keep college within reach.

As we proposed in our 2009 [recommendations](#) for retooling the Perkins Loan program, the President’s plan reallocates the Perkins and other federal campus-based dollars to reward colleges for prioritizing affordability and student success. The details of how this is done will matter and great care will be required to achieve the intended goals. Yet college costs are rising faster than family incomes and grant aid, and student debt is at record levels, so we cannot afford to continue on the current path. With three-quarters of all students enrolled in public colleges, the blueprint also creates important incentives for states to do their part to keep college affordable while improving student outcomes.

Importantly, the plan also provides students and families with the information they need to make good decisions about where to go to college and how to pay for it. A college education is one of the biggest investments students and families make, and having clear and comparable information about costs and outcomes is an absolute necessity.

With higher education increasingly important in today’s economy, the President’s plan acknowledges the shared responsibility for keeping it within reach. By continuing to invest in Pell Grants, other need-based student aid, and well-targeted tax credits, keeping student loans affordable and manageable, and helping college hopefuls be smart consumers, the plan takes steps that directly impact college affordability for millions of American families.

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An independent, nonprofit organization, the Institute for College Access & Success works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. The Institute’s Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. For more information see www.projectonstudentdebt.org and www.ticas.org.