NCHER DAILY BRIEFING

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In Today's Edition

- SAVE THE DATE: NCHER Legislative and Leadership Conference to be Held January 31–February 2, 2022 in Washington, DC!
- Department of Education OIG Releases Annual Report for FY2022
- AEI Report on Gaps in Education Data
- TICAS Releases Report on Student Debt and the Class of 2020
- U.S. Department of Education News
- General News

SAVE THE DATE: NCHER Legislative and Leadership Conference to be Held January 31–February 2, 2022 in Washington, DC!

NCHER will hold its annual Legislative and Leadership Conference on January 31–February 2, 2022, in Washington, DC. The conference, which will be in-person, is open and designed for everyone across the higher education finance industry and will provide important and timely sessions on the political and policy environment in Congress and the Biden Administration. The conference will provide attendees with ample opportunities to network and learn, and allow time for our members to meet with their Congressional delegations on Capitol Hill. The NCHER staff is currently working on a draft program agenda that will be released in the coming weeks; in the meantime, register today and take advantage of the Early Bird registration rate. Also, be sure to make your reservations at the Hotel Washington online or by calling (202) 661-2400. When calling the hotel, be sure to mention the NCHER Legislative Conference in order to guarantee a room rate of $265 per room, per night.

We look forward to seeing you in-person in Washington, DC!

Department of Education OIG Releases Annual Report for FY2022

This week, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Inspector General (OIG) released its **Annual Report** for Fiscal Year 2022. The report outlines the OIG's plans to conduct oversight over the Office of Federal Student Aid's (FSA) processes to transition federal student loan borrowers back into repayment after the expiration of the relief measures implemented in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and evaluate FSA processes for waiving the return of Title IV funds for students who withdrew because of the pandemic, canceling Direct Loans for students who withdrew because of the pandemic, and excluding students' subsidized loan usage and Pell Grant lifetime usage for any payment periods that the students did not complete because of the pandemic. OIG will also determine FSA's processes for overseeing proprietary school compliance with 90/10 revenue requirements and reporting 90/10 revenue information to Congress, and determine the extent to which FSA maintained information on which schools provide career pathway programs, reviewed the eligibility of career pathway programs through program reviews and compliance audits, and identified and ensured correction of any program weaknesses. Finally, the report said that the OIG will determine whether FSA has processes for planning and managing the transition to the Next Generation Financial Services Environment to achieve the project's intended outcomes.

AEI Report on Gaps in Education Data

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) released a report titled "**Bridging the Gaps in Education Data**." According to the report, over the past two decades, education underwent a "big data" revolution as states began tracking individual student performance and interim assessments and educational software allowed for a greater granularity of data on students, teachers, and schools. Despite this plethora of new data, considerable gaps in data on early childhood education, school spending, student program and intervention, and postsecondary outcomes remain. The author says that dissatisfaction with education data will never fully disappear due to technical gaps between what policymakers and researchers would like to measure and what can be measured, as well as normative disagreements about what data should be collected. The report states that policymakers should focus on closing the gaps they can while also recognizing the technical and normative constraints on educational measurement.

TICAS Releases Report on Student Debt and the Class of 2020

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS) recently released a **report** on the student loan debt of recent graduates from four-year colleges, documenting changes and variation in student debt across states and colleges. The report found that state averages for debt at graduation in 2020 ranged from $18,350 (Utah) to $39,950 (New Hampshire), and new graduates' likelihood of having debt varied from 39 percent (Utah) to 73 percent (South Dakota). In 19 states, average student loan debt was more than $30,000; it was over $35,000 in six states. As with previous reports, many of the same states appear at the high and low ends of the spectrum. High-debt states remain concentrated in the Northeast and low-debt states are mainly in the West. TICAS included federal policy recommendations to reduce debt and manage repayment in the wake of COVID-19 and beyond.

These include the following:

- Federal Policy. When COVID-19 emergency federal benefits end in early 2022, many borrowers may still be facing pandemic-related economic hardship. The U.S. Department of Education must make a robust plan to ensure borrowers will be protected during this transition, especially as this transition coincides with major shifts in the servicing system. Federal policymakers should ensure borrowers are protected when COVID-19 emergency benefits end, reform the student loan repayment system, fund public colleges sustainably and equitably, increase need-based aid, better protect private loan borrowers, tighten institutional accountability, and improve data infrastructure and transparency to shine a brighter light on student outcomes.
- State policy. Continued state investment and strong oversight, particularly to address educational quality and persistent equity gaps, is critical to make college more affordable and help more students graduate. State policymakers should allocate available state grant aid based on need, exempt forgiven amounts of federal student loans from state income tax, set institutional accountability standards for schools that receive state grant aid, develop or improve state-level longitudinal data systems, promote awareness of income-driven repayment plans, and require colleges within their state to adopt strategies to help reduce the burden of student debt.

- Institutional practices. Colleges should consider several options to increase college affordability and reduce student debt. These include protecting access to federal student loans, providing counseling for students seeking private loans, developing and providing supplemental counseling and information, and ensuring that net price calculators are easy to find, use, and compare.

U.S. Department of Education News

For today's *Federal Register*, click here.

The following announcement was posted to Federal Student Aid's Knowledge Center:

– **(APP-21-24) 2022–2023 Application Processing System Specifications for Software Developers (Final)**

General News

Inside Higher Ed explains how college students are taking on more private education loan debt than ever before, with private loans now comprising nearly 8 percent of all student debt and suggests the trend is primarily fueled by an increase in loans taken out by undergraduate students.

Business Insider reports that federalist society lawyers have gathered in Washington, DC to discuss the ramifications of cancel culture on college campuses.

Inside Higher Ed shares that college and university health teams have been on high alert due to the enduring possibility of a COVID-19 outbreak this fall, and now they are also working to prevent the spread of influenza as students prepare to return home for Thanksgiving.

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