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D **AILY BRIEFING**

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The NCHER Weekly Rundown, which includes the latest information on important events in Washington, DC, is available today and can be downloaded from the [NCHER website](#).

Department of Education Announces Upcoming Public Hearings on Negotiated Rulemaking

Today, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education [announced](#) that it will hold virtual public hearings on June 21, 23, and 24, 2021 to receive stakeholder feedback on potential topics for action by a negotiated rulemaking committee, which could include improving federal rules governing targeted student loan cancellation authorities for borrowers engaged in public service, with disabilities, or whose institutions close, among other topics. According to the press release, the process of issuing new regulations reflects "the Department's commitment to serving students and borrowers well and protecting them from harmful programs and practices that may derail their postsecondary and career goals." The announcement says that it is interested in comments on regulations that would address gaps in postsecondary outcomes, such as retention, completion, student loan repayment, and loan default, and specific consideration will be given to proposals that address disparate impacts by income, race/ethnicity, gender, and other demographic characteristics.

The Department suggests the following topics for regulation in the hearing notice:

- Ability to benefit;
- Borrower defense to repayment;
- Certification procedures for participation in federal financial aid programs;
- Change of ownership and change in control of institutions of higher education;
- Closed school discharges;
- Discharges for borrowers with a total and permanent disability;

- Discharges for false certification of student eligibility;
- Financial responsibility for participating institutions of higher education, such as events that indicate heightened financial risk;
- Gainful employment;
- Income-contingent loan repayment plans;
- Mandatory pre-dispute arbitration and prohibition of class action lawsuits provisions in institutions' enrollment agreements;
- Pell Grant eligibility for prison education programs;
- Public service loan forgiveness; and
- Standards of administrative capability.

Following the public hearings, the Department will solicit nominations for non-federal negotiators who can serve on the negotiated rulemaking committees, which will convene in late summer 2021. For additional coverage, see this article from [Forbes](#).

Sens. Warren, Smith, Van Hollen, and Blumenthal Send Letter to Education Secretary Cardona Requesting More Information on Restarting Student Loan Payments and Loan Servicing

Last week, Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Tina Smith (D-MN), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) sent a [letter](#) to Education Secretary Miguel Cardona requesting information on how the U.S. Department of Education plans to restart the monthly payments of millions of federal student loan borrowers when COVID-19 pandemic relief is set to expire this fall. "The COVID-19 economic recovery has so far been 'K-shaped, meaning that unemployment and financial stress have disproportionately hurt those who were already struggling before the pandemic," the letter said. While the pause on student loan payments and interest has been extremely valuable in keeping student loan borrowers afloat during this crisis, it is currently slated to expire at the end of September, only a few weeks after the enhanced unemployment benefits run out. Cancelling \$50,000 in student loan debt would dramatically lighten this burden and entirely eliminate student debt for 84 percent of borrowers, but even this major step toward relief would still leave millions of borrowers facing the resumption of payments in the fall. During the pandemic, borrowers have reported confusion about how pandemic assistance provisions apply to them, suggesting that proactive steps prior to the end of the payment pause are needed to prevent them from falling through the cracks. Currently, little is publicly known about how loan servicers have supported borrowers during the pandemic or how they are preparing for payments to resume."

The senators asked Secretary Cardona to explain whether the Department plans to extend the existing contracts with its federal student loan servicers that are set to expire at the end of the year, and whether he will commit to a new loan servicing system that includes "specific, outcome-based incentives for effective loan management and customer service" with penalties for companies that do not meet the standards. They also requested that the Department detail how many borrowers, broken down by servicer, successfully received various forms of existing relief and loan forgiveness during the pandemic, the current status timeline for the Next Generation Financial Services Environment, the number of bankruptcy claims that are currently pending, and if the Department will commit to cease contesting undue hardship petitions.

Sens. Hassan and Young Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Help High School Students Earn College Credit

Last week, Sens. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Todd Young (R-IN) reintroduced the [Fast Track to and Through College Act](#), which would create a grant program aimed at helping more students earn college

credits while still in high school such as early college programs. The bill includes the following components:

- Allows students enrolled in early college programs to take as much as a full year of early college courses toward their postsecondary degree or credential;
- Ensures that students receive credit for the classes that they take by requiring public colleges and universities to accept credit from early college programs; and
- Expands access to the programs by allowing Pell Grants to cover dual-enrollment costs for low-income, Pell-eligible students in states receiving a fast-track grant.

“We must do all that we can to ensure that our students are given the opportunity to gain the skills that will help them thrive in our modern economy,” Sen. Hassan said in a press release. “The bipartisan Fast Track to and Through College Act will better prepare students for higher education while also helping to make college more affordable.” Similarly, Sen. Young stated, “Early college programs help families avoid college debt while preparing students for postsecondary education. In Indiana, we have seen great success from programs like these, and their value will only be amplified as we continue to rebuild from the pandemic. Our bill aims to provide resources so states can create a fast-track pathway for students that includes access to advanced coursework, dual credits, and professional support.” Sens. Hassan and Young are working to include elements of their bill in the Endless Frontier Act, which is currently being considered by the U.S. Senate.

Rep. Roger Williams Introduces the Student Debt Alternative and CTE Awareness Act

Last week, Rep. Roger Williams (R- TX) [introduced](#) H.R. 3365, the Student Debt Alternative and CTE Awareness Act, which would require the U.S. Department of Education to publish information on the Office of Federal Student Aid website regarding general career and technical education (CTE) information, CTE programs in all 50 states, and Perkins Grant funding. The bill also requires the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to include a one-page summary about CTE programs and how they are a viable alternative to a 4-year degree and requires applicants to sign an acknowledgment box before starting their FAFSA application. Rep. Williams also introduced H.R. 3366, the Supporting Small Business and CTE Act, which would amend the Small Business Act to direct Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) and Women’s Business Centers (WBCs) to assist small businesses in hiring graduates from career and technical education programs. The bill also supports career and technical education graduates by directing SBDCs and WBCs to assist them in starting up a small business.

“I proudly introduced two pieces of legislation that will increase participation in the technical fields and improve awareness of alternatives to traditional higher education opportunities,” Rep. Williams said in a press release. “The first bill would require the Department of Education to inform prospective college students of the benefits of CTE, before they finalize student loans and commit to a university. The second would allow Small Business Development Centers and Women’s Business Centers to assist recent CTE graduates in starting up a small business or connecting with an existing business in need of their skillset. Costly 4-year degrees create burdensome financial obligations and saddles students with decades of debt, whereas CTE programs reduce education times to 6-24 months for a fraction of the cost. Skilled technicians make extraordinary contributions to the economy, without them, the American people would be without the critical services that we too often take for granted. It’s also crucially important that we continuously replenish our skilled workforce, these two bills will have a considerable effect on achieving that goal.”

U.S. Department of Education News

For today’s *Federal Register*, click [here](#).

Member News

The Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority or KHEAA [announced](#) the release of the “The College Circuit,” a helpful informational booklet. The booklet includes information about careers, college preparation, state and federal financial aid, tips for parents, online resources, and a template for setting up a personal college plan. The booklet can be requested by emailing publications@kheaa.com.



General News

[Yahoo Finance](#) reports that, in a new interview, President Joe Biden is sounding more skeptical about canceling \$50,000 in student loan debt per person, which is the goal of several Democrats in Congress. And a report about the upcoming White House budget suggests \$10,000 may be off the table for now, too.

[Business Insider](#) reports that three Democrats have requested a study on the impact of improving personnel benefits for House staffers, including making them eligible for public service loan forgiveness.

[Daily Mail](#) reports that President Joe Biden will not include student loan forgiveness in his upcoming budget request, after pledging to cancel \$10,000 from loans on the campaign trail.

[Forbes](#) reports that, if President Joe Biden does not cancel student loan debt, there are still other actions his administration could take that could benefit millions of student loan borrowers.

[Inside Higher Ed](#) reports that a bill introduced by Sen. Tom Cotton (R- AR) proposes a new tax on the largest endowments of private institutions -- revenue that would then be used to support apprenticeship programs. The bill may spark conversations about how federal policy can address large college endowments and provide funding for apprenticeships -- but some argue this is not the way to do it.

[The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) continues to update its list of colleges and universities that will require students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 – now more than 400 institutions.

[Diverse Issues in Higher Education](#) reports that, as higher education leaders look to the fall eager to revert to a sense of “normal” for students, faculty and staff alike, many are facing a new question: With COVID-19 vaccines now largely available, should they require their campus communities to get vaccinated?

[The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) reports that college fundraisers’ confidence in meeting their financial goals is the highest it has been since before the pandemic began. Eighty-one percent of college advancement professionals say they are confident they will meet their fundraising goals for the 2021 fiscal year. That is a big reversal from last April, when only 22 percent felt that way.

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