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# DAILY BRIEFING

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Thursday, June 17, 2021

In Today's Issue...

**Senate HELP Committee Holds Hearing on Returning to Campus Safely and Needs of Students in Higher Education**

**Senate HELP Committee Approves Graham Nomination**

**Education Secretary Cardona Recuses Himself from Final Decision on ACICS**

**FCC Announces Free Test Period for Reassigned Number Database**

**Education Department Announces Implementation Dates for Removal of FAFSA Selective Service and Drug Conviction Questions**

# NCES Releases Report on Undergraduates in the Pandemic

## U.S Department of Education News

### General News

## Senate HELP Committee Holds Hearing on Returning to Campus Safely and Needs of Students in Higher Education

Today, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee held a hearing titled, “COVID-19 Response and Recovery: Supporting the Needs of Students in Higher Education and Lessons on Safely Returning to Campus.” In her opening statement, Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA) said that she hopes Congress takes away from this experience that helping students during difficult times has benefits because they are the future and that their success is critical to the success of the country. She said that, if Congress truly wants to help students succeed, it must do more than return to normal because the price was too expensive and out of reach for too many students. Chairwoman Murray said she believes the COVID-19 pandemic has taught her that Congress must do better than normal. She said this is why Congress worked to restore Pell Grant eligibility for formerly incarcerated students, as well as why they worked to provide relief to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In his opening statement, Ranking Member Richard Burr (R-NC) said that Congress gave \$76 billion to institutions of higher education through three laws passed during the pandemic and asserted that colleges and universities have enough money as a result. He noted that, as of the first week of June, \$53 billion allocated to institutions of higher education remains unspent, which is approximately 70 percent of the money given out. He said that this makes him question whether institutions needed this money. Ranking Member Burr said that he is concerned about the lack of accountability among institutions around how they are using this money. He noted that the national graduation rate for four-year institutions is 52 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and expressed discontent with using the six-year graduation rate as a measure of completion and noted that the national six-year graduation rate is 62 percent.

In her [testimony](#), Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), discussed the importance of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) as many students were drastically impacted financially by the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that at UCLA, from April 2020 to March 2021, HEERF grants were awarded to 22,695 students to cover specific pandemic-related expenses, including need-based grants to Pell-eligible students and middle-income families. She said that HEERF II grants were awarded to an additional 20,000 students and will continue to be awarded to students throughout the summer. She said that HEERF III funds are already being disbursed to students. She said that without HEERF funds, the post-pandemic future would be extremely challenging for colleges and universities because these funds enabled students to continue their education, graduate on time, and work towards their degrees. In his [testimony](#), Dr. Reynold Verret, President of Xavier University of Louisiana, said that as an HBCU President, the funding provided in the relief bills was necessary and helpful for all students. He said that, because of the funds included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security or CARES Act, Xavier University had access to \$37.9 million in direct aid. He noted that many of Xavier’s students, in particular students of color, have experienced financial distress because of the pandemic. In his [testimony](#), Mr. Anthony Harris, a student at Baldwin Wallace University, said that CARES Act funding was well received by students who used the funds in necessary ways such as for transportation, food, tuition, and savings. Even as additional disbursements of the funding were released, students were continuing to find creative ways to continue attending school at all costs. In her [testimony](#), Madeline Pumariega, President of Miami Dade College

(MDC), said that MDC received more than \$50 million during the first round of CARES Act awards, which went almost entirely to students through student aid to ensure they enrolled and remained enrolled at the school. The funding recognized the unprecedented financial burden that colleges, universities, and their students faced from the impacts of the pandemic. She said that federal funding provided regulatory relief and flexibility to ensure institutions had the necessary resources to keep everyone safe and continue to deliver high quality instruction.

For more information on the hearing, including an archived webcast, visit the [committee website](#).

## Senate HELP Committee Approves Graham Nomination

Yesterday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee approved the nomination of Gwen Graham to serve as the next Assistant Secretary for Legislation and Congressional Affairs at the U.S. Department of Education by voice vote. “Families are counting on us to make sure the Biden Administration has a fully-staffed, well-qualified team to tackle challenges,” Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA) said in a [press release](#). “Combating public health threats like this pandemic, ensuring people have safe, healthy workplaces, protecting the rights of people with disabilities, and supporting individuals struggling with mental health and substance use disorders all require experienced leaders who know how to propel us forward. I am so glad we were able to move these qualified nominees forward for such crucial roles and I’ll be pushing to get them confirmed.”

## Education Secretary Cardona Recuses Himself from Final Decision on ACICS

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona recently delegated the decision about whether to uphold the Department’s decision to terminate the authority for the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) to accredit institutions of higher education. In a memo, Secretary Cardona said that Deputy Secretary Cindy Marten will make the final decision. In March 2021, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) voted 11-1 to recommend terminating ACICS’ recognition. As a reminder, the Obama Administration rescinded ACICS’ recognition, which the Trump Administration subsequently reinstated. Throughout the process, ACICS has said that the agency is “in substantial compliance with any objective, consistent, and reasonable interpretation of the recognition material,” and appealed NACIQI’s decision to the Secretary of Education as allowed under the law. While Secretary Cardona has not given a public reason for the recusal, it is likely due to comments that he made during an appearance before the House Appropriations Committee earlier this year where he stated that he would uphold NACIQI’s determination. The Secretary’s comments could be viewed as biased if he were the ultimate decider on ACICS’s accreditation status and raise legal jeopardy for the Department should the accreditor pursue the matter in court.

## FCC Announces Free Test Period for Reassigned Number Database

Earlier this week, the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau [announced](#) the availability of a beta test period for the Reassigned Numbers Database.

The beta test period will run from July 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021. During this period, callers and caller agents may use the database without charge. The FCC set up the database for callers to check before making a call to see if the number still belongs to the intended recipient of the call. Callers that use the database are given a safe harbor from liability under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act if it turns out the number in fact has been reassigned and they had consent from the original user of the number. After the testing phase, callers will have to pay to access the database.

## Education Department Announces Implementation Dates for Removal of FAFSA Selective Service and Drug Conviction Questions

Last week, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) [announced](#) that it would not be able to meet the implementation timeline laid out in the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] Simplification Act passed by Congress last December. The new law restructured the FAFSA and Pell Grant award process and dramatically reduced the number of questions that low-income borrowers would have to answer to receive Title IV aid. The Department's announcement said that most changes would be completed by the 2024-25 award year. Today, the U.S. Department published a [notice](#) in the *Federal Register* announcing that institutions of higher education are permitted to begin disregarding students' answers to questions regarding selective service registration and drug convictions effective June 17th. The process should be fully implemented by August 16, 2021.

## NCES Releases Report on Undergraduates in the Pandemic

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently released a report titled, [First Look at the Impact of the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic on Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Housing, and Finances](#). The publication provides preliminary results of the 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, with a particular focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected student experiences. The report includes information for about 61,000 undergraduate students attending postsecondary institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. It found that about 84 percent of America's undergraduates had some or all of their classes moved to online-only instruction during the 2020 spring semester. The report also found that 27 percent of undergraduates reported receiving a tuition refund from their institution and 38 percent received a room-and-board refund in the first semester of the pandemic. More so, about 87 percent of undergraduate students experienced a disruption or change in enrollment, 28 percent of students experienced a change in housing, and 40 percent of students experienced a financial change. About 29 percent lost a job or lost income as a result of the pandemic. For more coverage, see this article from [Inside Higher Ed](#).

## U.S. Department of Education News

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

## General News

[Inside Higher Ed](#) provides additional coverage of House and Senate Democrats' introduction of a bill that would double the maximum award for Pell Grants over a five-year period and extend eligibility to undocumented students.

[Bloomberg](#) reports that older Americans are on the front line of the student debt crisis. The fastest-growing chunk of the United States' \$1.7 trillion student loan portfolio is the one held by the oldest borrowers.

[Fox 10 Phoenix](#) reports on how student loans can help develop a good credit score.

[CNBC](#) reports that nearly half of older millennials wish they had chosen a different career path and examines what they would have done differently based on a recent survey conducted by The Harris Poll.

[MarketWatch](#) examines why inflation could create a 'giant wealth transfer' from lenders to borrowers and that student loan borrowers can count themselves as "lucky" during periods of inflation.

[Inside Higher Ed](#) provides additional coverage on the Student Borrower Protection Center report released last week that shed light on public colleges and universities that have been promoting high-risk loans for short-term programs. In several respects, the report prompted just as many questions as it offered answers.

[Higher Ed Dive](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), and [University Business](#) report that the U.S. Department of Education said that discriminating against gay and transgender individuals violates Title IX, the federal law banning sex-based discrimination on campuses.

[Higher Ed Dive](#) reports that Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey signed an executive order blocking the state's public college from mandating COVID-19 vaccines. The order is the latest example of some state policymakers restricting colleges' coronavirus safety policies ahead of the fall semester.

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