



PNACAC POLICY PAPER: THE PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE ACT

What is the Pathways to College Act?

The Pathways to College Act is a bill before the U.S. Congress that seeks to improve the college-going rates of underserved students through an investment in high school-based college counseling. The bill focuses on the critical role high school counselors play in student achievement and college access.

How would the Pathways to College Act help our students if Congress passed it?

The Pathways to College Act authorizes the Secretary of Education (currently Arne Duncan) to award competitive grants to school districts where a majority of the high schools in the district are “high need.” In this legislation, “high need” is typically defined as a high school where more than 50% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL).¹

High schools receiving these grants authorized under the Pathways to College Act would be required to use grant funds to provide the following:

- Professional development in postsecondary advising for high school counselors.
- One-on-one meetings between school counselors and every student at the high school to develop a postsecondary plan.
- Information for all students and their families on the college application process, paying for college, and preparing for college.
- Development of a school-wide plan to increase college-going culture in the school.

Why is the Pathways to College Act special?

The Pathways to College Act is special because this legislation follows closely a 2007 proposal created by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). In fact, NACAC worked closely with Senator Durbin (D-IL) to write this legislation. NACAC has been a major supporter of the Pathways to College Act since the bill was introduced in 2009.

What would the Pathways to College Act cost?

The Congressional Budget Office, a nonpartisan budgetary arm of Congress, has not calculated a cost estimate for the Pathways to College Act because this bill would authorize the Secretary of Education and the Department of Education to use preexisting funds allocated by Congress to make these grants to “high need” high schools. Should Congress pass this legislation, the Department of Education would determine how much funding to award to grantees. In an effort to gauge cost-effectiveness, the legislation also requires an independent evaluation of the grant program to assess the program's impact on high school graduation and college-going rates.

¹ You can find more detailed information about the Pathways to College Act online through the Library of Congress THOMAS website: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:s.03326>:

Why does the Pathways to College Act matter for PNACAC?

The national counselor-to-student ratio in 2008 was one counselor to 467 students; most public policy organizations suggest that to serve students effectively and equitably, a high school counselor should serve no more than 250 students. *All PNACAC member states have counselor-to-student ratios above 250; two PNACAC states having counselor-to-student ratios above the national average of 467.*

Regardless of counselor-to-student ratios, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana all have high poverty high schools that would qualify for grants through the Pathways to College Act.

Additionally, since many PNACAC members work with students outside the region, it is worthwhile to note that some neighboring states have dramatically higher counselor-to-student ratios than those ratios found in PNACAC states. For example, California has the highest counselor-to-student ratio in the US.

<u>State</u>	<u>Counselor-to-Student Ratio²</u>
Montana	1 to 310
Idaho	1 to 443
Alaska	1 to 452
Oregon	1 to 485
Washington	1 to 500
National Average	1 to 467
Highest: California	1 to 809

In short, the Pathways to College Act could provide support to many high schools in the PNACAC five-state region and throughout the nation where counselor workloads are burgeoning and unmanageable.

What's the status of the Pathways to College Act?

In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Pathways to College Act is currently under consideration in the committees which consider and review education-related legislation. *At this time, no elected representative or senator from Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, or Oregon is a cosponsor of the legislation.* (Being a “cosponsor” of a bill means the elected official has made a public commitment in support of the legislation.)

What can I do to learn more about the Pathways to College Act?

NACAC has a wealth of information on their website. You can learn more at NACAC's webpage dedicated to the Pathways to College Act:

<http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/LegislativeNews/Pages/PathwaystoCollegeAct.aspx>

How do I inform my elected officials in Congress about my thoughts on the Pathways to College Act?

The lawmakers that represent you want to hear from you on the Pathways to College Act, especially since you work with students. If this is an important issue to you, take action today by contacting your representative and senators. NACAC provides an easy-to-use portal for you to make contact:

<http://capwiz.com/nacac/issues/alert/?alertid=13459491>

² <http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/MemberAction/Documents/StudentCounselorRatios0708.pdf>