

**Increase Support for Low-Income, First-Generation Students and Families – Including
Veterans, Students with Disabilities, and the Unemployed -
Through Federal TRIO Programs**

In response to the pandemic virus COVID-19, many educational institutions – both at the k12 and collegiate level, have shuttered their doors. While necessary to preserve public safety, this move undoubtedly aggravates the hardships already experienced by low-income and first-generation students at both the pre-college and college levels who have now lost access to food service and possibly campus housing, can no longer support themselves in low-wage or service industry jobs, and who also lack access to the digital resources that will allow them to continue their academic work remotely.

Given the economic shock of these sudden losses, low-income and first-generation students and their families need quick access to a host of resources – both financial and non-financial – from trusted sources. Authorized under the Higher Education Act, the Federal TRIO Programs directly serve over 800,000 low-income, first-generation students, as well as students with disabilities, military veterans and other marginalized student groups ranging from those as young as middle school to adult learners through a set of college access and success programs that provide financial aid, economic literacy, academic support, and counseling. By providing emergency funds to the TRIO programs, Congress can provide immediate service delivery to the most vulnerable students, families, and unemployed adults in this crisis.

Requested Actions in COVID-19 Recovery Legislation

Provide \$248 million in direct grant aid to support low-income, first-generation undergraduates through the only federal college retention and completion program – Student Support Services.

Student Support Services (SSS) helps low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities, to successfully begin and complete college through a portfolio of services, including tutoring and academic instruction, financial counseling, and peer support and mentoring. Under the governing law, SSS programs are afforded the authority to provide – and many programs do provide – grant aid to program participants.ⁱ As many SSS students have been displaced as a result of campus closures and job losses associated with COVID-19, the provision of \$248 million in direct aid would allow SSS programs to provide emergency grants to help cover the cost of living expenses (housing, food, transportation, etc.) during this time of extreme need.ⁱⁱ Based on feedback from SSS leadership throughout the TRIO community, we believe that grants of up to \$2,000 would be adequate to replace three months' worth of part-time earnings for at least two-thirds of the approximately 202,000 participants in the SSS program.

Provide \$200 million to allow TRIO participants across all programs to gain broadband access and hardware (laptops, tablets, etc.) to continue online coursework. As schools across the nation

have cancelled in-person classes, students at every educational level have been told to continue their academic work online. Undoubtedly, this situation further disadvantages low-income and first-generation students who do not have internet access in their homes. Indeed, even before this current crisis emerged, many low-income students found themselves attempting to complete

academic assignments from the screen of a mobile phone in the parking lot of a fast food establishment or inside a coffee shop. Students from low-income families in rural communities with less commercial hotspots had even fewer options. By no means is this a recipe for academic success. For both parents and students in low-income families, the obstacles to pursuing the remainder of a semester's worth of coursework in this manner – to include the writing of term papers and execution of final exams – are insurmountable. However, TRIO programs have direct access to these students and their families and the capacity to provide such support if adequate resources are available. By providing \$200 million in immediate, emergency funding, Congress will allow TRIO programs to provide students and their families with the connectivity needed to access high-speed internet services inside their homes as well as the necessary hardware, like laptops and tablets, to utilize such service in order to adequately complete their academic coursework in the near term.ⁱⁱⁱ This figure would support providing in-home internet access and laptops for the approximately 45% of TRIO students who lack such critical resources.^{iv}

By utilizing TRIO, Congress can put emergency dollars directly into the hands of impoverished college students, low-income families with middle and high schools in the home, displaced workers and other high need populations in a short matter of time. This, in turn, will assure that their path toward college enrollment and completion remains uninterrupted in the immediate future and in years to come.

ⁱ 20 USC §1070a-14(d).

ⁱⁱ In order to enact this measure, Congress would need to waive certain provisions of law and regulation that limit the amount of grant aid SSS participants may receive (20 USC §1070a-14(d)(1), (3), (5)), prioritize certain SSS participants based on years of enrollment and Pell Grant eligibility status (20 USC §1070a-14(d)(2), and the requirement that the granting project to provide a 1/3 match (20 USC §1070a-14(d)(4).

ⁱⁱⁱ In order to enact this measure, Congress would need to waive certain regulations that prohibit the provision of “forms of direct support,” which the Department of Education has interpreted to include the provision of laptop computers for SSS participants. 34 CFR §646.31.

^{iv} See Anderson, M., and Kumar, M. “Digital Divide Persists Even as Lower-Income Americans Make Gains in Tech Adoption.” *Pew Research Center*. May 7, 2019, available at https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/ft_19-05-06_digitaldivideincome_lowerincomeamericanslowertechadoption/.

Increase Support for Low-Income, First-Generation Students and Families and Displaced Workers Hit Hard by the COVID-19 Crisis

Federal TRIO Programs FY21 Request – Updated for COVID-19

Authorized under the Higher Education Act, the [Federal TRIO Programs](#) directly serve over 800,000 low-income, first-generation students, as well as students with disabilities, military veterans and other marginalized student groups ranging from those as young as middle school to adult learners through a set of college access and success programs that provide financial aid, economic literacy, academic support, and counseling. TRIO has a proven track record of increasing college enrollment, persistence, and completion for these high-need populations and, despite serving just a fraction of the eligible population, has produced more than 5 million college graduates since its inception.

Given the economic shock of sudden job loss and school closings because of the COVID-19 crisis, low-income and first-generation students and their families have been among the hardest hit. With increased unemployment and lost wages, there are thousands more low-income families and displaced adult workers who are now eligible to benefit from TRIO services in order to help improve their economic situations through postsecondary education. The need is especially severe in rural areas. A targeted increase to the TRIO programs could help provide nearly 330,000 additional displaced workers and their children with the tools necessary to put themselves on stronger footing in the years to come.

TRIO Request – \$250 Million Increase for FY21 Appropriations

Provide an increase of \$32 million for the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) program to increase the number of programs by 50% so that more than 144,000 additional adult learners will have the opportunity to earn their GED, obtain guidance in completing financial aid and college admissions applications, and receive assistance with financial literacy and career counseling.

EOC targets adult learners, with a special emphasis on displaced, unemployed, and underemployed workers, and guides them through the many confusing, yet vital processes to achieving their academic and career goals. This typically includes the pursuit of the high school equivalency diploma, completion of financial aid and college admissions applications, basic money management, financial planning, and career counseling. Hosted by colleges, universities, and community-based agencies, EOC programs target the neediest sectors of their local communities through outreach efforts at employment offices, libraries, and the like. Although it is one of the smaller TRIO programs, with just 140 projects currently operating across the country, EOC has one of the largest footprints as it provides low-cost, light-touch services to nearly 200,000 participants annually. The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education found that more than half (57.6%) of “college-ready” EOC participants enrolled in institutions of higher learning following program participation; similarly a recent assessment of EOC found that 71% of eligible participants (i.e., high school seniors, high school graduates, high school equivalency graduates, postsecondary dropouts or transfers, etc.) applied for college admission.¹

¹ U.S. Department of Education, *Educational Opportunity Centers Grantee Level Performance Results: 2013-14*, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/eoc-gl-discussion-1314.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education, *Federal TRIO Programs, A Report on the Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 2007-08, with Select Comparative Data, 2002-07*, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/eocpublication07-08.pdf>.

A targeted increase of \$32 million in FY 2021 would increase the number of EOC projects by 50% and allow at least 144,000 more low-income adults the opportunity to improve their economic outlook by pursuing postsecondary opportunity.

Provide an increase of \$54 million for the Talent Search program to increase the number of grantees by 25% and allow more than 139,000 additional low-income, first-generation middle and high school students to gain the tools necessary to prepare for and apply to college.

Talent Search focuses on providing college preparatory support for middle and high school students, such as assistance with secondary course selection, college admissions tests, financial aid applications, and scholarships. According to the most recent data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, students who participated in Talent Search enrolled in postsecondary education immediately following graduation at a rate that far exceeded that of low-income high school seniors who did not take part in the program (80% vs. 58%).² However, Talent Search is only able to reach a fraction of the eligible population of low-income, potential first-generation college-goers.

The abrupt closure of secondary schools this spring in response to COVID-19 has disrupted the educational paths of many youth. By increasing the percentage of Talent Search programs by 25%, Congress would allow more than 139,000 additional young people to participate in the program and help re-direct their course to assure a far greater chance of postsecondary and, ultimately, economic success.

Provide an increase of \$164 million to grow existing TRIO programs by 15% to provide nearly 330,000 additional low-income, first-generation students, students with disabilities, veterans, and unemployed adults with college access and completion programming.

TRIO programs have always been about creating educational opportunity. At this time, when more people have suddenly found themselves in need of the chance to turn their economic situations around, the time is ripe for investment in TRIO. For, the immediate investment in academic tutoring and counseling, peer mentoring, and financial literacy will yield long-term dividends for individual students, their families and the nation at-large. TRIO professionals are educators with personal relationships with the most vulnerable students and can help provide immediate support during the current crisis. Recent studies continue to demonstrate that, over a lifetime, college graduates will earn nearly \$1 million more than those with only a high school degree.³ By increasing the investment in TRIO to support a 15% increase in the number of students currently served, Congress can help assure that TRIO will be there to help students and families absorb the economic shock of this crisis in the very near term while laying a foundation for years to come.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, *Fast Facts Report for the Talent Search Program*, Washington, D.C., 2016, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/ts-fastfacts2016.pdf>; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in college, by income level, 1975 through 2016*, Washington, D.C., 2017, available at https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_302.30.asp.

³ Carnevale, A. P., Rose, S. J., & Cheah, B., *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2011, available at <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/the-college-payoff/>.



Fact Sheet - Student Support Services Evaluation Shows Significant Gains

THE CHALLENGE: FIRST-GENERATION AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS FACE BARRIERS TO COLLEGE DEGREES.

Nationally, students from the lowest-income families earn college degrees at a rate that is five times lower than students from the highest income families (11% vs. 58%).¹

ONE EFFECTIVE SOLUTION: THE FEDERAL TRIO PROGRAMS (“TRIO”):

TRIO is a set of educational opportunity programs that enable students from low-income backgrounds to become the first members of their families to earn college degrees. Currently serving more than 800,000 students from middle school through adult education, TRIO provides academic tutoring, personal counseling, mentoring, financial guidance, and other supports necessary to promote college access, retention, and graduation. Since its inception, TRIO has helped more than 5 million Americans earn college degrees.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (SSS):

TRIO SSS programs help low-income and first-generation students, as well as students with disabilities, to successfully begin and stay in college. Participants receive tutoring, counseling, and financial support in order to achieve their goals of college completion.

THE LATEST RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS:

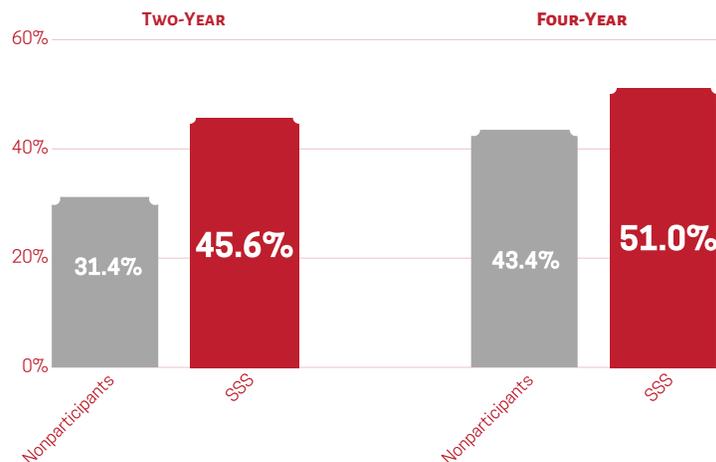
U.S. Education Department (ED or the Department) recently contracted two independent research firms to evaluate the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) programs.² The study compared academic achievement of students who first joined SSS as college freshman in 2003-04 with a sample of matched nonparticipants with similar demographics and high school achievement including GPA, SAT, and GPA.

KEY FINDINGS:

DEGREE COMPLETION

SSS students were more likely to earn degrees than similarly situated nonparticipants.

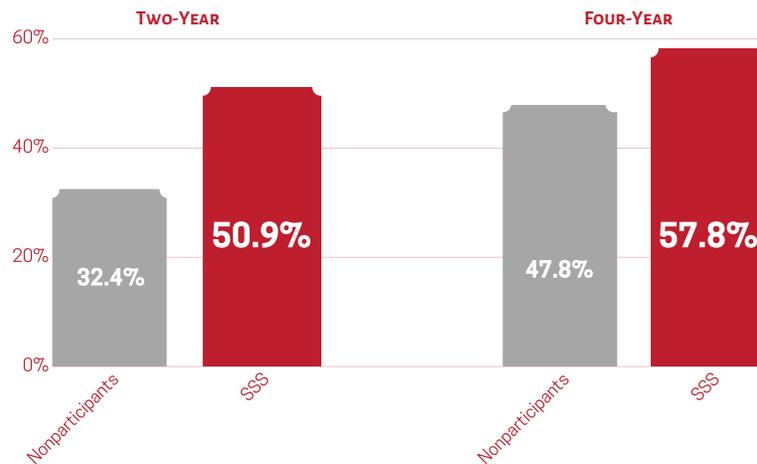
- Two-Year Institutions: After four years of college, SSS students were 47% more likely to complete an associate degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year institution.³
- Four-Year Institutions: After six years of college, SSS students were 18% more likely to complete a bachelor's degree.⁴



PERSISTENCE

SSS students were more likely to complete a degree or stay enrolled than similarly situated nonparticipants.

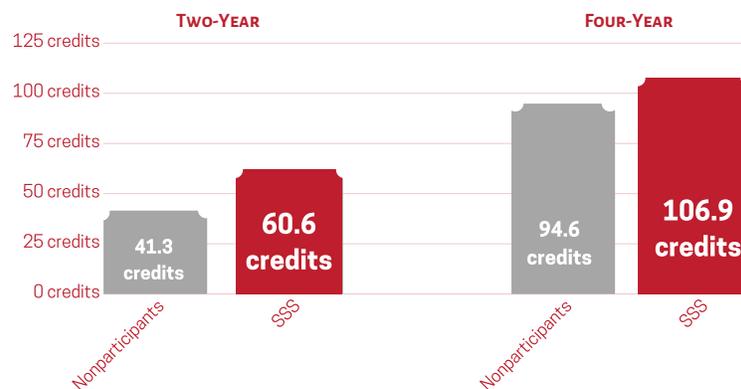
- Two-Year Institutions: By fall of the fourth year, SSS students were 57% more likely to have completed an associate degree or certificate or persist in enrollment than matched nonparticipants.⁵
- Four-Year Institutions: By fall of the sixth year, SSS students were 21% more likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or stay enrolled than matched nonparticipants.⁶



CREDIT ACCRUAL

SSS students earned more college credits than similarly situated nonparticipants.

- Two-Year Institutions: After four years of college, SSS students earned 47% more credits.⁷
- Four-Year Institutions: After six years of college, SSS students earned 13% more credits.⁸



1. Cahalan, M., Perna, L. W., Yamashita, M., Wright, J. & Santillan, S (2018). 2018 Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: Historical Trend Report. Washington, DC: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), and Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy of the University of Pennsylvania (PennAHEAD).

2. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, Comparing Student Outcomes Between Student Support Services Participants and Nonparticipants in the 2004/09 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Washington, D.C., 2019.

3. 45.6% for SSS vs. 31.1% for nonparticipants. $(45.6-31.1)/31.1=0.47$, statistically significant at $p<.05$ for SSS

4. 51.0% for SSS vs. 43.4% for nonparticipants. $(51.0-43.4)/43.4=0.18$, not statistically significant

5. 50.9% for SSS vs. 32.4% for nonparticipants. $(50.9-32.4)/32.4=0.57$, statistically significant at $p<.05$

6. 57.8% for SSS vs. 47.8% for nonparticipants. $(57.8-47.8)/47.8=0.21$, statistically significant at $p<.05$

7. Average 60.6 credits for SSS vs. 41.3 for nonparticipants. $(60.6-41.3)/41.3=0.47$, statistically significant at $p<.05$

8. Average 106.9 credits for SSS vs. 94.6 for nonparticipants. $(106.9-94.6)/94.6=0.13$, statistically significant at $p<.05$

TRIO

FACT SHEET

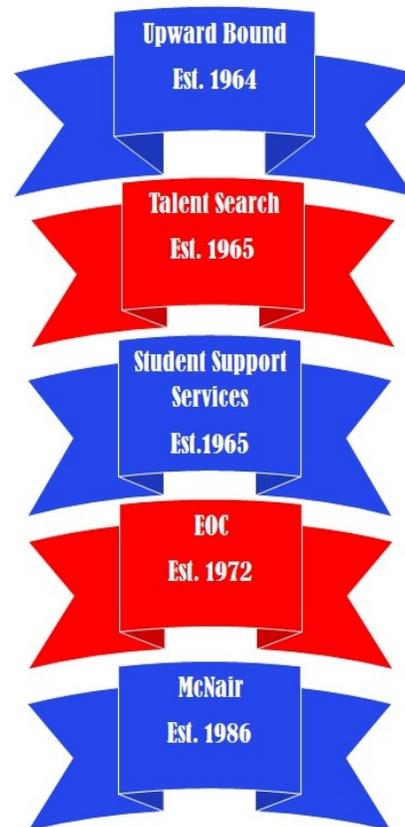
The Federal TRIO Programs (“TRIO”) are a set of educational opportunity programs that enable students from low-income backgrounds to become the first members of their families to earn college degrees. Currently serving more than 800,000 students from middle school through adult education, TRIO provides academic tutoring, personal counseling, mentoring, financial guidance, and other supports necessary to promote college access, retention, and graduation. Since its inception, TRIO has helped more than 5 million Americans earn college degrees.

Talent Search: Talent Search focuses on early intervention, working with students deemed to have “college potential” in grades 6-12. Students receive information about college admissions, scholarships, and various student financial aid programs.

Upward Bound: Upward Bound is an intensive intervention program that prepares students for higher education through various enrichment courses. These campus-based programs provide students with instruction in literature, composition, mathematics, science, and foreign language during the school year and during the summer. Upward Bound also provides intensive mentoring and support for students as they prepare for college entrance exams and tackle admission applications, financial aid, and scholarship forms.

Upward Bound Math/Science: Using a model similar to the classic Upward Bound program, Upward Bound Math/Science aims to strengthen academic preparedness in math, science, and technology. The program assists students in a rigorous math and science curriculum in high school to encourage and enable them to major in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines in college.

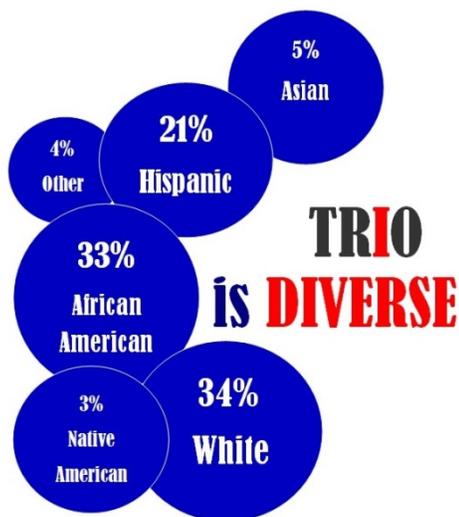
Veterans Upward Bound: Veterans Upward Bound provides a unique service to veterans returning to college, aiding them in the transition process through intensive basic skills development and short-term remedial courses. Additionally, participants receive assistance in navigating the services offered by Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans associations, and other organizations that aid veterans.



Student Support Services: Student Support Services programs help low-income and first-generation students, as well as students with disabilities, to successfully begin and stay in college. Participants receive tutoring, counseling, and remedial instruction in order to achieve their goals of college completion.

Educational Opportunity Centers: Educational Opportunity Centers target displaced or underemployed workers from low-income families. These centers help students achieve their high school equivalency and/or pursue postsecondary education options, guiding them through the often confusing admissions and financial aid processes.

Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement: The McNair program encourages and prepares low-income and minority students for doctoral study and to pursue careers in college teaching. The McNair program provides research opportunities and faculty mentoring.



For more information about the Federal TRIO Programs, please e-mail Jonathan Elkin (jonathan.elkin@coenet.org) or Stephanie Salvador (stephanie.salvador@coenet.org), or call 202.347.7430.