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June 8, 2017

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Democrats Introduce New Legislation to Improve Access to College, Make College More Affordable

WASHINGTON— TODAY, Representatives Bobby Scott (VA-03), ranking member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and Susan Davis (CA-53), ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development, joined Reps. Adriano Espaillat (NY-13) and Dan Kildee (MI-05) to introduce the [Jumpstart on College Act](#). Reps. Scott and Davis also joined Rep. Jared Polis (CO-02), ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education, to introduce the [Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017](#). The bills are part of House Democrats' [#AimHigher](#) initiative, which would make quality higher education accessible and affordable to empower America's working families to succeed in our economy.

"Most of the jobs of the future will require education after the high school level," said Ranking Member Scott. "The prospect of paying for college and succeeding in rigorous courses can be daunting, particularly for students who would be the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution. Democrats are committed to increasing the number of students who attend college, lowering the cost to enroll, and helping students complete a degree on time that will have value in the job market."

The Jumpstart on College Act would improve student access to college, increase affordability, and lead to higher degree completion rates by expanding dual enrollment and early college high school programs.

"A college education is the most powerful tool for upward socioeconomic mobility," said Rep. Espaillat. "That is why I am introducing the Jumpstart on College Act to close the higher education gap and help students achieve and aim for educational success. This bill makes investments in critical dual enrollment and early college programs, through which low-income and underserved students can get a jump start on academic success, educational attainment and college achievement." The Jumpstart on College Act would:

- Invest \$250 million in year one – with more in subsequent years – to support dual enrollment and early college high schools that primarily serve low-income students;
- Create a competitive grant program for colleges and universities to partner with school districts to support the development of these programs;
- Provide financial support to states in order to develop and implement a state-wide strategy for increasing access to dual enrollment programs for underrepresented students;
- Improve college affordability by ensuring students pay nothing to earn college credit while in high school and allowing students to get a jumpstart on college; and
- Improve the likelihood of degree and credential attainment.

“Unfortunately, many Americans face crushing student debt and numerous hurdles in attending and completing college. That’s why this legislation to support successful early college programs in Michigan and around the country is so important,” said Rep. Kildee. “We must reduce the burden of student debt and increase access to higher education to give Americans the skills they need to be ready for the jobs of the twenty-first century.”

Dual enrollment and early college high school programs are one part of the solution to increasing access to higher education, tackling college costs, and improving graduation rates – particularly for the students who need the most help. These programs allow high school juniors and seniors to enroll in college courses and earn credits upon course completion at low or no cost, simultaneously promoting a college-going culture and reducing costs families face.

“Of the 2,000 colleges and universities that offer dual and concurrent enrollment programs, two-thirds report that parents and students contribute toward tuition,” said Adam Loew, Executive Director of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). “As a result, high-achieving students who come from low income families take dual and concurrent enrollment courses less frequently than their higher income counterparts. The Jumpstart on College Act would address this critical need by incentivizing colleges and universities to provide free college courses to low-income high school students, thus propelling them to college success.”

Another way to improve our country’s completion rates is to ensure that our adult students are succeeding. Competency-based education is an innovative model used by colleges and universities where credits are awarded based on students’ demonstrable knowledge.

This education approach allows many of today’s students who may be juggling work and kids to enroll and succeed in college. Recent research shows that nearly 60 percent of college students are working while taking classes, almost 40 percent are older than the age of 25, and 25 percent are raising children while enrolled in school. At the same time, the cost of a degree continues to rise, forcing students to borrow more each year.

“Nowadays more and more college students are older, returning for a degree after years in the workforce, and pursuing their studies while working full-time simultaneously. That’s why with the input of forward-thinking schools, like CSU-Global, this legislation will allow more students to get credit for what they know, rather than how much time they spend in the classroom,” said Rep. Polis. “Competency-based education thinks outside the box; students can move through their degree

by demonstrating that they've mastered the necessary skills. For today's students, this provides exactly the kind of flexibility they need."

The Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017 would:

- Promote innovation in higher education by allowing competency-based education programs in the demonstration project to request additional flexibility from current statutory and regulatory requirements that are current barriers to implementation.
- Increase transparency by requiring an annual evaluation of each competency-based education program in the demonstration project to determine program quality, the progress of participating students towards earning a degree, and a students' ability to pay off their loans and find employment upon graduation.
- Provide new information about the students being served in competency-based education programs and how their success compares to similar students in traditional programs.
- Create new accountability for competency-based education programs by requiring an institution's accreditation agency to set standards for competency-based education programs.
- Establish a Competency-Based Education Council to continue studying the ongoing innovation and development of competency-based education.

*"Competency-based education is about what students know and can do; not how much time they've spent in a class. Unfortunately, our federal policies haven't kept up, making it hard for innovative CBE programs to take root," said **Amy Laitinen, Director for Higher Education at New America.** "Rather than ignore the tough questions, the Advancing Competency Based Education Act of 2017 will help us understand how to address the barriers colleges face in creating CBE programs while identifying protections to ensure students are getting what they need and what they're paying for."*

Despite significant progress in recent years, competency-based education is hindered by a variety of federal laws and regulations. To address this challenge, the Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017 provides flexibility for competency-based education programs, while at the same time establishing new levels of transparency and accountability.

*"Expanding higher education opportunities is critical to our children's future and the future of our country," said **Rep. Davis.** "This legislation will prepare students to succeed in their post high school careers, and give them the flexibility to manage their busy work and school life as they complete their education."*

For a section by section on The Jumpstart on College Act, click [here](#).

For a fact sheet on The Jumpstart on College Act, click [here](#).

For a section by section on The Advancing Competency-Based Education Act, click [here](#).

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