

Brief Overview

The “Pathways to College” Act (no bill number available at this time), is expected to be introduced by Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), would create a competitive grant program under No Child Left Behind to provide low-income school districts with funding to increase college enrollment rates. Required activities include: providing professional development to school counselors in post-secondary advising; ensuring each student has at least one meeting with a counselor to discuss postsecondary planning; providing college and financial aid information to all students and parents; and ensuring that each school in the district develops a comprehensive plan of action to strengthen its college-going culture.

More Detailed Overview

Pathways to College Act
Senator Richard J. Durbin (D-IL)

Background:

A recent report by the consortium of Chicago School Research found that only 41 percent of Chicago Public School Students who aspire to go to college took the steps necessary to apply to and enroll in a four-year college. According to a report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 87 percent of students from the top income quartile enroll in college while just 57 percent of students from the lowest income quartile enroll. Even the most engaged and ambitious students encounter problems with lack of information and misinformation about college and financial aid. Recently, Chicago Public School began implementing programs to address their low college enrollment rates. Their efforts have proven successful: half of the students who graduated in 2007 enrolled in college, an increase of 6.5 percent in four years. That increase in college enrollment was more than six times the rate of increase compared to the rest of the country.

Bill Summary

The Pathways to College Act would authorize the Secretary of Education to create a competitive grant program under No Child Left Behind to provide low-income school districts with funding to increase college enrollment rates.

The Pathways to College Act:

- Requires the Secretary of Education to award competitive grants to local education agencies (LEAs) in which a majority of secondary schools can be defined as high need.
- Requires grant recipients to develop and implement or expand a program to increase the number of low-income students who are entering and succeeding at college.
- Required activities include: providing professional development to secondary teachers and counselors in post-secondary advising; ensuring each student has at

least one meeting with a counselor to discuss postsecondary planning; providing college and financial aid information to all students and parents; and ensuring that each school in the LEA develops a comprehensive plan of action to strengthen its college-going culture.

- Other allowable activities include: establishing post-secondary planning classes; hiring staff; training student leaders; running college fairs or college tours, assisting with test preparation and applications; establishing partnerships with community and nonprofit organizations; providing long-term follow up with graduates; and other activities

Requires the design and implementation of a system for accurately tracking college enrollment rates using externally verified data.

The Pathways to College Act has the support of College Summit, ACT, College Board, Council for Opportunity in Education, National Association of College Admissions Counseling, and American School Counselors Association.