Students have high aspirations for pursuing more education after high school. Unfortunately, postsecondary opportunities are not equally distributed. Students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who are the first in their families to attend college experience lower rates of enrollment in and graduation from postsecondary education than their peers. Closing these equity gaps, which are over 20 percentage points by race and income, is a compelling national priority with a tremendous public benefit.

Members of the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) see firsthand the challenges students face. NCAN is composed of and represents hundreds of community-based organizations, K-12 schools and districts, and colleges around the country that help millions of students beat the odds and complete postsecondary education. NCAN members know that with the right pre-college advising, financial aid, and mentoring, students who face historical and structural inequities succeed at higher rates, whether it be in a two- or four-year degree or a high-quality certificate program. Students from the high school class of 2016 served by NCAN member programs narrowed the college completion gap by 10%.

The success of students served by NCAN members shows what is possible, but the equity gaps in college attainment will not close until we address college affordability. NCAN's research finds that only 23% of public four-year institutions and 41% of public two-year institutions were affordable to a student receiving the average Pell Grant, before the COVID-19 pandemic. The one-two punch of inequity and lack of affordability, exacerbated by family income losses due to the pandemic, makes investment in the Pell Grant vital and urgent.

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Double Pell to Address College Affordability

The Pell Grant has served as the cornerstone of financial aid for students from low-income backgrounds since its creation in 1972. This need-based grant provides crucial support for around 7 million students each year, or about one-third of undergraduates.

Unfortunately, the purchasing power of the Pell Grant has drastically declined over time. At its peak in 1975-76, the maximum Pell award was worth more than three-fourths of the average cost of attendance – tuition, fees, and living expenses – for a four-year public university. Today, it’s worth 30%.

NCAN’s “Growing Gap” research finds that fewer than a quarter of public, four-year institutions and fewer than half of public, two-year institutions are affordable to a student receiving the average Pell Grant.

While Congress attempts to keep the Pell Grant on pace with inflation by including increases during appropriations cycles, a bolder investment is needed to curtail college affordability challenges.

Doubling the maximum Pell Grant will address equity gaps in higher education by targeting affordability challenges faced by students with low family incomes and, disproportionately, students of color.

### DOUBLE THE PELL GRANT WILL REVERSE THE GROWING COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY GAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic High Value</th>
<th>As Appropriated</th>
<th>Double Pell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year: 1975-76</td>
<td>Academic Year: 2022-23</td>
<td>Academic Year: 2022-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value of Maximum Pell Grant Compared to Public Bachelor’s Institution Tuition, Fees, Room and Board Remaining Tuition, Fees, Room and Board

Why is Double Pell a Good Investment?

Pell Grants are:

- **Targeted:** The majority of Pell recipients have family incomes under $40,000. Pell Grants support students of color: 59% of Black students, 51% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 48% of Hispanic/Latino students, and 36% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students receive them.

- **Immediate:** The Pell Grant program is well established, with eligibility determined through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and administered through a student’s institution. Investing in this program is the fastest way to increase support for the most students.

- **Widespread:** The Pell Grant is available for a student to use at any Title IV eligible institution in any state.
Why is Now the Right Time to Double Pell?

- **College enrollment is decreasing**: High school class of 2020 fall college enrollment dropped 6.8%, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. That decline is four times larger than the class of 2019’s pre-pandemic enrollment decline, and across high school categories, significant inequities emerge that disadvantage students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.
- **Economic recovery is more likely to benefit those with education beyond high school**: Nearly all the jobs created in the recovery after the Great Recession were filled by individuals with at least some college education. Double Pell is an investment in our nation’s workforce and future leaders.

How Should Congress Double the Pell Grant?

- **Double the maximum award and then recalculate Pell eligibility**: This will give all current Pell Grant recipients an increase in funds. It will also allow students who are currently ineligible for Pell but still struggling to pay for college to qualify for a partial award.
- **Support all postsecondary students in need of federal student aid**: Congress should allow individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, and those meeting similar requirements to be eligible to apply for federal student aid.
- **Create a federal-state partnership**: Congress should incentivize states to invest in need-based aid and stabilize the cost of college. Such actions at the state level would help control the cost of college and provide additional support to close the financial aid gap for students from low-income backgrounds.
- **Index the Pell Grant to the rate of inflation**: Once the maximum award is doubled, Congress should reinstate the provision that indexed the program to the rate of inflation. Doing so would guarantee a baseline annual increase and, in turn, sustain Pell’s purchasing power.
- **Keep Pell dollars in the Pell program**: Dollars accumulated in the Pell Grant reserve (from unobligated funds in years when Congress appropriated more than students claimed) are intended for students from low-income backgrounds and should be used to help those students afford a higher education. They should not be removed to support other portions of the federal budget.

What Would the Increase Mean for Students?

- **Students currently receiving a maximum Pell Grant would receive double**: Pell Grant eligibility is determined by subtracting a student’s Expected Family Contribution (EFC) from the maximum Pell Grant award. Students with a $0 EFC receive the maximum award and, therefore, would receive double the amount of funding. (Assuming their total cost of attendance exceeds the Double Pell amount.)
- **Double Pell would help close college affordability gaps across the country**: Holding all other factors constant in the NCAN affordability definition, Double Pell would help close the affordability gap in nearly all U.S. states for public bachelor’s degree institutions and community colleges.