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STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

July 20, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leaders McCarthy and McConnell,

I am writing to urge you to support proposed transformative investments in student success initiatives in President Biden's FY22 Budget and The American Families Plan (AFP) on behalf of state higher education leaders throughout the country. The $62 billion framework would provide grants to states, territories, and Tribes to invest in evidence-based programs and practices to improve college student outcomes. These investments would reduce longstanding disparities based on race, income, and other factors, increase taxpayer return on investment and equip more Americans with the knowledge, skills, and credentials needed to access higher-paying opportunities in the workforce. As Congress weighs infrastructure priorities for the post-pandemic era, improving student success in college remains one of the best ways to build a more resilient, competitive economy and strengthen our civil society.

Too many students fail to complete college today due to structural resource disparities, not academic performance or motivation. Colleges and universities serving the largest shares of low-income students and students of color, such as community colleges and regional public universities, typically have the least resources to serve students and remain reliant on eroding state funding streams. These institutions, which are instrumental to economic and social mobility, do not have the resources to make significant upfront investments in proven student success strategies. As a result, completion rates for Pell Grant recipients trail the national average by nearly 11 percentage points. Meanwhile, Black and Native American students lag the national average by 20 percentage points, with lesser but still significant disparities for Hispanic and Pacific Islander students.

After years of rigorous studies in a variety of settings, state higher education leaders know what works for student success. For example, the City University of New York (CUNY) has the Accelerated Study in Associate Degree Program (ASAP), which removes financial barriers for full-time study through no-cost tuition and aid for books and transportation, along with academic support via personalized academic advising, flexible scheduling, regular tutoring, and career specialists. The results have been impressive—the three-year graduation rates of participants were nearly double those of the comparison group. Improved student performance led to the cost per graduate being substantially *lower* than the comparison group. The ASAP model has been replicated in Ohio with similar findings. Federal investment can scale ASAP and other evidence-based policies, programs, and practices, substantially improving graduation rates and improving taxpayer return on investment.

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SHEEO is pleased to see this proposal anchoring states at the center of grant distribution to institutions. State higher education leaders and their teams have in-depth knowledge of evidence-based student success strategies, experience working with campus leaders and state lawmakers, robust accountability structures, and a nuanced contextual understanding of student, institutional, and state needs. They can elevate and invest in proven programs linked to state educational attainment and workforce goals. States, like institutions, have been entrepreneurial in developing evidence-based student success policies and practices. Because of this, we encourage Congress to make both institution- and state-level policies, programs, and practices eligible for federal investments. As these state leaders will be responsible for creating state plans, helping implement those plans, monitoring the work as it moves forward, and evaluating the results, we also ask that resources be provided to the states for their work.

We are excited about this bold proposal and the unprecedented opportunity to reduce longstanding gaps in educational outcomes, help more students succeed in college, and collectively build a stronger economic foundation for our states and nation. We look forward to engaging with you in the months ahead to craft a framework that best leverages federal investments, state leadership, and state and institutional best practices to help our students succeed and fulfill the promise of higher education.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Anderson, Ph.D.
President
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association

Cc: Chairman Bobby Scott, Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, Chairwoman Patty Murray, Ranking Member Richard Burr, Members of the House Education & Labor Committee, Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee