



COUNCIL for OPPORTUNITY in EDUCATION

# College access and success for low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities

## OUR VISION

A vast educational attainment gap remains between rich and poor in the United States. Talented low-income students are severely underrepresented in our nation’s colleges and universities. Consider this: students from the highest-income families are about five times as likely as students from poor families to have attained a college degree by age 24.

We believe every young person and adult should have an equal opportunity to prepare for, attend, and graduate from college. Graduation from any category of postsecondary institution should be achievable and must not be limited by economic status, family background, or disability.

If the U.S. is to remain strong economically and assure its competitive global standing, we must improve the chances of the least advantaged students to access and complete a college education. As the leading national organization that focuses on college access and success for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities, COE has a critical role to play in developing and implementing solutions.

## OUR APPROACH

Nearly 1,000 member colleges and agencies of COE sponsor initiatives to increase college access and success for low-income, first-generation, underrepresented students and students with disabilities in their local communities. We work with them to provide:

- Needed **Program Improvement and Development** for more than 3,100 college access and success programs nationwide.
- Research and policy analysis through the **Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education** to encourage policymakers, educators, and the public to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities.
- **Advocacy** for federally funded programs critical to college access and success including TRIO, GEAR UP, Pell Grants, and other college access and success programs that assist low-income and first-generation students.
- **Professional Development** for college access and success professionals through COE’s Annual Conference, seminars, workshops, video conferences, webinars, and other web-based idea exchanges.

**“For more than 30 years, COE has made a difference in the lives of thousands of children. GE and COE are partners who want to prepare students to compete as workers, as entrepreneurs, and to succeed in this world. The work done by COE is amazing. We’re both dedicated to expanding educational opportunities. I am so proud to be associated with COE because of their passion and leadership.”**

—KEITH SHERIN, FORMER VICE CHAIRMAN OF GE, FORMER CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF GE CAPITAL

**“As a TRIO alumna, I know personally how a college education opens doors and expands life’s possibilities. The critical work done by COE increases access to college, but also promotes the American ideal of improved prospects for a better life.”**

—U.S. REPRESENTATIVE GWENDOLYNNE MOORE (D-WI)

**“Our forefathers knew that in order to be free, you had to be educated. The work of COE is invaluable—advancing educational opportunities and ensuring that the least advantaged citizens have access to a postsecondary education.”**

—U.S. REPRESENTATIVE TOM COLE (R-OK)

## OUR INITIATIVES

COE has continued to bring new thinking to program practice and development for more than 35 years. Some new initiatives:

- **Projects to Increase the Number of Underrepresented Students in STEM Fields.** Through a number of initiatives, COE assists college access programs to expand the quality and reach of their instruction in STEM through a combination of corporate support and funding from the National Science Foundation.
- **The Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program and the Thomas R. Wolanin Congressional Internship** offer opportunities for low-income, first-generation students to gain experience working on Capitol Hill and to study abroad. COE also works with employers to design internships to prepare underrepresented students for a successful transition to the workforce.
- **Compliance Assessment (Monitoring Review) Services** review administrative, fiscal, and programmatic activities to examine compliance with applicable TRIO program laws, regulations, and policies as well as bring any applicable findings or deficiencies to the attention of the institution or agency.
- **The Economic Impact Study** project extends the understanding of how increasing rates of high school graduation, college entrance, and college completion benefit individuals' positive life outcomes and enhance economic benefits for institutions and communities.
- **Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States** is the yearly report produced by COE's Pell Institute that is regarded by scholars and policymakers as a valuable resource and has been cited by such outlets as NPR, *Bloomberg*, and *The Atlantic*. It documents the major role that family income plays in college entrance, selection, and graduation rates.
- **Data and Technology.** COE (with the help of a Department of Education I3 grant) developed **empower**, a secure, cloud-based software solution to help college access and success professionals, community partners, administrators, and other stakeholders access and analyze student performance data. By making this tool accessible to those who work with first-generation, low-income students, COE hopes to empower users to use data to influence the narrative concerning college access and success.

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is a nonprofit organization whose membership includes more than 1,000 colleges and community-based organizations with a particular commitment to expanding college opportunity. COE, which was incorporated in 1981, is the only national organization with affiliates in all 50 states, the Caribbean, and Pacific Islands focused on assuring that low-income and first-generation students have a realistic chance to prepare for, enter, and graduate from college.

COE provides its membership services to institutions and organizations hosting college access and success programs, particularly the federal TRIO programs. TRIO programs (Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound

Math/Science, Veterans Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program) help students to overcome economic, social, academic, and cultural barriers to higher education.

TRIO services include: assistance in choosing a college and tutoring; personal, financial, and career counseling; assistance in applying to college; workplace and college visits; special instruction in reading, writing, study skills, and mathematics; assistance in applying for financial aid; and academic assistance in high school or assistance to reenter high school or college.

## OUR OUTCOMES

College access and retention services are essential to providing true educational opportunity for all Americans, including low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities. At present, college access and success programs reach only a small fraction of the students and families who could benefit from them. For more than 35 years, COE has worked to make the following outcomes a reality:

- More than **5 million** students have graduated from college with the special assistance of TRIO programs.
- Annually, more than **3,000** access and success professionals receive training and technical assistance either in-person, virtually, or both.
- Leveraged **\$1.06 billion** to support TRIO programs (up from \$156.6 million in 1981).
- More than **800,000** low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities receive college access and retention services through our member colleges and agencies each year.



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**Council for Opportunity in Education**

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