



AMERICAN TALENT INITIATIVE

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American Talent Initiative on Track to Goal of 50,000 More Lower-Income Students by 2025

Comprehensive strategies at standout ATI schools point the way

A national alliance of leading colleges and universities is on track to enroll 50,000 more students who receive federal Pell grants by 2025, a new report shows. The findings underscore the importance of the American Talent Initiative's (ATI) collaborative push to expand opportunity for low- and moderate-income students across the country.

Between 2015-16, the year before ATI launched, and the 2017-18 school year, U.S. colleges and universities with graduation rates of 70 percent or higher added 20,696 lower-income students—that is, those who qualify for Pell grants. That number represents more than 40 percent of ATI's 2025 goal. While ATI measures the collective progress of all high-graduation-rate institutions, those that have joined ATI have contributed disproportionately to this increase.

“We are excited to see colleges and universities significantly increasing access to all qualified students—no matter their family's income,” said Jenny Sharfstein Kane, who leads the College Access and Success work at Bloomberg Philanthropies. “What's more, we are learning the most effective strategies for opening these doors of opportunity. We salute the schools that are leading the way through aggressive, comprehensive approaches and will continue to push for even more progress ahead.”

ATI, which is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies and managed by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program and Ithaca S+R, has grown from 30 founding members in 2016 to 128 by the end of 2019 and includes flagship state universities, prominent liberal arts colleges, and every member of the Ivy League. Last year, 19 additional colleges and universities joined ATI, which now has 37 public and 91 private institutions. The initiative is also funded by the Gray Foundation and the Jeffrey H. and Shari L. Aronson Family Foundation.

There is a wide chasm in the United States between who gets a bachelor's degree and who does not, and high-graduation-rate colleges and universities play an important role in closing that gap. Even though many thousands of lower-income students have the academic credentials to succeed at the hundreds of institutions with a graduation rate of 70 percent or more, fewer than half of students at those colleges and universities come from families in the bottom 80 percent of the national income distribution.



Data for the 2018-19 school year are not yet publicly available for all high-graduation-rate colleges and universities, and data collected from 120 ATI member institutions indicate that continued progress toward the goal is not guaranteed. While a majority of ATI schools increased Pell enrollment between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, that was offset by declines at other institutions. Overall, Pell enrollment at ATI schools stayed virtually the same over the year. The ATI institutions sustaining or making the most progress take a comprehensive approach to socioeconomic diversity: having a visible, concrete commitment to this mission and strategy among senior leaders and trustees; expanding beyond traditional pipelines of incoming students; prioritizing need-based financial aid; and making sure lower-income students have what they need to thrive on campus in an inclusive environment.

“The first two years of the Initiative demonstrate what is possible when colleges and universities make a concrete commitment to expand access,” said Daniel R. Porterfield, president and CEO of the Aspen Institute and former president of Franklin & Marshall College, a founding ATI member. “Indications of a leveling off in the most recent year should serve as a call to action to sustain that commitment and to not lose sight of why this work is important to our institutions and our country.”

A variety of schools are highlighted in the report for making significant progress under a comprehensive approach, including the University of California, San Diego (UC San Diego).

“We’ve learned that in order to truly expand access to education, admitting more lower-income students is only part of the equation,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep Khosla. “We need to ensure our high-achieving, low-income students have more support, specific to both their academic and cultural needs. Support is what makes success not only possible, but inevitable.”

While the new data show a pause in aggregate progress, ATI leaders are optimistic that members will intensify their commitment to expanding opportunity. “We believe the results over the first three years of the initiative provide evidence that the initiative is having its intended effect,” the report says. “They also show that we need to keep our foot on the gas.”

“The ATI mission remains important because the nation needs talent from all backgrounds to thrive,” said Catharine Bond Hill, managing director at Ithaca S+R, which authored the report. “We are excited to share what we’ve learned from the colleges and universities featured in this year’s report, and we look forward to sharing new insights as schools incorporate more of these proven strategies.”

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About Bloomberg Philanthropies:

Bloomberg Philanthropies invests in 510 cities and 129 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on five key



areas for creating lasting change: the Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's giving, including his foundation and personal philanthropy as well as Bloomberg Associates, a pro bono consultancy that works in cities around the world. In 2019, Bloomberg Philanthropies distributed \$3.3 billion. For more information, please visit [bloomberg.org](https://www.bloomberg.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [Twitter](#).

About The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program:

The Aspen Institute's [College Excellence Program](#) aims to advance higher education practices, policies, and leadership that significantly improve student outcomes. The program is part of [The Aspen Institute](#), a global nonprofit organization committed to realizing a free, just, and equitable society.

About Ithaka S+R:

[Ithaka S+R](#) is a not-for-profit service that provides research and strategic guidance to help the academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, technological, and demographic change. Ithaka S+R is part of [ITHAKA](#).

About the Gray Foundation:

The [Gray Foundation](#), founded by Mindy and Jon Gray, is committed to maximizing access to education, healthcare and opportunity for low-income children in New York. The Foundation is also focused on funding initiatives to advance the care of individuals living with BRCA gene mutations.

About the Jeffrey H. and Shari L. Aronson Family Foundation:

The Jeffrey H. and Shari L. Aronson Family Foundation aims to help young people achieve their highest potential and become independent, thoughtful contributors to their communities. With a deep interest in initiatives that create equitable opportunity, the Foundation invests primarily in higher education & career success, Jewish life & Israel, health, and civic engagement.