

Written testimony from Dr. Andrea Venezia,  
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It is an honor to be asked to provide testimony regarding the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I will focus my comments on pre-college outreach programs. When these federal pre-college outreach programs started, they were focused on *access* to college, not on *success* in college. Now we are asking them to ensure that students will succeed in college.

Based on current knowledge, we do not know how to replace the programs in ways I am confident will be more successful. The Brookings/Princeton proposal lists the following strategies as having some evidence of success: mentoring, summer programs, tutoring, help with financial aid, help with academic preparation, involving parents, and so forth. Those are the strategies that the current programs employ, so I am unclear about what new programs would be asked to do differently in terms of the heart of their work with students.

There is evidence that current programs are succeeding; such data are even cited in the Brookings/Princeton proposal. For example, Upward Bound students who did not expect to complete a four-year degree in their middle school years enrolled in college and finished their degrees more often than did similar students who did not participate in Upward Bound. That is precisely what we want.

It's hard to compile useful evidence when we're comparing apples and oranges. We need greater clarity about:

- 1) **Outcomes.** The field has not clearly defined which outcomes it is trying to achieve. The proposal suggests college enrollment and completion. There are

also well-documented predictive milestones regarding college graduation, such as nondelayed entry into college, earning 20 credits in the first year, entering college without needing remediation, passing certain gatekeeper classes, and continuous and full-time enrollment. Monitoring student progress on such measures could help programs do course corrections and would help with evaluations.

2) **Students.** Do we want to serve the students who can fairly easily tip over into a “success zone” with some additional supports, do we want to help the nation’s most underserved students, or do we strive for a middle ground? Those require different strategies and a different kind of intensity regarding the interventions.

3) **Strategies.** While there are common terms being used—mentoring, tutoring, etc.—there is little consistency in how they are implemented, and there is little information about the basic principles that underlie sound practice. For example, is tutoring once a week for an hour sufficient? Or should programs embed tutoring into courses so that students receive daily supports? It is impossible to evaluate the effect of tutoring if the implementation of that practice varies across sites. Finally, ensuring that these programs offer interventions *through* college seems critical, if college completion is the goal.

There are two other important issues I’d like to mention. The proposal focuses just on academic preparation. We know that academic preparation is the #1 indicator regarding college success. But we are learning that many students are not able to learn academics at high levels because they do not have the skills to be able to calm down, focus, bounce back in the face of adversity, organize effectively, and so forth. We’re starting to see that leading with academics might not succeed until students are ready to learn academics at the levels required for postsecondary readiness.

Second, the proposal appears to take a programmatic approach. There is evidence that students need a systemic/comprehensive approach—not just a program-based/siloed approach, especially for the big lift required to help students get ready to succeed after high school. How would the new program be integrated into existing structures (schools, communities)?

Let's support existing networks and leverage knowledge from those networks; allow for new networks to be created; support experimentation within clear parameters; research and send crystal clear messages about who to serve, what works when serving them, for how long and at what level of intensity, and which metrics should be used; employ the best **qualitative** and quantitative methods at our disposal so that we not only know "what" is happening, but we also know "why" and "how;" and help these programs succeed at new levels. Thank you.