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Mission Statement

The Congressional Advisory Board serves as the voice of the University of South Carolina’s student body to the federal government. The board researches the most critical issues pertaining to students and addresses South Carolina’s Congressional Delegation to find better solutions to academic, financial and social problems.

The board works to solicit input from institutional constituents such as students, faculty, administrators and staff. The board strives to educate the university community about federal higher education initiatives and investments, enabling students to realize their potential for active involvement in national politics.

As student advocates, we believe we can transform both the state and the University of South Carolina by informing our elected leaders of issues that are relevant to our generation. By doing this, we can enhance their future — benefiting our community and leaving a lasting heritage for future students.
Acknowledgements

Without the assistance of several members of both Student Government and the Carolina community, this report would not exist. The Congressional Advisory Board thanks the following:

Theresa Sexton, coordinator for Student Government, greatly assisted the board in scheduling visits with administrators and in planning the logistics of its travels. Jerry Brewer, associate vice president for student affairs and academic support, provided advice for the proposals and assisted with the board’s financial arrangements. Michael Parks, student body president, provided valuable guidance in choosing worthwhile topics and coordinating meetings around the university. Stinson Rogers, student body treasurer, assisted with the board’s financial arrangements and helped reserve meeting venues. Steve Beckham, lobbyist for the University of South Carolina planned our visits while in DC and helped make our lobbying trip possible. Melissa Gentry and Hilary Brannon, of the Division of Student Affairs were instrumental in their efforts to edit and format this report. Most importantly, we would like to thank the hundreds of students who took the time to participate in our surveys and to discuss the issues most important to all students at Carolina.
Letter from the Director

Dear Senators and Representatives,

As the 115th session of Congress is underway, one cannot help but hope that behind a new beginning lies boundless potential for our elected representatives to improve the lives of every American. For over six months the members of the University of South Carolina Congressional Advisory Board have tirelessly researched issues affecting students and have identified critical areas in which we seek positive change. This report addresses such topics as access to higher education, mental health, curriculum and competitiveness of American education and sexual assault/harassment. While these topics are far from an exhaustive list of issues affecting college students, the remedies outlined in this report have the potential to markedly increase the safety, quality of life and economic opportunities afforded to college students. Our agenda, we believe, reflects the type of change that seeks to empower American students, open doors to more opportunity, and provide adequate resources for American families to prosper in what can oftentimes be a challenging world.

Over the past year, the Congressional Advisory Board has witnessed firsthand the vibrant, and sometimes volatile rhetoric that emerged from the past election cycle. As the official lobbying arm representing over 30,000 students, we understand intimately that students whom we represent, like many Americans, disagree vehemently on a variety of topics. However, we know, on a fundamental level there is so much more that unites us than divides us. Indeed, members of our own board fundamentally disagree but still reason through political issues with civility. We know that common ground can be found and positive change can be attained regardless of political party or ideology. We implore you to do the same in your capacity as our representatives.

As students at this state’s flagship university, we pride ourselves on being politically active and vocal citizens. This past election saw USC’s Lead the Way campaign successfully register nearly 5,000 new voters. In fact, the positions taken in this report reflect extensive surveys of our own student body. The issues outlined herein are important to us and, we hope, to you as well. We are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to discuss your plans to support these causes and advance the opportunities for young adults to excel and help make South Carolina the exceptional state that has afforded us so much already.

It is with great pride and honor that I present to you the Congressional Advisory Board 2017 Annual Report, a product of months of hard work by an outstanding team of students whose diverse experience and skills make them ideal representatives of our student body.

Sincerely,

Nick Santamaria
Director, Congressional Advisory Board
University of South Carolina Student Government
Member Biographies

**Nick Santamaria** is a third year political science major and Russian minor at the University of South Carolina. Nick is captain of the University of South Carolina’s Mock Trial Team, has interned with the South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense, and his undergraduate research focuses on judicial independence. As the son of an immigrant and a first generation college student, Nick credits his parents for his attraction towards public service. He plans to attend graduate school and pursue a career at the State Department to promote democratic institutions and the rule of law abroad.

**Kaitlin McClamrock** is a third year political science and European studies major at the University of South Carolina. Having served in Student Government since her freshman year, she enjoys advocating on behalf of the Carolina community, and hailing from Columbia, South Carolina, Kaitlin is a lifelong Gamecock. Kaitlin serves as a University Ambassador, and has also previously served as president of IRIS at USC, an on-campus LGBTQ organization. Kaitlin plans to pursue a doctoral degree in political science after graduation, focusing on evidence-based policy making, specifically in human rights.

**Jacklyn Abernathy** is a second year McNair Scholar studying economics and political science. In her time at the University of South Carolina, she has served communities both on and off campus as an intern with the South Carolina Attorney General’s Office and a member of Omega Phi Alpha National Service Sorority. She is also an executive officer of Amigos del Buen Samaritano and a mentor in the Top Scholars program. After graduating, Jacklyn plans to pursue a career in public service law.

**Taylor Bradley** is a second year student from Turbeville, South Carolina, pursuing a degree in political science with a minor in public relations. Over the course of her time at USC, she has served in various roles throughout Student Government, Special Olympics South Carolina, and currently pages in the South Carolina State Senate. Outside of academics, Taylor thoroughly enjoys food, *Scandal*, and her yorkie, Molly. Upon graduation, she desires to attend law school and pursue a career in public service.

**Isaac Kim** is a first year student at the University of South Carolina studying international business and finance with minors in French and mathematics. He currently serves as an Undergraduate Research Assistant at the Rule of Law Collaborative and is president of the Global Business Council. Following graduation, Isaac hopes to embark on a career in trade policy.

**Rachel Lunsford** is a third year student in the Darla Moore School of Business and the South Carolina Honors College. Her majors are international business and finance with a minor in Spanish. As a McNair Scholar, Rachel has become highly invested in the Carolina community. She has served in leadership roles since her freshman year in Student Government and serves as president of USC Rotaract. She plans to pursue a master’s degree in international business at USC during the 2017-2018 academic year.

**Abby Nugent** is a third year political science major with minors in business and French. She has served in Student Government since her freshman year, and is active in state advocacy as a student ambassador for the Save the Children Action Network. She also serves on the executive board for USC’s chapter of College Republicans. She will be pursuing a policy internship in Washington D.C. this upcoming summer with the Koch Fellow Program, and hopes to research policies surrounding poverty and upward mobility.

**Tron Riley** is a third year political science and economics major with a minor in business and a cognate in African American studies from Charleston, South Carolina. Tron has held numerous internships including bill keeper for the South Carolina Senate Judiciary Committee, staff assistant for Congressman Jim Clyburn, and field organizer for the South Carolina Association of Nonprofit Organizations. Tron is a member of Alpha Kappa Psi Professional Fraternity and the National Association of Collegiate Scholars. Upon graduation, Tron plans to attend law school to pursue a JD/MBA.
University of South Carolina
Congressional Advisory Board

2017 Annual Report to Congress
Mental Health on College Campuses

Each year millions of students seek post-secondary degrees at institutions of higher education in order to better themselves and their prospects in a stressful job market. The enrollment of students at institutions in the United States has increased nearly 20% each decade since the 1970s. This transition to college represents a shift in how students are perceived by society at large; on the cusp of adulthood, college students are granted increased independence and responsibilities. Many students excel, achieving high marks and accomplishing academic and professional feats worth celebrating. However, there are other students who are coping with the stresses and trials of life on their own. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, over 20% of people age 18-25 experience some sort of mental illness. In fact, a 2014 survey by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health reveals that nearly 34% of all college students take medication for mental health concerns while 48% attend counselling. The college transition is an exciting time in the lives of many young people, but it is also associated with a drastic mental health risk that cannot go unaddressed.

However, college students are not the only ones afflicted by mental health disorders. In 2014, it was reported that 43.6 million Americans were suffering from a mental illness. South Carolina, reflecting the nationwide statistics on mental health problems, ranks suicide as the ninth leading cause of death. In order to address this epidemic, we need a concerted effort from all levels of government to support mental health care and reform the mental health care system in a comprehensive way. A large problem that mental health care faces is the stigma of reaching out for help, due to mental and behavioral health being seen as a form of healthcare “other” than the norm. This stigma alone, which surrounds mental and behavioral health, constitutes a
tangible barrier to the proper implementation of health care solutions.\textsuperscript{vi} The United States has made significant strides in recognizing this disparity and attempting to correct it in both our words and actions. We believe that mental health should no longer be considered an alternative category of health care, but rather, it should rightfully be considered and treated in the law like any other form of health care. For millions of Americans across the country and for our fellow students at the University of South Carolina, the actions of the federal government directly impact the way that mental health is seen, treated, and addressed in our communities. For this reason, we call upon our elected representatives to aggressively and practically address mental health in the 115th Congress.

The environment of a college campus means a lot of things for the millions of students who live there for ten months out of the year. The stresses of college, living on one’s own, relationships, and the undeniable presence of drugs and alcohol all contribute to a volatile mix that puts our nation's youth at risk. The American College Health Association’s 2016 survey found that nearly 60% of college students have felt overwhelming anxiety within the past 12 months yet only 17% report ever seeking treatment for anxiety.\textsuperscript{vii} This means that thousands of young people in college are suffering from conditions but do not seek treatment. This, in part, falls to the localities, schools, and communities to increase their advocacy and awareness efforts surrounding mental health. However, the influence and the attention of the federal government must be directed towards this issue. The recent passage of H.R.34 by the 114th Congress makes laudable strides to improve the state of mental health care in America, but it also leaves critical areas overlooked or underfunded. By closely examining what has been accomplished and what remains to be improved, we hope to advise your position in crafting a new mental health agenda going into the 115th session of Congress.
**Recent Accomplishments: The 21st Century CURES Act**

As part of the final legislative push of the 114th Congress, the 21st Century CURES Act is a bill that addressed, in large part, a number of notable and commendable aspects of mental health care that this advisory board has lobbied for in years past. Among these accomplishments include new positions and working groups within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, reauthorization of critical grants such as the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act grants for suicide prevention, as well as vital technical clarifications regarding HIPPA and mental health. For passing these critical improvements to mental health care, infrastructure, and community project funding, the Congressional Advisory Board at the University of South Carolina commends all representatives who voted in the affirmative.

Overall, the CURES Act has been historic in its bipartisan agreement and allocations for research and programs putting mental health at the forefront of care. The CURES Act strengthens requirements that insurers consider mental conditions under the same premise as physical conditions, which is a huge success towards eliminating the stigma and fear of receiving mental health treatment. The law also acknowledges the strong interconnectedness between addiction and mental health issues, which is especially crucial for young people.

**Letting Localities Decide: The Inherent Freedom and Weaknesses of Block Grants**

Often, the true needs faced by a state can get lost in translation when given a strict categorical grant from Washington. It is crucial, especially in the critical field of aiding those with mental health crises, that those on the ground in the state have the ability to allocate monies creatively to best suit individual community problems.

This concern is an excellent opportunity to implement evidence-based solutions at the local level and integrate key factors such as social, educational, and juvenile services. A
modernized block grant, as featured in H.R.34, allows states the flexibility and freedom to
determine areas of highest need and implement proven evidence-based practices to serve those in
need of mental health services, as well as to further integrate primary and behavioral health care.

Included in specific grant funding through H.R.34 are monies to support training,
education, and experiential fieldwork of those in the mental health field. When students have the
ability and resources to pursue experiential training such as an internship or field work, real-
world skills are developed that will translate into greater successes with treating mental illness in
the future. These internship opportunities will also serve to recruit more future students in this
field of study. Only then will there be enough professionals in the field, reducing the dismal
student to clinician ratios, to fully tackle the pressing mental health issues facing our state and
country today.

The block grant system has enormous potential to assist people in the state of South
Carolina since those within the state best know the needs of South Carolina’s residents.
However, the federal government needs to develop proper safeguards to ensure that block grant
funds are being used effectively and with as little waste as possible. **Recommendation: Ensure
that sufficient measures are in place to hold block grant recipients accountable for the
judicious and effective use of federal grant funds.**

**Unpacking H.R. 34: Missed Opportunities of the 21st Century CURES Act**

However, we cannot rest on our laurels or become complacent when mental health
continues to pose a serious health risk to Americans. Suicide is among the top ten leading causes
of death in America, and a history of derogating mental health to a secondary class of care has
led to systemic shortcomings in terms of infrastructural investment in the field. The resources
available on college campuses alone are grossly insufficient to deal with the picture the latest
statistics have painted. According to the Association for University and College Counseling
Center Directors, the ideal student to professional staff ratio for mental health services is 1
clinician per 1,500 students. However the most recent 2015 survey found that some universities
are severely understaffed, with student to clinician ratios as high as 3,400 students per
professional staff member.\textsuperscript{x}

It is reassuring to find that Division B, Title IX, Subtitle C of the 21st Century CURES
Act is titled “Mental Health on Campus Improvement.” However, the three small contents of that
subtitle leave some critical concerns unaddressed. Section 9031 authorizes crucial grant funding
to help institutions of higher education cope with the burgeoning need for mental health services
on college campuses. However, the section clearly lays out future allocation of funds for fiscal
years 2017-2022 to be an anemic $7 million per year in eligible grant monies. When corrected
for inflation and compared to the 2005 allocation, the new totals represent an increase of only
$800,000 per year. Meanwhile, in that same period of time, the percentage of college students
who have considered suicide has increased by 15\%.\textsuperscript{xi-xii} While in no way do we expect or want
the federal government to pick up the tab for campus or community mental health services, when
steps are taken to outline paths of support for struggling communities, the allocation should be
more than what might be considered nominal in the face of worsening statistics.

This trend of decreased funding for mental health grants and programs is not confined to
Section 9031 of H.R.34 either. Funding is being cut from mental health awareness training grants
in Section 9010 from the previous allocation of $25 million in 2001 to $14,693,000 for each of
the years between 2018 and 2022. When corrected for inflation, using the Bureau of Labor
Statistics’ own formulas, this new sum constitutes a cut of over $20 million on actual spending
power for mental health awareness training grants. While we appreciate the inclusion of mental health in name throughout the CURES Act, including the mention of various task forces, commissions of reports, and creation of new positions to enhance attention, serious concerns remain about what H.R.34, now law, is actually doing to combat the declining mental health of our nation, and particularly of students on college campuses.

In order to make tangible improvements to mental health care in this country, we strongly believe that it is time for the federal government to take the critical step from gathering reports and convening task forces to passing laws to address the basic infrastructural deficits plaguing the mental health care system. South Carolina itself ranks 45th out of 50 among states in terms of access to mental health care services. Similarly the Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals that when compared to the national average, South Carolina ranks an abysmal 49th in terms of the “location quotient” or ratio of mental health counselors to the population.

While Section 9007 includes up to $12.5 million in federal grant funding to help improve local and state infrastructure in order to respond to mental health emergencies, a specific emphasis of this section is a “Bed Database Plan.” This focus on cataloging beds and open spaces at community treatment centers appears premature and ill-conceived, since the nationwide shortage of beds, facilities, and experts has been well documented. As Figure 1 shows, those with mental health issues are more often homeless or jailed than placed in a community care facility. Furthermore, those with outpatient needs face even greater difficulties as inadequacies with inpatient services push thousands to flood outpatient care centers and emergency rooms.
Recommendation: Restore vital funding to mental health grant programs having experienced cuts. By restoring the cuts made to grant programs promoting mental health, we can continue to support local efforts to fund customized solutions to mental health crises around the nation. Even in South Carolina, federal mental health grant funding has been used by Clemson University, the College of Charleston, and statewide through the South Carolina Department of Mental Health to fund awareness, advocacy, training, infrastructural, and treatment programs. Without properly funding federal grant programs to support workforce development, training, advocacy, and emergency mental health response programs, we can only expect the statistics we are facing to worsen.

Recommendation: Shift the federal government’s approach from exploratory to active investment in mental health infrastructure. While it is noted that working groups and task forces can bring together valuable stakeholders to create actionable plans for improvement, the federal government must begin to actually address the issues facing the mental health care system. Chief among these issues are the lack of facilities, professionals, and beds throughout the country. While vital improvements and investments in telehealth services are beginning to bridge
the gap, the federal government must continue its investment in telehealth and commit to more funding for health infrastructure.

**S.841 (114th Congress) Prioritizing Veterans Access to Mental Health Care**

Despite the increase in funding to South Carolina’s Dorn Veterans Medical Center in Columbia, veterans are still facing waiting periods to see a specialist double that of the national average - 4.8% as opposed to 2.8% nationally. These extended waits can have significant negative effects, especially on those suffering mental health problems. Veterans deserve to have options and more control over care available to them when facing these waiting periods, which is why the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) must allow and fund the use of outside health care resources. These changes are suggested in S. 841 (114th), cosponsored by Senator Lindsey Graham, amending the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs State Summary, of the 21,681,000 total veterans in America, 418,000 live in South Carolina. However, the amount of VA care sites is minimal in comparison to the large demographic of veterans. The University of South Carolina itself has 1,361 student veterans out of the 24,866 undergraduate students, which translates to 5.5% of the student body—much higher than the already substantial state percentage.

Veterans deserve the utmost freedom and choice in regard to their health care services, especially in an issue as personal and important as mental health. This bill suggests removing a requirement that veterans must live more than 40 miles away from a VA facility or have waited longer than 30 days before accessing non-VA mental health care. This is crucial, because as Senator Joni Ernst succinctly states, “there is no acceptable wait time for mental health care treatment for veterans. After the immeasurable physical and mental challenges our veterans have
faced to protect our freedoms, the least we can do for their health care is to ensure that their mental health is given the same priority as other ailments.³³viii **Recommendation:** The reintroduction and support of S. 841 (114th) in order to prioritize veteran’s mental health.
Access and Affordability of Higher Education

In an increasingly globalized and competitive world, higher education provides students with invaluable opportunities to succeed, and the statistics demonstrate the ever-changing nature of the job market. In 1975, 13.9% of adults age 25 and over had a four-year college degree. Today, one of every three adults has a bachelor’s degree, and the Department of Education predicts that by the year 2020, over 60% of jobs will require either a two or four year degree.

When looking closely at Americans ages 25-34, the distinction between college-educated individuals and those without college education is noticeable, as those who only have a high school diploma experience 6% higher unemployment. Furthermore, young college graduates earn a yearly median income over 66% higher than high school graduates. Corporations such as BMW, Boeing, and Volvo invest heavily in South Carolina due to its ready supply of degree-holding graduates. Wouldn't a greater supply of degree holders cultivate greater investment?

In order to meet the demands of the job market and secure a brighter future for coming generations, Congress should continue efforts to improve our education system and ensure that college is affordable for the average American. The Congressional Advisory Board has identified four key areas that the federal government can improve both access to and affordability of higher education. These areas include streamlining the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), full and proper allocations for both Pell Grants and TRiO Programs, and increased transparency regarding student loans.

FAFSA

In 2015 alone, nearly 20 million students completed the FAFSA. The 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 versions of this form each include over 100 questions about the student’s
demographics and their family’s financial circumstances. \textsuperscript{xxiv} This form nears the length of the IRS 1040 and easily surpasses the 1040 EZ, making the length overwhelming to students who often have never filled out even a single IRS document before. The form specifically deters low-income students whose families may not have experience with complicated tax forms. Even after filling out the FAFSA, there is still the possibility of being rejected. Nationally, 45\% of graduating high school students do not complete the FAFSA, largely because of the complicated and extensive nature of the form. \textsuperscript{xxv} In a project tracking education decisions, researchers found that few low-income high-schoolers made the deliberate choice to not attend college but rather they fall off the path towards a college education in the face of seemingly minor obstacles, such as a FAFSA rejection or confusion.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

One might suggest, that the current FAFSA, and its 100 questions, provides the most accurate picture of a student’s finances. However, Harvard economists Susan Dynarski and Judith Scott-Clayton found that only four variables – adjusted gross income, marital status, family size, and the number of family members in college – explain over three-quarters of the variation in federal grant aid for students.\textsuperscript{xxvii} Furthermore, dependent students have to provide their parents’ and their personal income data each year. However, for many students whose financial situations have not changed significantly in the past year, this process causes additional stress and wastes time. Changing the FAFSA to a file-once form would both cut down on government waste for yearly reviews and student time.

In order to rectify this issue, Congress should prioritize the reform of the FAFSA process. In the House, H.R.5784 (114th Congress) – The File Once FAFSA Act proposes turning the FAFSA into a file-once document for low-income students with Pell Grants, allowing their information to carry over for four years. Similar legislation from the 114\textsuperscript{th} Congress includes
H.R.5528 (114th) and S.108 (114th). These bills also focus on simplifying the application by reducing the number of questions asked of students. H.R 5528 (114th) also requires the Department of Education to release Pell Grant information earlier, which allows institutions to provide more accurate and timely scholarships and grant estimates to students.

In the White House Task Force’s report, researchers found that in 2009, 50% of students from families with incomes of less than $35,000 and 47% of those with family income between $50,000 and $100,000 eliminated colleges based on cost before applying. Notifying both students and schools of their financial aid faster allows institutions and students to make the most informed financial decisions. We are asking legislators to continue to support and introduce legislation that will streamline the FAFSA process in order to make a college education more affordable and accessible to those students whose families struggle to meet the economic burden of college. The legislation outlined above can help American families who seek a higher education for their children but can’t afford to meet this burden on their own. Recommendation: Support the reintroduction of H.R. 5784 (114th) the File Once FAFSA Act to require federal aid recipients to only refile FAFSA documents if their income changes. Support the introduction of bills to cut the length of the FAFSA.

**Pell Grants**

Students who successfully complete the FAFSA and meet a number of income and eligibility criteria can potentially receive Pell Grants, which unlike federal student loans do not have to be repaid. During 2015, the Department of Education’s fiscal report indicated that nearly 40% of college students use funds from the Pell Grant Program to help with cost of college. While the amount awarded varies from student to student, the majority of Pell Grants are
awarded to students whose families make under $30,000 a year. In this way, Pell Grant funds assist students from the poorest backgrounds and help make higher education a reality. Studies consistently suggest that these low-income students are less likely to complete a college degree program due to financial difficulties. In a report from the Vice President’s Middle Class Task Force, it is revealed that middle-class children are half as likely to complete a degree program as their counterparts from wealthier backgrounds. The report also states that attending a four-year public institution costs the average family 16% of their after-tax income after all aid is applied. For high school graduates, 78% of high-income graduates are expected to enroll in college compared to 63% from the middle class. Simply put, the link between educational attainment and income is as clear as it is disheartening, and the Pell Grant Program is a strong step towards providing the opportunity for those students to succeed. **Recommendation:**

*Continue to fully fund the Pell Grant Program to assist low-income students in attaining a higher level of education.*

**Loans and Transparency**

With the cost of college rising nearly 3% every year, many students, including over half of the 2015 graduates of the University of South Carolina, take out federal loans to cover the cost of their education. Many students’ first interaction with the federal government is filing for student aid and receiving student loans, which contributes, in part, to college graduates facing almost $29,000 in debt at the end of four years. In 2014, the total outstanding federal student debt reached $1.1 trillion, the number of student borrowers passed 42 million, and the default rate rose to their highest levels in 20 years.
Students often do not understand the financial burdens and obligations of a college education at the onset and do not comprehend the magnitude of their loan burden until post-graduation repayment rolls around. In fact, in 2012, Indiana University began sending out letters that estimate future loan burdens when students received their financial aid decisions, and their student borrowing has since dropped by 18%.xxxv Before accepting loans, students should be aware of all of their repayment options in addition to an estimated total of loans that will be repaid. By requiring colleges to send out this information, students will be made more aware of their responsibilities and obligations. **Recommendation: Promote responsible borrowing by amending the Higher Education Act to require or incentivize institutions of higher learning to include estimated loan burdens with their financial aid disclosures to students.**

**TRiO Programs**

In communities with large low-income populations, TRiO programs promote continued education and academic success. Unlike the Pell Grant Program, TRiO focuses on more than just the financial cost of a higher education and provides resources for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including low-income students, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities. Across the country and here in South Carolina, TRiO provides several programs to empower students. These programs include the Educational Opportunity Centers, the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, and Upward Bound programs.

These programs provide students with financial and economic literacy counseling, postsecondary education training, course selection advisement, college entrance exam preparation, and GED training. In addition to these services, the programs provide career
workshop training, tutoring, and meaningful mentor and mentee relationships. These programs impact students nationally as well as locally in South Carolina. In 2013, a total of 758,350 students benefitted from the 2,791 different TRiO projects, with South Carolina providing 58 of those projects. xxxvi Studies show that in the 2007-2008 school year, 86% of Student Success Services participants went on to enroll in a two-year program or higher. xxxvii Similarly, reports indicate that for the 2012-2013 school year, 59% of Equal Opportunity Center participants went on to enroll in a secondary education program. xxxviii

Funding TRiO programs is vital to the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in addition to contributing to the diversity on college campuses. A continued investment in this program is not only instrumental in preparing low-income students for more successful careers, but it also can provide the invaluable opportunities for hardworking South Carolina students to overcome the limitations shouldered by low-income and first-generation students. **Recommendation:** Continue supporting and allocating funds to TRiO Programs through the United States Department of Education.
Curriculum and Competitiveness of an American Education

Education remains an expensive yet valuable investment for both our country and our citizens. As nations across the globe race to educate and produce the most competitive workforce, we must reflect critically on how a country is best poised to educate a workforce facing global competition. How can the federal government ensure that its citizens can continue to innovate, invent, and compete in a way that is not just quintessentially American but cements our place as a world leader for economic prosperity, technological ingenuity, and entrepreneurial success?

Perhaps most critical to continued economic development and innovation is an educated workforce. According to the 2012 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the U.S. ranked 27th out of the 64 countries analyzed by OECD in mathematics, and similarly ranks in the bottom quartile for science. The U.S. has a score of 18% in science, which is the OECD average for low-performing students. Low performance is defined as those 15-year-old students who received scores below Level 2, which is considered the baseline to perform in modern society, on the PISA mathematics, reading, and science assessments. The U.S. is considered one of the world’s foremost leaders, yet we perform near the world averages and do not lead in math and science performance globally, unlike our trade counterparts in Korea and China.

The current job market is changing quickly, with many jobs of the future yet to be created. The Pew Research Center Fall 2016 survey revealed that employment is rising the fastest in skilled occupations. In other words, growing occupations with job security require higher levels of education, drastically increasing the demand for higher degrees.
So how do we confront the need for better educated, better skilled, and more competitive Americans? Students across the nation and in South Carolina can benefit tremendously from an increased emphasis on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education. This approach to learning centers around a core emphasis on the traditional STEM fields with the added benefits of arts integration and has been proven to strengthen students’ learning and encourage them to think critically. Concerns exist among educators that the United States may be short 3 million high-skilled workers by 2018, with a minimum of two-thirds of these jobs requiring postsecondary education, potentially harming our economy. Without enough skilled workers to fill positions, our economic base will weaken to the point of collapse. xlii

**STEM to STEAM: A Critical Transition**

In a study of Michigan State University Honors College graduates between the years of 1990 and 1995, patent bearers and business owners were eight times more likely to have participated in arts and crafts as children, revealing a connection between arts exposure and entrepreneurism. xliii Proponents credit arts integration to valued traits like ingenuity, creativity, and “out of the box” thinking, skills which are required by today’s workplace.

Traditional technical education has focused on science, technology, engineering, and math, or the traditional "STEM" fields. However, research has increasingly pointed to the importance of the arts, including subjects from music to foreign language, in comprehensive and effective education. Studies by Edutopia and the George Lucas Educational Foundation demonstrated that exposure to the arts led to a 30% increase in science and math skills in English as a second language (ESL) students. xlv This new approach, with the addition of arts, is referred to as "STEAM" and has been clearly linked to more advantageous education outcomes.
A Richland County School District One teacher relates her personal experience to describe the importance of STEAM education. “STEAM offers advanced exposures to students as early as middle school. Our district is exposing them to the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts, math, and additional career fields through real-world and scenarios. Math instruction has become more rigorous in that students must be able to calculate concepts they would likely see and apply in the workforce. Students experience authentic applications of concepts and problem-solving opportunities. For example, students learn how to build a bridge or calculate the launch angles of rockets that they build in their class. STEAM schools use the technology available to teach students and prepare them to be successful in the 21st century workforce.”

Some of the most necessary and marketable skills, such as communication and problem solving, are encompassed in a STEAM-oriented education. Smith Systems, a producer of classroom furniture, defines the arts as significant to the learning process in explaining how the “art gives new language to science”. In this way, arts integration allow students to engage multiple part of the brain, think creatively, brainstorm, and problem solve.

The Committee on STEM Education (CoSTEM), comprised of 13 agencies—including agencies within the Department of Education—have promoted STEAM education in schools across the country. The Harvard Business Review notes how certain businesses such as Warby Parker, a producer of eyeglasses and sunglasses, have invested in book clubs to achieve greater professional development, supporting the notion that development in the arts can bring tangible, economic benefit. Embracing the arts has taken widespread support, but it requires continual congressional support to remain a new cornerstone of American education. Students today face a remarkably competitive global market, and any advantage, such as the one posed by arts
integration, must be leveraged. **Recommendation: Introduction and support of legislation to bolster both STEM education initiatives and arts integration in American schools.**

**Reintroduction of bills like H.R. 118 (113th) promoting tax incentives for STEM programs.**

**Fostering Entrepreneurship & Capitalizing on American Ingenuity**

Just as arts integration poses substantial benefits to both our students and the country’s workforce, programs with an explicit emphasis on entrepreneurship can help make American students all the more competitive. The Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute evaluates the entrepreneurship “ecosystem” within a country annually analyzing attitudes, resources, and infrastructures available to entrepreneurs and then assigning an "entrepreneurship index". xlviii

In the 2017 evaluations, researchers at the London School of Economics, George Mason University, Imperial College, and University of Pécs ranked the United States’ Global Entrepreneurship Index first with a score of 83.4. American history is laden with examples of entrepreneurship, from the Ford Motor Company to Microsoft. In 2015 alone, 5 million jobs were created in entrepreneurship, contributing massively to the U.S. economy. American ingenuity remains our greatest asset and must continue to be promoted.

As noted in *Serial Innovators*, published by the Stanford University Press in May of 2012, innovators who bring more than two “revolutionary products” to the market each year possess characteristics such as technical excellence, curiosity, systems thinking, a broad range of experience, and creativity – skills cultivated by arts educations. In essence, arts education directly equip individuals to engage in entrepreneurship. **Recommendation: Support of S.121**
Foreign Language Education in a Global Economy

In the U.S., high schools and colleges frequently possess basic foreign language requirements that often fall short of proficiency. Currently, the U.S. Department of Education has no foreign language mandate. However, this lack of emphasis on foreign language education has led to a mere 10.75% of the population self-reporting proficiency in another language. Of that segment, 89% of these bilingual individuals learned second languages at home, revealing that only 1% of Americans acquired bilingual proficiency through formal educational means. Foreign language priorities should start with introduction to students at a young age. According to the Linguistics Society of America, children are programmed to learn languages due to their innate need to communicate. This programming simplifies the acquisition of multiple languages. By taking this approach, we can increase efficiency in student learning while maximizing the impact of local investment into foreign language acquisition.

Language education cannot simply end with its introduction. Psychology principles iterated by K. Anders Ericsson indicate that without practice of language abilities, those abilities are lost. Schools like the University of South Carolina require some level of foreign language proficiency; however, these requirements far from promote proficiency in a language. A survey of over 500 University of South Carolina students revealed that 94.5% of students found foreign language proficiency was a valuable and marketable skill. With such overwhelming support, what should the federal government do to promote foreign language acquisition?
Looking to many of our allies, education policy in 29 European nations require instruction in multiple foreign languages, and these nations have experienced tangible benefits from language learning. Great Britain has considered repealing its foreign language requirements; however, research by Cardiff University reveals that if this foreign language requirement becomes voluntary, the GDP would be reduced by 3.5% or $60 billion dollars. In other words, foreign language acquisition accounted for a 3.5% GDP boost.

By not requiring, encouraging, or even emphasizing language requirements domestically, the United States forgoes GDP growth seen by other modernized nations. This 3.5% GDP increase due to foreign language is the equivalent of U.S. economic growth in 2016 of the last year. Furthermore, for more than 20 European nations, foreign language education remains compulsory, with this second language often being English. With this education, European workforces are more adequately prepared to communicate in the varying contexts of today’s globalized world, a preparation that the American workforce has not been versed in. Therefore, foreign language skills not only must be improved but sustainably prioritized for American success in the global marketplace.

Education remains the cornerstone of future American success. An investment in STEAM education, foreign languages, and American competitiveness demonstrate a
commitment to this future success, by ensuring our students will be continually exposed to innovation, entrepreneurship, and hands-on learning. This investment is not only wise for our education systems, but it will prove to be a fiscally responsible in the long term, leading to greater innovation and competitiveness in the global market. In our continually growing and interconnected world, these issues must be made a top priority by those in Washington as well as in our educational institutions. **Recommendation: Reintroduce and support HR.3096 to establish and fund foreign language education grants. Reform and return normal funding levels to Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965 in regards to federal funds for international studies and foreign language learning.**
Campus Safety: Sexual Assault & Harassment

Sexual assault is a major concern on college campuses. The American Association of Universities reported that after surveying 150,000 students across 27 colleges and universities, more than 23% of undergraduate women report being sexually assaulted while in college. This often translates to 1 in 4 women being sexually assaulted during college, and 1 in 3 women being sexually assaulted over the course of their lifetime. Sexual assault is defined by the Department of Justice as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. This poses a direct threat to the safety of students on campus. Though there is a misconception that men are not in danger of sexual assault, the National Criminal Justice Reference reports 1 in 16 men will be sexually assaulted while in college, proving this is an issue that affects men and women alike.

Mandatory Reporting

Given that sexual assault is such a major concern, a myriad of preventive measures have been taken on campuses to protect victims and reduce dangerous situations that may lead to sexual assault, or a pervasive “rape culture”. These measures include the “It’s On Us” campaign, which the University of South Carolina along with other institutions of higher education in South Carolina and the nation as a whole, have enthusiastically implemented. Through weeks of action over the past three years related to sexual assault prevention and domestic violence awareness services on campus, along with mandatory reporting of sexual assaults, the campaign has changed some of the climate surrounding sexual assault on college campuses. However, the “It’s On Us” campaign and the sexual assault & violence intervention and prevention services (SAVIP) cannot protect all victims of sexual assault and alone cannot
end the troubling trend of sexual assault on college campuses. Further, mandatory reporting in its current form derogates victims’ wishes and places all responsibility on the institution. Mandatory reporting, once heralded as the best option for campuses to comply with federal law, found it origins in the Clery Act and the Higher Education Act (specifically Title II and Title IX). However, American universities have interpreted mandatory reporting requirements in such a way that never could have been imagined. When these laws were initially passed through Congress, their intent was not to cause additional problems for victims of sexual assault, but the way that these laws have been interpreted by institutions of higher education is the problem at hand. Brent Sokolow, executive director of the Association of Title IX Administrators, remarked that the current interpretation of federal law has unleashed a "runaway train on mandatory reporting [that] needs to be brought back into the station".

Mandatory reporting in college campus settings forces administrators, and even peer students who are in leadership positions, to report to the authorities if a student has been sexually assaulted. This may sound like a positive component to ending sexual assault on college campuses, but instead, it leads to distrust in university administration and officials and does nothing to empower survivors of sexual assault. Jill Engle of Penn State University wrote about the issues faced by campuses with recent high profile sexual assault cases such as Columbia, Yale, Vanderbilt, Penn State, Florida State, and the University of Virginia in 2015 in her article “Mandatory Reporting of Campus Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence: Moving to a Victim-Centric Protocol that Comports with Federal Law.” Engle, and other experts in the field of sexual assault reporting almost unanimously agree that survivor-centric models of sexual assault reporting are much more empowering and successful in efficiently reporting sexual assaults on campus in compliance with the Clery Act. Mandatory reporting does not accomplish these
goals and necessarily involves campus police or authorities without the survivor’s consent, which 55% of University of South Carolina students disagree with.\textsuperscript{lxiv}

\section*{Survivor-Centric Alternatives to Mandatory Reporting}

In contrast to mandatory reporting, newer systems have emerged to provide survivors of sexual assault with means of reporting their assault without being forced to by university administration. One such system is a project of the 501(c)3 non-profit Sexual Health Innovations, called Callisto. Callisto was created with the understanding that less than 10% of college sexual assault survivors report to administrators, local police, campus security, or other authorities, and those who do report wait an average of 11 months to do so. As such, the Callisto group created an online, self-reporting tool that places the safety, comfort, and security of the survivor of sexual assault first. Callisto helps create a report in real-time but leaves the decision to contact authorities up to the survivor. It also teaches users about sexual assault, giving statistics as the report is generated with the individual.\textsuperscript{lxv} Other survivor-centric sexual assault reporting systems can be implemented nationwide, which would prevent campuses from being out of compliance with the Clery Act but also protect the wishes of survivors of sexual assault, while shielding universities from potential false claims of sexual assault. \textbf{Recommendation: Support Bills H.R.5972 (114\textsuperscript{th}) and H.R.1310 (114\textsuperscript{th}) to combat the difficulties associated with enforcing mandatory reporting.}

Current legislation seeks to empower survivors of sexual assault by moving away from mandatory reporting but also providing universities incentives to discourage sexual assault on campus by requiring data on sexual assaults to be publicized. One such act is H.R.5972, the
Campus Sexual Assault Whistleblower Protection Act of 2016, which seeks to grant victims of sexual assault and harassment prosecutorial amnesty for unlawful consumption of alcohol or controlled substances when reporting sexual assault incidents. Statistics suggest that more than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault to the institution of higher learning for a variety of different reasons.\textsuperscript{lxvi} The Campus Sexual Assault Whistleblower Protection Act strives to create an environment where survivors of sexual assault are encouraged to report these cases to universities for prevention and awareness.\textsuperscript{lxvii} By encouraging victim-centric and safe reporting, the data on sexual assault can be made public, without the same concerns held about mandatory reporting.

H.R.5972 declares retaliatory action for persons reporting sexual assault and harassment cases as unlawful and includes a clause to incorporate the retaliatory action principle in the sexual assault policies of all universities nationwide. Prohibited retaliatory action for a student who has filed a report as defined in H.R.5972 includes suspension, expulsion, and/or altering of financial aid for the student. The Campus Sexual Assault Whistleblower Protection Act works to protect the confidentiality of reporting made by survivors by prohibiting the notification of the incident to parents/legal guardians, other university students, and/or university staff to safeguard both victims and universities from being exploited. In conjunction with the Clery Act and the Higher Education Act, H.R.5972 would assist in developing the data of sexual assault cases documented by colleges by decreasing the large number of incidents that go unreported to officials.\textsuperscript{lxviii}

The Campus Accountability and Safety Act Bill, H.R.1310, also seeks to combat sexual assault and domestic violence across college campuses. This bill proposes the amendment of the Higher Education Act of 1965 by requiring higher education institutions participating in Title IV
programs to produce annual campus security reports to current and prospective students and employees. This act also requires higher education institutions to establish a uniform campus security code that includes a number of provisions such as designated confidential advisors, training programs for employees to facilitate programs that help victims of sexual assault, and authorization for higher education institutions to implement anonymous online reporting systems. Additionally, H.R.1310 encourages universities to form alliances with local law enforcement agencies to apportion responsibilities and share information regarding sexual assault crimes against students on and around campus. The alliance would allow universities and local law enforcement agencies to corner sexual assault crimes on college campuses and delineate invariable procedures for the disciplinary proceedings of abusers.

H.R.1310 requires universities to produce annual campus security reports that include the incidents reported and results from a biannual university standardized survey that reflect student experiences with sexual assault and harassment on campus. Each institution would be responsible for administering an online survey to students and then publishing those results in annual security reports and the school’s website and also submitting them to the Department of Education to be published in an attempt to circulate the information. The Campus Accountability and Safety Act Bill authorizes civil penalties for colleges that fail to cooperate with local law enforcement agencies, establish the required campus security policy, and/or refuse to provide campus annual security reports and crime statistics to students and prospective students.

H.R.1310 also amends the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 to increase the minimum grant provided to colleges in combating sexual violence and authorizing those grants for the purposes of training victim-oriented trauma-informed interview techniques. Additionally, competitive grants collected from the Higher Education
Act’s penalty provisions funds would be available for schools aggressively addressing sexual assault on their campuses with the implementation of The Campus Accountability and Safety Act Bill.

**Campus Safety: Harassment**

Harassment on college campuses is of major concern, despite the common misconception that bullying is not as prevalent among college students. According to the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association, 42% of college students have witnessed a student being bullied on campus, and an additional 37% have been bullied in person or cyberbullied themselves.\textsuperscript{lxix} Bullying, or harassment, has serious implications for students’ health and safety. In 2014, a student from Santa Barbara City College cited extensive bullying and harassment as the cause of a mental break that turned violent and left 8 injured.\textsuperscript{lxxi} Harassment and bullying can easily become dangerous when resources are not available for students to receive help for their problems. Though many students are aware of mental health resources on campuses across the country, an internal survey revealed that 68% of University of South Carolina students are either unsure of resources available to assist students who are being harassed or do not believe there are enough resources available on college campuses.\textsuperscript{lxxii} Currently, colleges have few resources at their disposal to trying to deal with students being harassed on campus, or to be able to effectively discourage harassment between students. While some universities have been more proactive in handling hazing within the Greek life system, there is not a universal plan set forth to handle bullying, harassment, and other threats to campus safety.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Harassment can occur in multiple different ways, from cyberbullying to hazing to stalking, and even to sexual harassment. However, few means of protecting students exist
beyond mandatory reporting, the ability to file restraining orders, and the faith held in campus police forces to address harassment if they see it in practice. Harassment can be even worse for students who identify as LGBTQ, and as such, Senator Patti Murray (D-WA) introduced the Tyler Clementi Anti-Harassment Act to the Senate in 2014 and has encouraged support for the bill since then. While no piece of legislation is perfect, this bill outlines clear cut practices that universities receiving federal funding need to adopt in order to meet certain benchmarks against harassment on their campuses. To be proactive in the fight against harassment, it may be pertinent for universities to receive federal funding assistance in conducting online trainings about anti-bullying efforts, the types of bullies and their methods used, and the resulting effects of harassment. If the harassment behavior is not against state or federal law explicitly, and there is no evident method for legal recourse, a campus policy that addresses harassment can provide students who are victims of harassment with obvious measures of recourse on campus. Additionally, by recognizing harassment and bullying as a serious concern on a college campus and as a threat to campus safety, students may be more encouraged to seek help through mental health support services on campus or to seek assistance from the college’s ombudsperson, or Title IX coordinator in the case of sexual harassment. Recommendation: Support the Tyler Clementi Bill and the BRAVE Act to outline a uniform definition of harassment/bullying and augment reporting systems for campus bullying.

The Tyler Clementi Bill, also known as H.R.1421, seeks to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require colleges and universities to produce annual security reports that include: (1) the outlawing of harassment of students by faculty, staff, and other students; (2) a list of institutional programs that prevent harassment/bullying on college campuses; (3) a clear-cut course of action for students who are suffering from harassment/bullying; and (4) a clear-cut
description of the procedures that will follow any incidents of harassment on college campuses. The bill additionally offers a precise definition for harassment that specifies any situation that limits any student’s ability to benefit from institutions of higher education programs (including classes) and/or any situation that creates a hostile environment for a student at any institution. Finally, H.R.1421 calls for the authorization of the secretary of education to award competitive grants to institutions that are actively expanding or initiating programs that prevent harassment/bullying on campuses, provide counseling/supportive services to students being harassed, and/or train faculty and staff to control harassment.

H.R.5959 or the BRAVE Act (Bullying Redress and Verified Enforcement Act), requires the appropriate reporting of bullying (harassment) on college campuses and the equal protection of persons who unsuccessfully respond to claims of bullying. The BRAVE Act includes a firm definition of bullying to include pervasive electronic, written/verbal, and/or physical activity imposed on any student by another student during school hours, on school premises, or at any school-sponsored functions outside of school hours. The Act mandates that institutions of higher education require employees and staff to report any bullying within 7 days of being notified of the incident unless the student being bullied requests otherwise. Federal enforcement under the bill includes funding for universities and colleges actively complying with the Act and providing programs for bullying as well as mandatory public reports on the school’s website and Department of Education's website about complaints of campus bullying.
Conclusion

While the Congressional Advisory Board acknowledges that these issues of education, sexual harassment, harassment, and mental health are some of the most complex that should certainly not preclude them from your attention. Millions of students attending institutions of higher education across this nation and in the state of South Carolina are effected by the federal government’s policies towards these issues. Therefore, we call on you to aggressively tackle the issues outlined herein and on the 2017 Congressional Advisory Board “One-Pager” addendum. Together, we believe the 115th has the potential to accomplish many things, and we hope those include prudent steps towards making South Carolina and the United States of America a better, safer, and more prosperous place for our nation’s young people.
## Causes of Education Success (United States: March 1975)


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# USC Student Government

Prepared by the Congressional Advisory Board

## Sexual Assault and Harassment

**Reform Mandatory Reporting**

Combat issues faced by universities and sexual assault survivors by supporting H.R. 1310 (114th).

**Campus Security Reporting and Surveys**

Ensure accurate reporting of campus safety statistics and surveys of undergraduate student populations about sexual assault.

**Victim-Centric Reporting Models**

Encourage new systems such as "Callisto" and reforms highlighted in H.R.5972 (114th), the Campus Sexual Assault Whistleblower Protection Act.

**Combat and Report Harassment on College Campuses**

Acknowledge and define harassment as a serious issue with lethal consequences that presents in numerous forms.

**Bullying Redress and Verified Enforcement Act**

Support H.R.1421 (114th) and H.R.5959 (114th) in order to encourage universities to ban harassment of any form: verbal, physical, sexual, electronic or "hazing."

## Mental Health

**Restore Funding to Mental Health Programs**

H.R.34 (114th), the 21st Century CURES Act underfunded or cut federal allocations totaling in the tens of millions for mental health awareness training grants when compared to early 2000s figures.

**Block Grants**

Ensure proper funding for Community Mental Health Block grants that support evidence based solutions and implement safeguards to hold grant recipients accountable.

**Invest in Infrastructure**

Shift the federal government's focus from creating task forces and committees to investing in behavioral/mental health facilities, training, and infrastructure to address the growing demand for services.

**Prioritize Veteran's Mental Health Care**

Support the reintroduction of S.841 (114th) to provide vital relief to veterans waiting to receive services.

## Access and Affordability

**FAFSA**

Introduce measures to simplify the FAFSA including decreasing question count and implementing a file-once feature for low-income students. Reintroduce and support H.R.5784 (114th) the File Once FAFSA Act.

**Pell Grant**

Fully fund the Pell Grant Program to ensure low-income students access to higher education.

**Student Loans and Debt**

Amend the Higher Education Act to promote fiscal transparency by incentivizing institutions that receive federal funding to disclose debt estimates in financial aid awards.

**TRIO**

Fully fund TRIO programs through the U.S Department of Education in order to provide holistic assistance to underserved and underprivileged students.

## Curricular and Competitiveness

**STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics)**

Introduce and support legislation to bolster both STEM education initiatives and arts integration in American schools.

**Entrepreneurship**

Fortify the American economy through the promotion and support of American entrepreneurs, such as women and veterans, in business endeavors. Support S.121 (115th) and H.R.255 (115th).

**Foreign Language**

Provide comprehensive foreign language education to students K-12 and university level through federal grants. Promote international literacy and global understanding. Support H.R.3096 (114th) and fully fund Title VI foreign language grant programs.

Please feel free to contact us at [sasgpres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sasgpres@mailbox.sc.edu).
Congressional Advisory Board

The Congressional Advisory Board serves as the voice of the University of South Carolina’s student body to the federal government. The Congressional Advisory Board researches the most critical issues pertaining to students and addresses South Carolina’s Congressional Delegation to find better solutions to academic, financial, and social issues.

The board works to solicit input from institutional constituents such as students, faculty, administrators and staff. The board strives to educate the University community about federal higher education initiatives and investments, enabling students to realize their potential for active involvement in national politics.

As student advocates, we believe we can transform both the state and the University of South Carolina by informing our elected leaders of issues that are relevant to our generation. By doing this, we can enhance their future—benefitting our community and leaving a lasting heritage for future students.