

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 885

To establish a rural postsecondary and economic development grant program.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 22, 2021

Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. CORNYN, and Ms. SMITH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To establish a rural postsecondary and economic development grant program.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Success for Rural Stu-
5 dents and Communities Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. RURAL POSTSECONDARY AND ECONOMIC DEVEL-**
7 **OPMENT GRANT PROGRAM.**

8 Part Q of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of
9 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161q) is amended by adding at the end
10 the following:

1 **“SEC. 862. RURAL POSTSECONDARY AND ECONOMIC DE-**
2 **VELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM.**

3 “(a) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are
4 to—

5 “(1) increase enrollment and graduation rates
6 of secondary school graduates and nontraditional
7 students from rural areas at 2-year and 4-year insti-
8 tutions of higher education, their articulation from
9 2-year degree programs into 4-year degree pro-
10 grams, and their attainment of market-relevant cre-
11 dentials and certificates;

12 “(2) ensure rural communities benefit from
13 their students’ success by advancing rural economic
14 development and cultivation of a skilled local work-
15 force with employment opportunities for college
16 graduates;

17 “(3) promote economic growth and development
18 in the rural United States through partnership
19 grants to consortia of rural serving institutions of
20 higher education, local educational agencies, and re-
21 gional economic development entities;

22 “(4) foster innovation and development of effec-
23 tive practices, identify and document effective prac-
24 tices for the purpose of continuous quality improve-
25 ment, and ensure that additional rural areas benefit

1 from innovations through dissemination of practices
 2 that are most effective in rural areas; and

3 “(5) foster elevated levels of investment in rural
 4 students and communities by State, private sector,
 5 and philanthropic partners.

6 “(b) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this section:

7 “(1) NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT.—The term
 8 ‘nontraditional student’ means an individual who—

9 “(A) delays enrollment in an institution of
 10 higher education by 3 or more years after sec-
 11 ondary school graduation;

12 “(B) attends an institution of higher edu-
 13 cation part-time; or

14 “(C) attends an institution of higher edu-
 15 cation and—

16 “(i) works full-time;

17 “(ii) is an independent student, as de-
 18 fined in section 480;

19 “(iii) has 1 or more dependents other
 20 than a spouse;

21 “(iv) is a single parent or is the pri-
 22 mary caregiver for a family member;

23 “(v) is aging out of foster care;

1 “(vi) has been involved in the juvenile
 2 justice system or the adult criminal justice
 3 system; or

4 “(vii) is in recovery from a substance
 5 use disorder.

6 “(2) REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EN-
 7 TITY.—The term ‘regional economic development en-
 8 tity’ means an entity working to promote economic
 9 development in, or employing residents of, a rural
 10 area, which may include local boards (as defined in
 11 section 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Oppor-
 12 tunity Act), Chambers of Commerce, and employers
 13 in the rural region covered by the grant.

14 “(3) RURAL AREA.—The term ‘rural area’
 15 means an area that is defined, identified, or other-
 16 wise recognized as rural by a governmental agency
 17 of the State in which the area is located.

18 “(4) RURAL SERVING INSTITUTION OF HIGHER
 19 EDUCATION.—The term ‘rural serving institution of
 20 higher education’ means an institution of higher
 21 education that serves rural areas.

22 “(c) ELIGIBLE PARTNERSHIP.—

23 “(1) ELIGIBLE PARTNERSHIP.—A partnership
 24 eligible to apply for a grant and carry out activities
 25 under this section (referred to in this section as an

1 ‘eligible partnership’) shall include partners rep-
2 resenting not less than 3 of the following types of
3 organizations:

4 “(A) A local educational agency or edu-
5 cational service agency (as such term is defined
6 in section 8101 of the Elementary and Sec-
7 ondary Education Act of 1965) serving a rural
8 area.

9 “(B) An institution of higher education.

10 “(C) A regional economic development en-
11 tity.

12 “(D) A rural community-serving organiza-
13 tion, including a philanthropy, with dem-
14 onstrated success supporting rural students in
15 accessing higher education and attaining 2-year
16 or 4-year degrees, including supporting students
17 articulating from a 2-year to a 4-year college.

18 “(2) OPTIONAL PARTNERS.—Other organiza-
19 tions serving rural students, families, or commu-
20 nities, including agencies of Tribal, State, or local
21 government, community action agencies, or other
22 non-governmental agencies, and local elected officials
23 may participate in the eligible partnership as op-
24 tional partners.

1 “(3) LEAD APPLICANT.—Any required partner
2 in an eligible partnership described in paragraph (1)
3 may be designated by the eligible partnership to
4 serve as the lead applicant and submit a competitive
5 application on behalf of the eligible partnership of
6 which that partner entity is a member.

7 “(4) LIMITATION.—No more than 1 partner
8 may submit a grant application under this section
9 on behalf of an eligible partnership.

10 “(d) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—

11 “(1) IN GENERAL.—From amounts made avail-
12 able under subsection (j), the Secretary may award
13 grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible partner-
14 ships to carry out the activities described in sub-
15 section (f).

16 “(2) DURATION.—A grant awarded under this
17 section shall be awarded for a period of not less than
18 5 years and not more than 9 years.

19 “(3) MINIMUM GRANTS.—A grant awarded
20 under this section shall be in an amount not less
21 than \$1,000,000.

22 “(e) APPLICATIONS.—

23 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible partnership
24 desiring a grant under this section shall submit to
25 the Secretary an application at such time, in such

1 manner, and containing such information as the Sec-
2 retary may reasonably require.

3 “(2) SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS.—In awarding
4 grants under this section, the Secretary shall give
5 special consideration to applications that dem-
6 onstrate the most potential and propose the most
7 promising and innovative approaches for—

8 “(A) increasing the number and percent-
9 age of graduates from rural secondary schools
10 who enroll in and graduate from institutions of
11 higher education;

12 “(B) increasing the number of market-rel-
13 evant credentials and certificates awarded to
14 students in rural communities;

15 “(C) meeting the employment needs of re-
16 gional employers;

17 “(D) strengthening the regional economy
18 of a rural area;

19 “(E) utilizing Labor Market Information
20 data to determine regional job growth opportu-
21 nities and connect that information to edu-
22 cation and other partners; and

23 “(F) creating shared data systems acces-
24 sible to all partners.

1 “(f) MATCH.—As part of the application, each eligi-
 2 ble partnership applying for a grant under this section
 3 shall secure and document commitments of matching
 4 funds, in cash or in kind, totaling not less than 20 percent
 5 of the amount of grant funding that the eligible partner-
 6 ship is requesting in the application. Matching funds may
 7 be contributed from any non-Federal source, including a
 8 State, local, private, nonprofit, or philanthropic source.

9 “(g) USE OF FUNDS.—An eligible partnership that
 10 receives a grant under this section shall use grant and
 11 matching funds to carry out not less than 2 of the fol-
 12 lowing 4 activities:

13 “(1) Improving postsecondary enrollment rates
 14 for rural secondary school students by providing
 15 supports to students, beginning as early as middle
 16 school, but in no case later than grade 11, and con-
 17 tinuing through completion of postsecondary edu-
 18 cation. Such supports may include—

19 “(A) providing students and families with
 20 counseling related to applying for postsecondary
 21 education, and Federal and State financial as-
 22 sistance for postsecondary education;

23 “(B) providing students at rural high
 24 schools, and their families, with exposure and
 25 access to campuses, courses, programs, and in-

1 ternships of institutions of higher education, in-
2 cluding covering the cost of transportation to
3 and from such institutions;

4 “(C) providing students of rural high
5 schools exposure and access to courses offering
6 dual or concurrent enrollment that will earn
7 credits towards postsecondary degrees, creden-
8 tials, or certificates;

9 “(D) supporting early connectivity to re-
10 gional employment opportunities for rural stu-
11 dents, including early opportunities for career
12 exploration and exposure, expanding career
13 counseling and opportunities for work-based
14 learning experiences, opportunities available
15 through career and technical education schools,
16 and designing and implementing college and ca-
17 reer pathways in secondary schools that align to
18 local labor market demands;

19 “(E) supporting the transition of students
20 from high school to postsecondary education;

21 “(F) supporting students in completing
22 their postsecondary degree or credential;

23 “(G) supporting the transition of students
24 articulating from 2-year degree programs to 4-
25 year degree programs; and

1 “(H) other initiatives that assist students
2 and families in developing interest in, applying
3 for, attending, and graduating from rural serv-
4 ing institutions of higher education.

5 “(2) Increasing enrollment and completion rates
6 of rural nontraditional students in degree programs
7 at institutions of higher education, which may in-
8 clude—

9 “(A) programs to provide nontraditional
10 students with counseling related to applying for
11 postsecondary education, and Federal and State
12 financial assistance for postsecondary edu-
13 cation;

14 “(B) community outreach initiatives to en-
15 courage nontraditional students to enroll in an
16 institution of higher education;

17 “(C) programs to increase rural nontradi-
18 tional student persistence in and completion of
19 postsecondary education; or

20 “(D) programs to improve the enrollment
21 of nontraditional students in 2-year degree pro-
22 grams and the transition of nontraditional stu-
23 dents articulating from 2-year degree programs
24 to 4-year degree programs.

1 “(3) Creating or strengthening academic pro-
2 grams at rural serving institutions of higher edu-
3 cation to prepare graduates to enter into high-need
4 occupations in the regional and local economies, and
5 to provide additional career training to such stu-
6 dents in fields relevant to the regional economy.
7 Such activities may include—

8 “(A) developing and expanding work-based
9 learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships
10 or paid internships, including covering the cost
11 of transportation or the cost of internet access
12 for virtual opportunities;

13 “(B) establishing policies and processes for
14 assessing and awarding course credit for prior
15 learning;

16 “(C) developing and expanding programs
17 that accelerate learning and recognized postsec-
18 ondary credential attainment, including com-
19 petency-based education, corequisite remedi-
20 ation, and other strategies for acceleration;

21 “(D) developing and expanding efficient
22 career pathways to credentials, including the
23 development of stackable credentials and inte-
24 grated education and training strategies;

1 “(E) working with local boards on the use
2 of labor market information for making pro-
3 gram decisions; or

4 “(F) engaging employers in the develop-
5 ment of programs and curricula.

6 “(4) Generating local and regional economic de-
7 velopment that creates employment opportunities for
8 rural students with postsecondary degrees, which
9 may include—

10 “(A) promoting and incentivizing remote
11 work opportunities to connect local talent with
12 non-local employers;

13 “(B) supporting entrepreneurship as a
14 part of career pathways in secondary school and
15 postsecondary academic and career programs;

16 “(C) developing strategies to address
17 transportation and internet connectivity gaps
18 that create barriers to employment opportuni-
19 ties in rural areas;

20 “(D) designing and implementing mar-
21 keting efforts to attract employers and talent to
22 the region or community; or

23 “(E) developing strategies to identify start-
24 up funding for local entrepreneurs.

1 “(h) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary may
 2 reserve not more than 5 percent of funds authorized to
 3 be appropriated to carry out this section to provide tech-
 4 nical assistance to assist eligible partnerships in preparing
 5 and submitting successful applications, and to support
 6 grantees in the successful implementation of grant awards
 7 under this section.

8 “(i) RESEARCH, EVALUATION, AND DISSEMINATION
 9 OF PROMISING PRACTICES.—

10 “(1) ONGOING DATA COLLECTION AND RE-
 11 SEARCH.—The Secretary shall reserve not less than
 12 10 percent of the amount appropriated to carry out
 13 this section for the purpose of—

14 “(A) ongoing data collection and research
 15 to—

16 “(i) identify innovative practices that
 17 improve attainment of market-relevant cre-
 18 dentials, certificates, and degrees for rural
 19 students; or

20 “(ii) enhance rural economic develop-
 21 ment that results in employment opportu-
 22 nities for graduates of postsecondary edu-
 23 cation in rural areas; and

24 “(B) dissemination of the findings related
 25 to that data collection and research on a reg-

1 ular basis throughout the duration of the grant
2 period.

3 “(2) DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH BY
4 GRANTEES.—At the Secretary’s discretion, data col-
5 lection and research under this subsection may be
6 conducted by eligible partnerships.

7 “(3) PURPOSE; PROHIBITED USE.—

8 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The purpose of data
9 collection and research under this subsection
10 shall be to identify, document, and disseminate
11 effective practices throughout the duration of
12 the grant period in order to support continuous
13 quality improvement of programs funded under
14 this section.

15 “(B) PROHIBITED USE.—To incentivize in-
16 novation, experimentation, and collaboration,
17 findings that result from data collection and re-
18 search under this subsection shall not be used
19 for the purpose of denying subsequent applica-
20 tions for Federal funds.

21 “(j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
22 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
23 \$60,000,000 for fiscal year 2022 and each of the 5 suc-
24 ceeding fiscal years.”.

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