

The Post's View Opinion

Good news in higher education: More colleges are reaching out to lower-income students

By [Editorial Board](#)

January 13 at 6:47 PM

EACH YEAR, tens of thousands of lower-income high school and community college students with strong academic credentials do not apply to institutions where they could earn the bachelor's degree that is a ticket to better careers and higher earnings. Not only are these students hurt by the lack of opportunity, but the country also loses out when talent goes undeveloped and citizens are held back. Consequently, it's welcome news that some of the nation's top colleges and universities launched an effort to increase enrollment of these underrepresented students. Even better is that the initiative is showing promising signs of early success.

Members of the American Talent Initiative (ATI) have increased enrollment of students who receive federal Pell grants by 7,291 since the 2015-2016 school year, according to [an ATI report](#) released last month. The gain, while seemingly small, is notable because it reverses a decline in enrollments by low- and moderate-income students in recent years and it puts the ATI on track to reach and even exceed its overall goal.

What's been most encouraging is the growth in the ATI from 30 founding members two years ago to 108 schools today. The schools all boast six-year graduation rates of at least 70 percent and include prominent liberal-arts colleges, flagship state universities and every member of the Ivy League. The initiative is backed by money from Bloomberg Philanthropies, but the schools, which commit to the collective goal while also setting individual goals, must raise money for scholarships and programs that support low- and moderate-income students.

Of key importance is the establishment of socioeconomic diversity as a priority of university leadership. Among the strategies that have proved effective are a shift from merit-based to need-based financial aid and outreach to community college graduates and military veterans. Some schools have increased the size of their student bodies to create additional space for students who receive Pell grants.

Much work still must be done to bridge the economic chasm that keeps higher education out of reach for too many Americans. So let's hope the report is right in [concluding that the initiative](#) "has galvanized members, surfaced and shared effective practices, and raised the profile of socioeconomic diversity, thereby laying a foundation for further progress."

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