



March 14, 2017

Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
731 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator  
317 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senator  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Edward J. Markey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Buildings  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Stabenow, Warren, Murray, and Markey:

On behalf of Achieving the Dream (ATD) and our network of over 200 community colleges across the nation, we write this letter in full support of your request asking the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study on food insecurity at American colleges and universities.

Achieving the Dream is a comprehensive non-governmental reform movement for student success. With our network of higher education institutions, coaches and advisors, state policy teams, investors and partners, we are helping more than 4 million community college students have a better economic opportunity and achieve their dreams. ATD's mission is to lead and support a national network of community colleges to achieve sustainable institutional transformation through sharing knowledge, innovative solutions and effective practices, and policies leading to improved outcomes for all students, including breaking down any form of barriers that would prevent student success, such as issue of food insecurity at our colleges and universities.

Food insecurity in our colleges has quickly become one of the biggest barrier for student success, especially within our community colleges. Over the past 12 years, ATD has developed and implemented, through evidence based, multiple innovative solutions working with our community college network to provide resources and guidance for student success, one being the Working Students Success Network (WSSN). In its third year of developing and offering integrated services that help students move up the economic ladder, WSSN projects are focused in community engagement, financial literacy, student-centered supports, and workforce preparation.

The WSSN holistic approach integrates and “bundles” services on campus that support education and employment advancement, income and work supports, and financial services and asset building. To help students who are food insecure, some WSSN colleges help students apply to public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other programs incorporate ways for students to have access to emergency funds.

North Arkansas College in Harrison, AR, for example, created Pete’s Pantry where it has served over 100 students and over 250 individual, including students’ family members. Students who visit the pantry also can complete SNAP applications on site. At the end of the 2015-2016 academic year, the college reported that \$10,500 worth of food items has been distributed through Pete’s Pantry.

Another WSSN college, Cañada College located in Redwood City, CA, launched Cañada Cash! where students earn cash incentive to practice specific beneficial money management behaviors that will build their financial knowledge and capability. With Cañada College located in the third most expensive county in California, many students struggle to go to college and support themselves or their family at the same time. Programs like Cañada Cash! not only educate students on financial literacy, but also provides students with financial assistance to pay for emergency expenses that many working students might not be able to foresee. Colleges like Cañada College also provide on-campus information about SNAP where students can get screened for eligibility and the option for same-day sign up.

Out of the 19 participating WSSN colleges, more than half have opened or expanded on-campus food pantries that offer students food and sometimes toiletries on a need basis. With more students struggling with food insecurity, initiatives like WSSN that provide students multifaceted resources are crucial for student success in our colleges.

ATD has access to effective and timely research, examples, and advice focused on low-income students and student of color, that is why we at ATD would like to work with and provide information to Congress to fight the issue of food insecurity across our higher education institutions. Investment in our education and workforce system is vital to our nation’s economic prosperity. Barriers such as food insecurity should not limit nor prevent students from being able to attend and complete their degree or certification.

We urge you to keep pushing the GAO to conduct this study on food insecurity at our colleges and universities and to use Achieving the Dream as a resource.

Thank you,



Karen A. Stout  
President & CEO