

## Barriers to college completion

Written by Judge Greg Mathis  
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In recent years, much attention has been paid to K-12 student performance, and rightly so. The educational foundation our children receive in schools prepares them for life; we must devote significant resources to ensuring that education is strong and comprehensive. But we must not forget about our students after they leave high school. College graduates are critical to maintaining a successful American economy.

According a report recently released by the Public Agenda, a nonpartisan think tank, 2.8 million students enroll in a college or university every year; most of them do not graduate in four years. In fact, many drop out early in their college careers. These students say that it is often too hard to work and support themselves – and often their families – and go to school at the same time. Over a third of the students say that even if they received a grant that helped pay for books and tuition, returning to and finishing college would tax their already full schedules. This is alarming news, considering that more and more of today's college students are considered 'untraditional' students – they have families to support and must work while in school.

Of those who eventually finish school, they are taking longer to graduate. The report notes that only one out of five students who enroll in two-year colleges receive their associate degree, a program that typically takes two years, in three and that only two out of five who enroll in four-year colleges receive their degree within six years.

College graduates provide much needed innovation, analytical reasoning and specialty skills that move our economy forward. Additionally, college graduates earn significantly more money over the course of their lifetime than a high school graduate will, money that will be poured back into the American economy.

Knowing this, the American government has to work to support these already overwhelmed students by building supports into the nation's grant programs for students. A housing stipend for students who have to pay rent and subsidized day care for those with children are among the benefits that go a long way in making sure fewer students drop out of college because of such conflicts.

Obviously, much can – and needs – to be done. The American legislator should view the Public Agenda report as a call to action, taking the disturbing information presented and using it as an impetus to sit down and really think of ways to support our college students. If a student is motivated, we must do all we can to remove the barriers that stand in their way.