



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

September 16, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: #22-12 Montgomery College CRRSAA Higher Education Emergency Relief

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-12 advances racial equity. The planned use of Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund II (HEERF II) grant, particularly the elimination of outstanding balances for 4,569 students, will help to address structural inequities that impede enrollment and completion of post-secondary education. Given the demographics of Montgomery College students, what is known about the racial wealth gap and the harms of student debt, and the disproportionate health and economic impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on communities of color, ORESJ can conclude that the planned use of grant funds is likely to advance racial equity.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** Supplemental Appropriation #22-12 will authorize funding from the United States Department of Education (USDE) directly to Montgomery College from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund II (HEERF II) grant, under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA). The appropriation in the amount of 17,082,886 will be used for HEERF II designated expenditures such as technology and Wi-Fi expansion, professional development for faculty and staff, HVAC enhancements, student reengagement activities and lost revenue. The appropriation will direct \$5.8 million of these funds to eliminating outstanding student balances (past due tuition and fees from fall 2020, winter 2020-2021, and/or

spring 2021 terms) for 4,569 Montgomery College students, about 23% of the Fall 2020 student population.

In fall 2020, Montgomery College had a total enrollment of 20,037 students¹ down from 21,260 in fall 2019 and 21,720 in fall 2018. This decline follows national data but is far less steep than the national trend of 10.1% decline reported in fall 2020². The majority of students at Montgomery College are people of color with the following distribution by race and ethnicity: 26% of students were Black or African American, 26% Hispanic or Latino, 22% White, 12% Asian, and 4% were multi-race. Students who were non-citizens made up 23% of enrolled students, and in 2018 students with disabilities represented 7% of the college's total population³. Information provided in the supplemental request indicates that the average household income of students eligible for financial aid was just over \$27,000 and 65% of students are enrolled part-time.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, students of color experienced disparities in resources, opportunities, and outcomes across educational settings (K-12 and post-secondary)⁴. The experiences of community college students are often complex and involve navigating systems that have not kept pace with changing educational and employment patterns or sufficiently recognized structural inequities affecting students' lives (i.e. caretaking responsibilities, access to transportation, etc.). These structural issues make the college transfer process and degree attainment, for example, more complicated. This is particularly true for Black and Latinx students who are most harmed by transfer inefficiencies—the six year bachelor's degree completion rate for Black and Latinx students who begin at community colleges is about half the rate of White students⁵. This on top of how student loan debt limits economic mobility, deeply affects not only how long it takes for students of color to complete their degree but the cumulative cost of higher education, particularly given the pronounced effects of the racial wealth gap⁶.

¹ Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Montgomery College. *Fall 2020 Official Enrollment Summary*. April 2021. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/documents/offices/institutional-research-and-effectiveness/student-enrollments/2020fall-official-enrollment-summary.pdf>.

² US Department of Education. Office for Civil Rights. *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impact of Covid-19 on America's Students*. June 2021. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>

³ Montgomery College at a Glance. August 2019. Available at: https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/documents/offices/institutional-research-and-effectiveness/score-card_toolkit_mc-at-a-glance/2019-08-mc-at-a-glance.pdf

⁴ *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impact of Covid-19 on America's Students*.

⁵ Tackling Transfer Policy Advisory Board. The College Excellence Program. *The Transfer Reset Rethinking Equitable Policy for Today's Learners*. 2021. Available at: <https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/the-transfer-reset/>

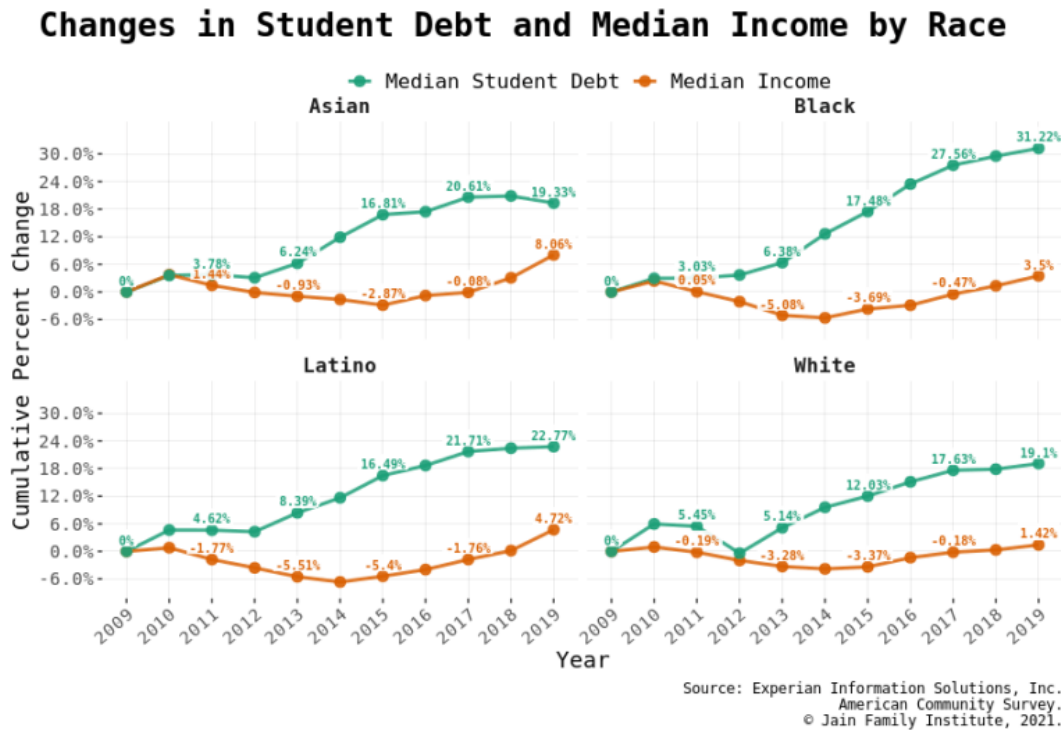
⁶ Andre M. Perry, Marshall Steinbaum, and Carl Romer. The Urban Institute. *Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/student-loans-the-racial-wealth-divide-and-why-we-need-full-student-debt-cancellation/>

The US Department of Education explained in a June 2021 report how the pandemic has impacted students of all ages and backgrounds, noting the following challenges for students in post-secondary settings: challenges to mental health and well-being; heightened risk of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence; identity-based harassment; new barriers for entry into, continuation and completion of studies. These challenges were felt most acutely by students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and students who are transgender or gender non-conforming.

The report also explains that enrollment has declined across institutions who disproportionately serve students of color and low-income students and that the pandemic has created or exacerbated structural inequities. Disparities include many of the well-documented health and economic impacts of the pandemic disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx households and communities. The report also highlights how juggling education with additional caregiving and financial responsibilities has forced some students to step away from school. There are also noted disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity, housing access, and meeting basic needs during the pandemic which has also complicated students' attempts to stay connected to school in the online environment⁷.

- III. **DATA ANALYSIS:** Prior to the pandemic, students of color carried higher levels of education-debt. Data from a June 2021 Brookings Report shows the steep rise in student debt compared to median income. The gap between student debt and median income is largest for Black borrowers followed by Latino borrowers. These gaps and the burden of student loan debt deeply affects economic mobility, including where to live, what type of work to do, whether and when to buy a home, whether to launch a business, or start a family.

⁷ *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impact of Covid-19 on America's Students.*



Source: Andre M. Perry, Marshall Steinbaum, and Carl Romer. The Urban Institute. *Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/student-loans-the-racial-wealth-divide-and-why-we-need-full-student-debt-cancellation/>

cc: Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive