

Proposed Federal Accountability Rule Signals New Pressure on Low-Earning Postsecondary Programs

A proposed federal rule could expose whether some college programs leave students with debt but little economic return.

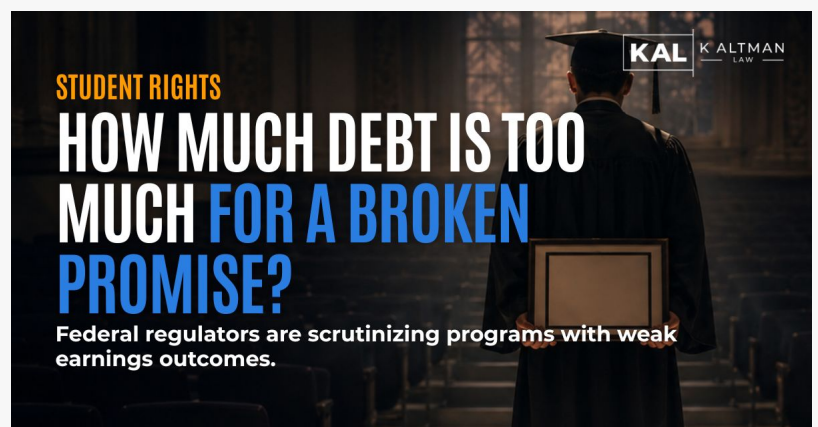
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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A newly proposed U.S. Department of Education rule could reshape how colleges and universities evaluate program viability, student outcomes, and long-term compliance risk. On April 17, 2026, the Department announced a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that would hold institutions and programs accountable for low earning outcomes across sectors. [You can read about it here.](#)

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Students were promised opportunity. Regulators are now asking whether some programs delivered it.

What the proposal would do:

According to the Department, the proposal would establish a postsecondary accountability framework under which undergraduate programs whose typical graduates do not earn as much as high school graduates could lose eligibility for federal student loans. Graduate programs would similarly be measured against earnings benchmarks tied to bachelor's degree holders. The Department stated that programs failing to provide students with a reliable return on investment could lose access to federal student loans and, in some circumstances, Pell Grants.

For institutions, the proposal raises questions about disclosures, internal program review, recruitment messaging, and the relationship between federal aid eligibility and measurable student outcomes. For students and families, it underscores the need to examine how a

program performs, what debt may be required, and whether program marketing aligns with actual results.

[K Altman Law](#) perspective:

“When regulators place greater weight on program outcomes, institutions need to review not only their compliance frameworks but also how they communicate value to current and prospective students,” said [Keith Altman](#), Founder and Managing Partner of K Altman Law. “Students should pay close attention to disclosures, financing obligations, transferability, and whether program promises are being framed carefully and accurately.”

Because this is a proposed rule, the final requirements could change after the comment period. Even so, the proposal is a strong signal that postsecondary institutions may face heightened scrutiny regarding program performance and student debt exposure.



Keith Altman Founder of K Altman Law

What students and families should do now:

- Review program disclosures, published outcomes data, and total borrowing expectations before enrolling or re-enrolling.
- Keep copies of recruitment materials, financial aid communications, and representations about earnings or job placement.
- Ask whether credits transfer, whether licensure pathways are clear, and what happens if a program loses eligibility.
- Monitor rulemaking developments if you are in a program with high debt and uncertain outcomes.
- Seek legal guidance if you believe a school materially misrepresented program value or student-outcome expectations.

About K Altman Law:

K Altman Law represents students, families, and professionals in matters involving education law, civil rights, student defense, special education, Title IX, and related administrative and litigation issues nationwide.

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