



Money Concepts® Publications



**Richard Chrzanowski, MSFS, CFS, RFC**  
**Regional Director**  
**Money Concepts**  
**Sunshine Region**  
 5619 Harney Road  
 Tampa, FL 33619  
 800-708-7077 x279  
[rchrzanowski7@MoneyConcepts.com](mailto:rchrzanowski7@MoneyConcepts.com)  
[MoneyConcepts.com/rchrzanowski7](https://MoneyConcepts.com/rchrzanowski7)

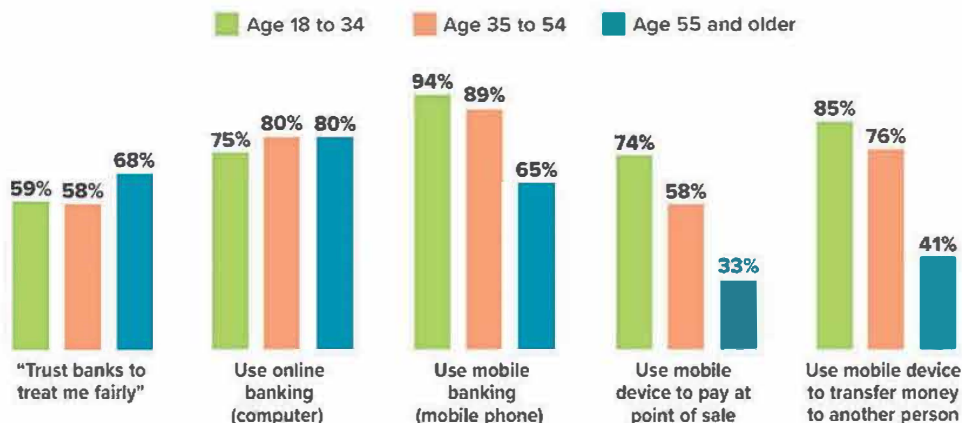


**48%**

Percentage of U.S. adults who engaged in one or more expensive credit card practices in 2024, such as paying only the minimum due, paying late fees or over-the-limit fees, or using a credit card for cash advances. This was up from 43% in 2021.

## Banking and Payments Vary by Generation

A study of financial capability found interesting differences across generations in banking and electronic payment practices. It's probably not surprising that younger people are less trusting of banks and more likely to use mobile banking and payment apps, but older people are also adopting various forms of electronic banking and payment.



Source: FINRA Investor Education Foundation, July 2025

Source: FINRA Investor Education Foundation, July 2025

# Key Tax Law Changes to Higher Education Coming Soon

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), signed into law in July 2025, includes many provisions that affect higher education. Here are some key changes and the implications for students, parents, and colleges.

## New borrowing limits and payment pause rules

**Parent PLUS Loans.** Starting July 1, 2026, Parent PLUS Loans will have a \$20,000 annual limit and a \$65,000 total limit per dependent student. (Currently, parents can borrow up to the full out-of-pocket cost of their child's undergraduate education.) There is a grace period for parents of undergraduate students who are currently borrowing under this program.

**Grad PLUS Loans.** Starting July 1, 2026, the Grad PLUS Program will be eliminated. It will be replaced by new graduate loans under the existing Direct Loan Program, with new loan limits: \$20,500 per year and \$100,000 total for graduate students and \$50,000 per year and \$200,000 total for professional students (these limits do not include undergraduate loans). There is a grace period for students who are currently borrowing under this program.

**Direct Loans.** Starting July 1, 2026, there will be a new lifetime student loan borrowing cap of \$257,500. This limit applies to undergraduate and graduate loans, not Parent PLUS Loans. Also, starting July 1, 2027, the economic hardship and unemployment deferments will be eliminated, and a forbearance (a payment pause due to short-term financial difficulty) will be limited to a single nine-month pause every 24 months.

## New student loan repayment plans

OBBBA significantly alters the landscape of federal student loan repayment programs. The Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) Plan, the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Plan, and the Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR) Plan will be phased out and eliminated by July 1, 2028. Borrowers currently enrolled in one of these repayment plans must transition to a new plan by July 1, 2028.

In addition, the legislation creates two new repayment plans as of July 1, 2026: the Standard Repayment Plan and the Repayment Assistance Plan.

**Standard Repayment Plan.** In the past, fixed monthly payments were spread over 10 years. Under the new Standard Repayment Plan, the amount of time a borrower has to repay a student loan depends on the loan balance:

- Less than \$25,000 – 10 years
- \$25,000 to less than \$50,000 – 15 years
- \$50,000 to less than \$100,000 – 20 years
- \$100,000 and over – 25 years

**Repayment Assistance Plan.** The Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP) is a new income-based repayment (IBR) plan that sets monthly loan payments as a percentage of a borrower's adjusted gross income (AGI). This plan is only available to undergraduate and graduate students, not parents. After 30 years of on-time payments, all remaining debt is forgiven. (Current federal IBR plans forgive remaining debt after 20 or 25 years.) A bright spot: payments are applied first to interest, then to fees, then to principal, and if the required payment is less than any new interest that accrues, the extra interest is waived.

For married borrowers who file a joint federal income tax return, their joint AGI is used. And the monthly payment will be reduced by \$50 for each dependent listed on a borrower's federal income tax return.

## Repayment Assistance Plan: Monthly Payments Based on AGI

\$10,000 or less AGI – 10%	\$30,001 to \$40,000 AGI – 3%	\$70,001 to \$80,000 AGI – 7%
\$10,001 to \$20,000 AGI – 1%	\$40,001 to \$50,000 AGI – 4%	\$80,001 to \$90,000 AGI – 8%
\$20,001 to \$30,000 AGI – 2%	\$50,001 to \$60,000 AGI – 5%	\$90,001 to \$100,000 AGI – 9%
	\$60,001 to \$70,000 AGI – 6%	\$100,001 and over AGI – 10%

Source: Department of Education, 2025

## Miscellaneous provisions

**New Workforce Pell Grant.** Starting with the 2026–2027 school year, a new Workforce Pell Grant will be available to students who are enrolled in accredited, short-term (8–15 weeks in duration) job-focused programs, such as certificate programs at community colleges. Funding amounts will be prorated based on the program's length.

**New qualified expenses for 529 plans.** Starting in 2026, qualified 529 plan expenses will expand to include tuition, fees, books, and expenses for workforce credentialing programs. In addition, the limit on K–12 qualified expenses will increase from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year and will cover instructional materials, tutoring classes, dual enrollment fees, standardized test fees, and educational therapies for students with disabilities.

**Employer student loan repayment assistance made permanent.** Starting in 2026, the \$5,250 of tax-free employer-provided student loan repayment assistance will be permanently extended. This amount will be indexed for inflation starting in 2027.



# Strategies for Smarter Giving

With Americans contributing about \$592 billion to charitable organizations in 2024, it is clear that charitable giving remains a powerful way to support the causes that matter most.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to advancing philanthropic goals, charitable donations may offer tax advantages. Here is an overview of some strategies to consider.

## Donating appreciated assets

If you own appreciated assets, such as stocks, mutual funds, or real estate that have increased in value and have been held for more than 12 months, donating these directly to a qualified charity may be a tax-efficient way to give.

By donating assets directly, you may avoid paying capital gains tax on the appreciation, while still taking a deduction for the assets' full fair market value, subject to IRS rules and limits.

## Donor-advised fund

A donor-advised fund (DAF) is a charitable account offered by sponsors such as financial institutions, community foundations, universities, and fraternal or religious organizations. Donors who itemize deductions on their federal income tax returns can write off DAF contributions in the year they are made, then gift funds later to the charities they want to support.

DAF contributions are irrevocable, which means the donor gives the sponsor legal control while retaining advisory privileges with respect to the distribution of funds and the investment of assets.

Because DAF assets can be invested for tax-free growth, this approach helps offer flexibility to spread out your giving and potentially increase your gifts while locking in a deduction in a high-income year, such as after receiving a large bonus, exercising stock options, or selling a business.

For taxpayers whose annual donations are close to the standard deduction amount (\$15,750 for individuals or \$31,500 for joint filers in 2025), combining several years' worth of gifts into a single tax year can help you exceed the standard deduction threshold, maximize itemized deductions for that year, and then claim the standard deduction in alternate years.

*DAFs have fees and expenses that donors giving directly to a charity would not face. All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful.*

## Qualified charitable distribution

For taxpayers age 70½ or older, a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) offers another efficient way to give. With a QCD, you can transfer up to \$108,000 annually in 2025 (indexed for inflation) directly from your traditional IRA to an eligible charity. The amount you transfer is excluded from taxable income, which may lower your adjusted gross income (AGI). This may help reduce Medicare premiums, limit the taxable portion of Social Security benefits, and preserve other tax breaks. The amount counts toward your required minimum distribution, which account owners must withdraw annually from their accounts, starting at age 73 or 75, depending on birth year.

QCDs can be useful for retirees who do not itemize deductions but still want the tax benefits of charitable giving. But QCDs cannot be made to DAFs, private foundations, or most supporting organizations.

*Note: Starting in 2026, a floor of 0.5% of AGI will apply to itemized charitable deductions. Before taking any specific action, be sure to consult with your tax professional.*

1) Giving USA Foundation, 2025

## Recipients of charitable giving in 2024, by percentage of total contributions



# Cash Balance Plans Help Some Business Owners Supersize Retirement Savings

Cash balance plans are technically defined benefit plans (or pensions) that share key characteristics with defined contribution plans such as 401(k)s and 403(b)s. These hybrid plans have generous contribution limits that increase with age, and they are often stacked on top of a 401(k) and/or profit-sharing plan. This can help partners in professional firms and other business owners to maximize or catch up on retirement savings and reduce their taxable incomes.

On top of the \$70,000 maximum contribution to a 401(k), a 65-year-old could save as much as \$329,000 in a cash balance plan in 2025, while a 55-year-old could save \$248,000 on a tax-deferred basis until the account reaches a maximum balance of about \$3.6 million (IRS limits adjusted annually for inflation).<sup>1-2</sup>

## Employees benefit too

A cash balance plan can also be a powerful tool for employee recruitment and retention. As with other defined benefit plans, employees are promised a specified retirement benefit, and the employer funds the plan and selects investments. However, each participant has an account with a "cash balance" for record-keeping purposes, and the vested account value is portable, which means it can be rolled over to another employer plan or to an IRA.

But unlike a 401(k), the participant's cash balance when benefit payments begin can never be less than the sum of the contributions made to the participant's

account, even if plan investments result in negative earnings for a particular period. This means the employer bears all the financial risk.

## Funding the plan

The employer's annual contribution amount is actuarially determined based on plan design and participant demographics. Generally, there are two types of contributions made for each employee. The first is a pay credit, which is either a fixed amount or a percentage of annual compensation, and the second is a fixed or variable interest crediting rate (ICR). The ICR can be set to equal the actual rate of return of the portfolio if certain diversification requirements are met, which helps reduce the employer's investment risk and the possibility of having an underfunded plan due to market volatility.

Businesses may deduct employee contributions, so current-year tax savings may offset some of their contributions. Still, a cash balance plan is typically more cost-effective for a sole proprietor or the owner of a small firm with few employees.

*All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful. Diversification is a method used to help manage investment risk; it does not guarantee a profit or protect against investment loss.*

1) FuturePlan, 2025; 2) *The Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2025

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