



ACCESSeD

Connecting state legislators to policy resources that support higher education access for women and minorities

AccessEd

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LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHT: AFFORDABILITY & SUCCESS FOR FOSTER CHILDREN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Every state in this nation has people like Mary Ann and Tim, foster children in Washington State who just wanted a chance to graduate from high school and earn a college degree. Mary Ann and Tim both testified to lawmakers about the odds that foster children face and I'll never forget what they said. "The state was my parent," Mary Ann told lawmakers, "but the message I often got was, *you're not going to make it.*" And the numbers bear her out: Mary Ann testified that only 3 percent of foster children in the United States get a bachelor's degree.

Tim told us that the current system is "set up for mediocrity," and that laws pushing foster children away from their foster families when they turn 18 only make it that much harder for any foster kid to get an education.

EDUCATION IS THE DIFFERENCE

I agreed with Mary Ann when she said the state has a moral obligation to take care of foster children. If we've accepted the responsibility of raising these children, then we need to give them a chance to succeed. I believe that we need to even the odds so foster children aren't running uphill and dodging boulders just to get a fair shake when it comes to getting an education and a job. Education is the key.

We had passed reforms in Washington State to give foster children a better education through high school, but we hadn't addressed the

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problem of foster kids not getting a chance to earn a college degree, which is the surest ticket to the American Dream.

So I wrote a bill to fix this (HB 1050). Foster kids like Mary Ann and Tim traveled to our state capitol in Olympia to testify. Together we took two bold steps to give foster kids a chance to attend and succeed in college:

- Established a new scholarship fund for foster kids entitled *The Foster Care Endowed Scholarship Program*. We chose an endowment to make sure that the scholarship money wouldn't be subjected to yearly budget battles and would grow every year.
- Passed a law to extend the time foster kids are with their foster families through their college years. Few college students can survive on their own – how many can afford to pay for college, much less get health care, without a supportive family?

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR POLICYMAKERS?

These two reforms are the smart thing to do. It's better for everyone if foster children get a good education and break the cycle of poverty. And it's the right thing to do. It's our

moral obligation to take care of people like Mary Ann and Tim.

Mary Ann went to college. She beat the odds. Tim did, too. I believe that these two young people who had the courage to stand up deserve to be heard, not only in Washington State, but in all 50 states—because every child deserves a shot at the American Dream.

Rep. Phyllis Gutiérrez Kenney is chair of the Higher Education and Workforce Education Committee in the Washington State House of Representatives. For more information on Washington State House Bill 1050, please contact Representative Kenney.

For more information on obstacles facing some foster youth in higher education, read *Beyond Access: Improving Persistence in Higher Education for Foster Youth* on Page 3.



Women In Government's Access to Higher Education Policy Research Center is dedicated to identifying policy issues, gathering research data and information, and providing a centralized clearinghouse for state legislators on ways to increase access to higher education for women and minorities.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: EARLY COMMITMENT FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS

In preparation for the formal report issued this month, Secretary of Education Margaret Spelling's "Commission on the Future of Higher Education" has released a series of issue papers over the course of the past year. In *Eliminating Complexity and Inconsistency in Federal Financial Aid Programs for Higher Education Students*, Barry D. Burgdorf and Kent Kostka analyze the intricate system of postsecondary financial aid. The authors assert that the multitude of programs create unnecessary confusion, generate countervailing incentives and disincentives for students, and are often overlapping and thus redundant in their scope. To remedy these issues, the goal of aid programs should be threefold:

- increase access to college by students who would not otherwise attend
- increase retention in school by students who would not have been able to persist
- decrease overall debt burden to allow students to pursue career options based on interest rather than solely on financial obligations.

In the interest of increasing access to college students who would not otherwise attend, one type of program that has received increased attention in recent years is Early Commitment Financial Aid Programs. In *A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Access and Success* (Pathway to College Network, 2004), policy-makers were urged to support early aid commitments that guarantee financial assistance to secondary school students preparing for college. In WICHE's 2005 work *Early Commitment Financial Aid Programs: Promises, Practices, and Policies*, Dr. Cheryl Blanco confirms this recommendation: "Since affordability and academic preparation are considered the greatest barriers to higher education for low-income students, early commitment initiatives seek to provide a solution to both problems." These programs are specifically targeted at economically-disadvantaged middle and high school students by providing a guarantee of financial aid for postsecondary education that is contingent upon meeting ongoing specific requirements including college-preparatory courses and minimum cumulative grade point averages. Brief descriptions of a public program (*Indiana's 21st Century Scholars Program*) and a private program (*I Have A Dream*) are included in the Model Programs section of Women In Government's Access to Higher Education Policy Research Center's online [Legislative Toolkit](#).



STATISTICS ON THE COSTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Since 1984, tuition has risen 126 percent (inflation-adjusted), outpacing the rise of both family income and other household expenses. (CNNMoney.com, 2006)
- Nationwide, the percentage of family income needed to pay for postsecondary education is **28.5% for public four-year colleges** and **22.3% for public two-year colleges**. (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2004*)
- Over the last 25 years, the majority share of financial aid for postsecondary students has shifted from grants, 55% of student aid in 1980, to loans, which are currently 56% of student aid. (The College Board, *Trends in Student Aid, 2004*)
- The **average loan** amount undergraduate students borrow each year nationally to attend postsecondary education is \$3,344. (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Measuring Up 2004*)
- Among a survey of California Latinos, 98% of respondents felt it was important to have a college education but 38% did not feel that the benefits of college outweighed its costs. (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, *Policy Brief, 2006*)

BEYOND ACCESS:

IMPROVING PERSISTENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR FOSTER YOUTH

In the cover article, Representative Kenney (WA) reports on legislation that targets the financial needs of foster youth to access higher education. Reports have found that only about ten percent of all college-age foster youth enroll in postsecondary education. In addition to difficulty with access, foster youth tend to face an issue of persistence and success *within* higher education. The 2001 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study found that only 26 percent of foster youth who entered postsecondary education in 1995 had completed their degrees within six years, compared to 56 percent of all other undergraduate students. Therefore, foster youth may need additional support throughout their higher education careers in order to attain a degree or certificate. The absence of information about the causes of non-persistence among foster youth makes formulating policy responses more challenging. Nevertheless, specifically focusing on the costs of college and the financial barriers that face foster youth generates the following set of recommendations from two leading researchers in the field for policymakers to improve success within postsecondary education:

- Extend eligibility for support through independent living programs from age 21 to 24.
- Extend Medicaid coverage to age 24 to help cover health care costs of foster youth.

- Revise the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to clearly identify the options available to foster youth and simplify the federal financial aid process.
- Task the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance with assessing the barriers to accessing financial aid faced by foster youth.
- Target existing outreach services (i.e. College Goal Sunday, TRIO, GEAR UP, and the Gates Millennium Scholars) specifically at foster youth.³
- Compensate foster parents adequately to increase interest in long-term involvement.
- Educate foster parents about record-keeping and reporting requirements that aid educational attainment.
- Make more financial aid for low-income foster youth available, especially in the form of grants.

Policy recommendations included in this article were informed by Thomas R. Wolanin's *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth* (The Institute for Higher Education Policy) and Ryan J. Davis' *College Access, Financial Aid, and College Success for Undergraduates from Foster Care* (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators).

² The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance is an independent committee created by Congress to advise on student aid policy.

³ For more information on these outreach programs, visit the **Model Programs** section of Women In Government's Online Legislative toolkit at http://www.womeningovernment.org/highered/legislative_toolkit2.asp.

CREATING A COLLEGE CULTURE

Project GRAD does more than help low-income students graduate from high school. It prepares them for college, teaches them about scholarships, helps families understand college costs, and even gets fourth-grade students thinking about college. In short, Project GRAD creates a college-bound culture for under-served communities. Project GRAD, a national education reform program operating in 12 U.S. cities, works to ensure that children from economically disadvantaged communities graduate from high school – that's what GRAD stands for: Graduation Really Achieves Dreams.

Learning the system: The "feeder" approach

Project GRAD focuses on communities where many students receive free and reduced-price school lunches. All elementary and middle schools that feed students into a designated high school participate in the program. These "feeder schools" implement the same curriculum and teaching

methods to provide academic consistency as students move from grade-to-grade.

Getting down to business: The high school component

The high school component begins on a Saturday morning early in the academic year with the "Walk for Success." Teachers, administrators, Project GRAD staff and community volunteers visit every incoming 9th grader's house to explain the program to the students and their families. Students are asked to sign a contract that specifies they will complete college prep courses, graduate with at least a 2.5 GPA, attend at least two Project GRAD Summer Institutes, and graduate in four or fewer years. If students meet these criteria by the time they graduate, they are guaranteed a Project GRAD scholarship – a minimum of \$1,000 a year – to any college to which they are accepted.

Sealing the deal: The college experience

Throughout the school year, Project GRAD scholarship coordinators help

students to complete college applications, prepare for the ACT or SAT, get financial aid, and choose a college. And by this time, students are ready for college – academically, financially and emotionally.

A study of the first three Project GRAD classes shows that 51 percent completed college four to eight years after enrollment. In contrast, according to a national study by the U.S. Department of Education, only 27 percent of low-income students across the country completed college four to eight years after enrollment.

This article appeared in its entirety in Lumina Foundation for Education's Student Access & Success News, June 21st, 2006.

If you would like more information on access to higher education issues, or to receive a free copy of Women In Government's Legislative Toolkit, please email highered@womeningovernment.org or call the InfoLine at 1-888-333-0164.

ANNOUNCEMENTS | UPDATE ON TASK FORCE MEETING

The Rising Cost of Higher Education: Keeping Opportunity Affordable

In June, Women In Government convened its second Task Force Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. As with the 2003 Task Force meeting that launched the Access to Higher Education Policy Research Center, participants were state legislators and other stakeholders hailing from across the country. Tasked with focusing specifically on the rising cost of post-secondary education, individual sessions addressed findings from national and state data, increasing opportunities for higher education, and aligning appropriations with tuition setting. Speakers included Dr. Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Dr. Dewayne Matthews, Senior Research Director at the Lumina Foundation for Education, Jennifer Blatz, Executive Director of the Ohio College Access Network, Lisa Duty, Policy Officer at KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Dr. Cheryl Blanco, Director of Policy Analysis and Research at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and Representative Frank Rasche of the Kentucky State Legislature.

If you are a female state legislator and would like to become a member of Women In Government, please contact Kate Roche at 202-333-0825 x217 or via email at membership@womeningovernment.org

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like more information on access to higher education issues, or to receive a free copy of Women In Government's Legislative Toolkit, please call the InfoLine at 1-888-333-0164 or email at highered@womeningovernment.org.

You can also visit our website at: www.womeningovernment.org/highered

RESOURCES ON COSTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Annually, the College Board releases **Trends in Student Aid**, which presents annual data on the amount of financial assistance—grants, loans, work-study, and education tax benefits—distributed to students to help them pay for postsecondary education.

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost05/trends_aid_05.pdf

The College Board also released **Trends in College Pricing**, which presents data from the College Board's Annual Survey of Colleges on undergraduate charges for tuition, fees, room and board, and other estimated expenses.

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost05/trends_college_pricing_05.pdf

Education Commission of the States

<http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issuesPS.asp>

Lumina Foundation for Education

<http://www.luminafoundation.org>

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

<http://www.nmefdn.org>

Women In Government is a national 501(c)(3), non-profit, bi-partisan organization of women state legislators providing leadership opportunities, networking, expert forums, and educational resources to address and resolve complex public policy issues.

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