

**The Council of State Governments
Resolution on Improving Access to Higher Education**

Resolution Summary

Evidence indicates that there is a direct link between higher education and state economic competitiveness. America's colleges and universities provide students the skills necessary to succeed in today's changing global economy. Despite the benefits of higher education, this nation continues to fall further behind other developed countries in the percentage of students attaining a degree. Currently the United States ranks eighth in degree attainment among students ages 25-34 in industrialized nations. An overall graduation rate of 54% ranks America 20th among developed countries.

Low income and minority students obtain college degrees at an even lower rate. As of 2003, only 18% of African-Americans and 9% of Hispanics completed a bachelor's degree by the age of 29. That compares to 34% of white students who obtain a degree by the same age. Statistics also indicate low income and minority students have less knowledge about college than white families. This lack of knowledge limits their ability to make informed decisions about the value and importance of college.

With the increased emphasis that potential employers place on having a college degree, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for the average high school student to enroll in college. Tuition, room, and board at a four-year public university rose by an average of 6.3 percent during the 2006-07 school year to an average annual cost of nearly \$13,000.00. Tuition at four-year private institutions rose by an average of 5.9 percent during the same time frame. Even more troubling is the fact that tuition costs have risen this year at more than double the rate of inflation according to the College Board. This is just one of several factors that state policymakers need to address to ensure that higher education is accessible and affordable for all Americans.

Additional Resource Information

National Education Association: www.nea.org/he/

The College Board: www.collegeboard.com

Lumina Foundation for Education: www.luminafoundation.org

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education: www.highereducation.org

American Association of State Colleges and Universities: www.aascu.org

Improving Access to Higher Education Management Directives

- **Management Directive #1:** Make a commitment to improving access. Affordable options such as technical schools and community colleges need to be more available. College schedules, financial aid and scholarships for returning adult learners also need to be more flexible to ensure potential students have a variety of scheduling options, such as evening classes.
- **Management Directive #2:** State policymakers need to rethink how higher education is funded. Recent cuts to higher education budgets have placed a greater burden on students and families. Realizing that many states face serious budget shortfalls, it is imperative that states spend higher education dollars in the most efficient manner possible.
- **Management Directive #3:** Support efforts to ensure a balance exists between merit based and need based financial aid programs to make sure minority and low income students also have an opportunity to attend college.
- **Management Directive #4:** CSG staff will post approved resolution on CSG's Web site and make available through its regular communication venues at the state and local level to ensure its distribution to the state government and policy community.

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WHEREAS, education is the single most important key to our nation's long-term success and to the future of each individual citizen; and

WHEREAS, improving access to higher education ensures more Americans have the skills necessary to compete in today's global economy; and

WHEREAS, despite the importance of higher education, the United States continues to fall further behind other developed countries in the percentage of students earning their degree; and

WHEREAS, minority and low income students are even less likely than white students to earn a college degree; and

WHEREAS, these problems are being compounded by the rising cost of tuition, which is making it even harder for the average American family to afford college; and

WHEREAS, state policymakers need to work closely with colleges and universities to improve access to higher education so that all American's have an opportunity to enroll in college;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that The Council of State Governments encourages state legislators and government officials to recognize the importance of higher education to their economic growth and development and that state policymakers place a greater emphasis on improving access to higher education so that their citizens can obtain the skills necessary to compete in today's changing economy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that The Council of State Governments encourages state legislatures to offer more stability in revenue for institutions of higher education. States should consider financial incentives or rewards aimed at colleges and universities for courses students complete as well as for students enrolled.

Adopted this 31st Day of May, 2008 at the
CSG 75th Anniversary Celebration
in Lexington, Kentucky

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is for Governor M. Jodi Rell, and the signature on the right is for Representative Kim Koppelman. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Governor M. Jodi Rell

Representative Kim Koppelman

2008 CSG President

2008 CSG Chair