

Expand post-secondary education opportunities for more students

Post-secondary education is more important than ever in today's global economy, but it is increasingly out of reach for young Americans. Each year, more than 400,000 qualified high school graduates do not go on to college because neither they nor their families can afford the cost.¹ This is an unfortunate trend that also affects Pennsylvania.

PSEA believes that students should have the opportunity to take part in post-secondary education and supports efforts to evaluate existing programs aimed at helping low-income students afford postsecondary education.

PSEA Recommendation

Implement improved efforts to:

- Increase college accessibility through grants and loan forgiveness programs; and
- Ensure fair and equitable state funding for Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education and the state's community colleges.

Cost is too often a barrier

Over the last quarter century, the burden of financing higher education has shifted from the state to the student. At the same time, college tuition and fees have risen faster than personal income, consumer prices, and even health insurance. Tuition and associated fees at Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education averaged more than \$8,000 in the 2008-09 school year.²

Students and families who can afford it the least are the hardest hit. The Pell Grant program, an important source of financial aid for the poorest students, covered 32 percent of the cost of a public, four-year college in the 2007-08 school year.³ When the program was created in the 1970s, it covered up to 84 percent of the cost of a public four-year college.

In addition to financial barriers, many low-income and minority students need a range of support programs, starting as early as middle school, to encourage them to attend college, help them prepare for it, and provide support so they complete their degrees and graduate.

(01/10)

The Power of a Great Education: *PSEA's 20/20 Vision for the Future*

¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2002) "Empty Promises: The Myth of College Access in America," www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/emptypromises.pdf.

² State System of Higher Education, Fact Book 2008-09. www.passhe.gov.

³ "College based trends in student aid 2007," www.collegeboard.com/press/releases.

