



The Bell Policy Center

Research • Advocacy • Opportunity

1801 Broadway, Suite 280
Denver, Colo. 80202
(303) 297-0456 metro Denver
(866) 283-8051 statewide
(303) 297-0460 fax

www.thebell.org

The Bell's Proposals to Improve Postsecondary Access and Success for All Coloradans

By Spiros Protopsaltis, Policy Analyst

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As the new legislative session begins and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education launches its statewide higher education marketing campaign with its January 18th "CollegeInColorado" event, the Bell would like to highlight its proposals for improving Colorado's public higher education system and enhancing postsecondary access and success for underserved students:

1) Fix TABOR

Unless the state addresses the fiscal crisis caused by TABOR, public higher education will continue to suffer enormous budget cuts, further decreasing postsecondary access and threatening the quality of educational services offered by our colleges and universities. If our state leadership does not take immediate action, funding for higher education will disappear within a decade and our state will be the first in the nation to completely disinvest from the development of our human capital, threatening our finest college systems, decreasing postsecondary access, losing top-notch faculty and research funds. The possible closing of several institutions that serve as economic growth engines across the state and the deterioration of our public higher education system would have a devastating impact on our state's economy. This scenario can only be avoided by reforming the constitutional restrictions that have led to Colorado's ranking at the bottom in terms of postsecondary funding and access for underserved students.

2) Increase the State's Need-Based Financial Aid

During a time of increasing tuition rates and growing enrollment, our state has lost the ground that it had gained in providing additional need-based financial aid to qualified low-income students. State funding for financial aid has declined in recent years, making college less affordable and less accessible for thousands of college-ready students from low- and moderate-income families. By investing resources in need-based financial aid, we can increase postsecondary access and provide opportunity to all Coloradoans, regardless of their economic status. In addition, we should revise existing financial aid programs that support students who would attend college regardless of the aid they receive, to put greater emphasis on serving those students most in need.

3) Assess the Effectiveness of Existing Financial Aid Programs

In order to maximize the effectiveness of our limited financial aid resources, it is important that we have the information to assess the effectiveness of existing financial aid programs. Without such information, the design of additional programs will not benefit from the lessons learned and may run the danger of duplication and ineffectiveness. Therefore, it is crucial to revisit existing programs and examine their impact on postsecondary access and success, especially for under-served students, and to review the characteristics of financial aid recipients and whether existing programs serve their targeted populations.



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4) Provide Adequate Resources to Successfully Implement the New Pre-collegiate Curriculum Requirements

Without additional resources, under-funded and under-performing school districts serving a large proportion of low-income students will be unable to implement effectively the new mandatory college admissions requirements of a pre-collegiate curriculum. Especially in light of the high school population projections that indicate a growth in the number of students in need of additional language and support services, it is necessary to ensure that the new requirements will not serve as an additional barrier to postsecondary access for low-income students.

5) Hold Institutions Accountable for Increasing Access and Success for Low-Income and Minority Students

One of the major elements of the Colorado Opportunity Fund legislation is the signing of performance contracts between CCHE and the participating higher education institutions that will lay out specific goals and requirements and promote accountability. Unfortunately, and despite postsecondary access and success for low-income and minority students being among the stated goals of this legislation, the draft contracts fail to include specific measures that would ensure the realization of such goals. Specifically, the contracts provide an overly broad definition of "underserved" students and also fail to require the use of specific data that would capture an institution's performance in this area. Furthermore, the draft contracts do not include measurable objectives for institutional investment in outreach and support services, for underserved populations as well as for increased institutional financial aid. A revision of the performance contracts that would include a narrower definition of underserved students, and would include measurable goals for postsecondary access and success for such populations could ensure that institutions are held accountable for making an effort to serve all Coloradoans, regardless of socioeconomic status or race.