

For Immediate Release: March 17, 2010

Access Missouri Work Group Agrees on Eight Principles for Financial Aid Program

Columbia – Ten presidents of public and private institutions or their designated representatives met at the home of UM System President Gary Forsee last night to find common ground on disbursement of Missouri's need-based scholarships. Commissioner of Higher Education Robert B. Stein served as the meeting's facilitator.

"The participants were genuinely motivated to come together to identify a program built on sound public policy objectives," says Stein. The four-hour meeting yielded consensus on several principles. Participants noted that the following principles represent a common framework identified by those in attendance for further discussion with their sector colleagues:

1. The state should continue to provide need-based financial aid to eligible students attending public two-year, public four-year and independent institutions in Missouri through a program that is easily understood, predictable and portable.
2. Public policy on state scholarships should recognize and support access and choice by Missouri students.
3. The state should continue the policy of stratified awards based on student need as defined by the federal expected family contribution (EFC) methodology.
4. State policy should be guided by the principle of equal maximum awards to all students. Within the context of resource constraints (a total current appropriation of \$95 million) and the number of eligible students, award amounts for students attending public four-year, Linn State Technical College, and independent institutions should be the same. There is also agreement that ideally the state should be able to afford the ability to provide equal maximum award levels to all students regardless of institution attended and that the financial impact of including students attending public two-year institutions at the same award level should be explored.
5. Students currently enrolled should be held harmless from any statutory changes in award levels. The current sunset provisions for Access Missouri should be eliminated when a new authorizing statute is adopted to provide needed continuity and consistency. Exact date for implementation should be determined after further exploration.
6. To be eligible for awards, students should maintain a 2.0 GPA during their first 60 credit hours and a 2.5 GPA after 60 hours.
7. The state's need-based scholarship award should be applied only after all other grants and scholarships are applied and should not exceed the cost of attendance.
8. Higher education is a driver of economic strength and growth in the state. As additional resources become available, the state must recognize its obligation to meet the increased financial aid challenges faced by Missouri's most needy students while also improving the state's rank in support for public institutional operating budgets.

Stein applauded the commitment of the participants to put student and state needs first.

Two bills are currently under consideration by the Missouri legislature to equalize award amounts for public and private four-year institutions.

The group charged Stein to issue a press release on their behalf and serve as spokesperson during the next 24-48 hours to give them time to meet with their sector colleagues. Sector consultations are scheduled to conclude Thursday evening, March 18, after which participants hope to speak with one voice to support their agreed upon principles.

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