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Editorial

No changes needed to Access Missouri

Missouri students attending Missouri's 25 private colleges and universities could see the price tag increase sharply next year if state legislation is passed that changes how Access Missouri scholarship money is distributed.

The changes would make the maximum award amounts the same for students attending public and private universities — a 25-percent increase for students at public schools and a 38-percent decrease for those at private universities.

Missouri Sen. David Pearce, co-sponsor of the legislation, said the legislation “levels the playing field by treating students who attend public and private schools the same.”

But the playing field is uneven to begin with, and as the program currently stands, it works to help even the playing field. Generally speaking, tuition is lower at public universities than private. Why? Because taxpayers are pouring millions of dollars into public universities every year, resulting in lower tuition.

By setting a higher maximum scholarship amount through Access Missouri for students attending private universities, the state is helping make college affordable for more Missouri students. It gives students a choice of what university they want to attend, and they can more easily make that decision based on what university will best fill the students' needs, rather than based on which one will be the least expensive.

Private universities provide an excellent service to taxpayers by not requiring the state to pay for educating everyone, and they are a vital part of the local economy where those universities are located. Southwest Baptist University here in Bolivar is a perfect example.

Keeping the Access Missouri scholarship program in its current form will protect the \$2.7 million in financial aid that 30 percent of SBU's students received through the program for the 2008-09 school year.

The Access Missouri program is working in its current form. It does not need to be changed, as several state legislators have proposed.

— Charlotte Marsch