



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

Why Higher Education -- Why Now? A Framework for Legislative Action

North Dakota Higher Education Policy Summit
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The NCSL Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education

- To study the trends and issues in state higher education, especially impacting access and cost and to make recommendations about legislative roles and responsibilities.
- To enhance the dialogue among state legislators on the "big picture" issues regarding appropriations, tuition, and financial aid and the impact of legislative decisions on college affordability and access.
- To offer recommendations about the roles and responsibilities of state legislators (and the roles and responsibilities of the state and federal government) in higher education reform.

Commission Members

- Co-Chairs:
 - Rep. Denise Merrill, Connecticut
 - Rep. Geanie Morrison, Texas
- Members:
 - Sen. Ben Altimarano, New Mexico
 - Sen. John Chichester, Virginia
 - Sen. Lyle Hillyard, Utah
 - Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, Washington
 - Rep. Rob Kreibich, Wisconsin
 - Sen. Ken Lavallo, New York
 - Assemblywoman Carol Liu, California
 - Sen. Evelyn Lynn, Florida
 - Sen. Robert O'Leary, Massachusetts
 - Sen. Robert Plymale, West Virginia
 - Sen. Steve Rauschenberger, Illinois
 - Assemblyman Craig Stanley, New Jersey

Key Messages

- The report is first and foremost a report by state legislators for state legislators about the importance of prioritizing state higher education as part and parcel of state economic development strategies.
- Legislators are perfectly positioned to take leadership on this issue: they can articulate the public interest, design appropriate policy and funding strategies, and ensure results.

The Problems:

In terms of education attainment, our higher ed system is no longer the best in the world.

Too many students are falling through the cracks.

At the same time, tuition and fees are increasing rapidly.

The Problems

- **We're applying 20th century policy solutions to a 21st century world.**
 - **Today's students are different from yesterday's.**
 - **We're not prepared for dramatically changing demographic shifts.**

Key Messages

We've forgotten that higher education is an important *investment* for the states and the country.

Legislator Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Budgets and Appropriations**
- **Goals and Expectations for Higher Education**
- **Higher Education as a Legislative Priority**
- **Legislative Leadership**

Recommendations:

- **Define Clear State Goals -- A Public Agenda for Higher Education**
- **Identify Your State Strengths and Weaknesses**
- **Know Your Demographic Trends for Next 10-30 Years**
- **Identify a Place to Sustain the Public Agenda**
- **Hold Institutions Accountable**

Recommendations:

- **Rethink Funding**
 - Link appropriations, tuition and financial aid policy
 - Be results/performance oriented in funding
 - Focus on productivity
- **Recommit to Affordability**
 - Help reduce borrowing and debt
 - Rethink student aid
- **Recommit to Access and Success**
- **Don't Forget about Adult Learners**
- **Embrace Innovation**

Next Steps:

- **Dissemination and discussion around the country in 2007.**
- **Link to other national movements on this issue, such as Secretary Spellings Higher Ed Summits.**
- **Support of statewide discussions in the states.**
- **Development of a set of leadership tools for legislators.**

For more information:

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NCSL Blue Ribbon Commission:
<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/brcoverview.htm>