

Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges Makes Suggestions for Lottery Use

Information released by the Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges (AATYC) announced that the Presidents and Chancellors of Arkansas' 22 two-year colleges unanimously agreed on recommendations of ways they think state lottery funds might be used to benefit five under-served populations.

According to a statement by AATYC, "A high school education is no longer sufficient to prepare a skilled workforce," the recommendation continued, "and Arkansas is nearly last in the nation in the number of degrees. Therefore, in order to boost the number of degrees and certificates in Arkansas, we must focus on programs that provide the most help to the most people, while at the same time providing the most benefit to the state."

The first of the five areas listed by AATYC includes nontraditional students. Students who do not enroll in college immediately following high school, or who have some college credit without completing a degree, are considered nontraditional. This population faces obstacles such as work and family responsibilities, lack of funds for tuition and associated educational costs (including housing, transportation and child care), lack of adequate training, and layoffs as companies downsize or leave the state.

Currently, Arkansas offers need-based Higher Education Opportunities Grants (GO) for students enrolling in college within one year of high school graduation or GED completion. According to AATYC, it is essential to eliminate age restrictions and financial need barriers in order to educate and train state residents. Improving skills of the workforce will increase per capita income and quality of life. It will also allow current companies to expand and attract new companies to the state. The expansion of the Workforce Improvement Grant (WIG) also falls under the AATYC recommendations. AATYC would like to see this program include all students ages 24 and over with unmet need up to cost of attendance, regardless of Pell eligibility. (Currently, WIG is reduced by the amount of Pell eligibility.)

Another area proposed by AATYC is aid for concurrently enrolled students. Concurrently enrolled high school students receive college credits prior to high school graduation. A recent study showed positive results for concurrent enrollment in other states. Concurrently enrolled students are more likely to earn a high school diploma, more likely to enroll in college as a full time student, more likely to persist to a second semester, and have higher grade point averages in college than their non-concurrently enrolled peers.

The Association also recommends including a state funded work study program, grants for Associate Degree completers transferring to four year universities, and targeted aid for workforce shortages, such as STEM careers (science, technology, engineering, and math). Merit based assistance in Arkansas is currently offered through Academic Challenge. In the AATYC recommendations, it suggests expanding the Challenge program to help more students.