

The National Agenda for Postsecondary Education and the Higher Education Act

~ Statement of the State Higher Education Executive Officers ~
July, 2002

Because our prosperity, our democracy, and the quality of life in succeeding generations depends on it, the nation is expecting postsecondary education to generate –

- More opportunities for students to participate in postsecondary education
- Widespread, affordable access to high quality programs
- Higher levels of student learning
- More students who complete degrees and certificates,
- More capable teachers, and
- More high quality research.

The federal Higher Education Act, which will be re-authorized in the coming year, provides an excellent opportunity for both the states and the federal government to consider and take the actions required to achieve these national goals. The State Higher Education Executive Officers have prepared this statement of premises and priorities to articulate their commitment to advancing the national agenda.

Premises:

We believe that achieving the national agenda will require:

- A persistent commitment to excellence and continuing improvement.
- A greater effort and commitment from:
 - Institutions, who will need to become more effective and productive in facilitating student learning and generating high quality research;
 - Students, who will need to work harder;
 - The public, who will need to invest more in postsecondary education.
- A clear focus on the national goals and accountability systems for achieving them. Effective accountability systems, which are primarily a state responsibility, must:
 - Focus on student benefits – learning, readiness for work, and a capacity for future learning;
 - Motivate and guide institutions, faculty, and students with clear, relevant goals;

- Build the capacity to succeed;
 - Provide flexibility for experimentation and creative approaches;
 - Be efficient and effective – not cumbersome, complicated, or regulatory.
- A sensible division of responsibilities and roles among the federal government, the states, the private sector, institutions, and academic leaders. Everybody cannot play every role, just as every institution cannot be excellent in every mission.
 - Wise choices among competing demands and priorities
 - Good stewardship in preserving and strengthening the nation’s educational resources, along with the courage to innovate and challenge outmoded approaches.

Priorities:

For the states

To advance the national agenda the states must:

- Continue the design and implementation of state accountability systems that focus attention on public priorities, monitor results, assure quality, and promote greater achievement.
- Take all steps necessary to assure that the next generation of students is well-prepared for postsecondary education, with special attention to those who have received inadequate preparation.
- Develop and implement tuition and financial aid policies that, in partnership with federal programs, assure that higher education is affordable and accessible to low-income and middle-income students, without assuming inordinate debt.
- Provide adequate direct support to colleges and universities to meet the demand for high quality postsecondary education and to sustain the vitality of the nation’s research infrastructure.
- Mobilize and engage every available institutional resource in advancing the public agenda – public, private non-profit, and private for-profit institutions.
- Identify and eliminate regulations and constraints that increase the cost of education without increasing its quality or effectiveness.
- Develop policies and operating procedures that enable the states and institutions to use limited resources effectively in advancing the public agenda.

For the federal government

To advance the national agenda the federal government must:

- Assure sufficient support for federal financial assistance programs so that low and middle income students are enabled and encouraged to participate in higher education.
- Simplify federal student aid programs to increase their operating efficiency and to reduce obstacles to students in need.
- Expand the federal financial commitment to programs, such as Gear Up and TRIO, that demonstrate results in encouraging and enabling students to prepare for success in college.
- Support the further development and maintenance of national data systems that will help states and institutions monitor their progress and increase achievement.
- Continue funding high quality research.
- Identify and eliminate regulations and constraints that increase the cost of education without increasing its quality or effectiveness.

For institutions

To advance the national agenda postsecondary institutions must:

- Focus continuing and increased attention on practices that increase teaching effectiveness and student learning.
- Utilize and develop technological applications that engage students and increase the quality and effectiveness of instruction.
- Develop stronger collaborative relationships with pre-K-12 educational systems in order to strengthen the quality of teaching and the preparation of the next student generation.
- Develop new approaches to instruction, research, and administration that increase access, reduce costs, and increase the quality and productivity of postsecondary education.
- Identify and eliminate the factors, both within and among institutions, that unduly slow student progress and impede the achievement of educational goals.

Commitments:

The state's higher education executive officers are committed to working with state, federal, and institutional leaders to reach these national goals.