

nassgap

national association of state student grant and aid programs
www.nassgap.org

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Via email: arne.duncan@ed.gov

March 24, 2009

Secretary Arne Duncan
United States Secretary of Education
LBJ Education Building, Room 7W311
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I write on behalf of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) to provide input for the development of the President's proposed FY2010 budget for higher education. NASSGAP represents agencies in the fifty States that operate major state aid programs including the federal Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program. In 2006-07, our member states provided \$9.3 billion in student aid. Nearly three quarters of the State-sponsored student grants were need-based.

We are pleased that President Obama's 2010 budget blueprint emphasizes college access and affordability. Along with an expansion of student aid, the President's budget blueprint stresses, through the inclusion of a new five-year \$2.5 billion Access and Completion Incentive Fund, the need for providing incentives to spur innovative State efforts to help low-income students succeed and complete their college education.

To accomplish this goal, we believe the Access and Completion Incentive Fund should incorporate the highly effective framework of LEAP and elements of its Grants for Access and Persistence (GAP) component. As you testified at the House Committee on the Budget on March 12, 2009, "this Federal-State partnership builds on ideas Congress included in the Higher Education Opportunity Act, such as the State Grants for Access and Persistence program designed to complement LEAP."

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Secretary Duncan

Page 2

The LEAP program consists of two critical components. The basic Federal LEAP need-based grant has been the foundation of the program since 1972. It has been instrumental in leveraging the delivery of critical State grant aid to needy undergraduate and graduate students across the nation. LEAP annually generates more than \$840 million in matching State spending for need-based student grants, and over half of LEAP recipients are from families with incomes under \$20,000.

The second component of LEAP is the GAP program included in the Higher Education Opportunity Act signed into law last year. Under GAP, States are rewarded – via higher levels of federal matching dollars – for creating robust partnerships with institutions of higher education, businesses, and philanthropic organizations in their State to provide low-income students with: (1) a grant that literally fills the “gap” of their unmet financial aid need – tuition and fees or cost of attendance; (2) increased participation in early information, intervention, mentoring, and outreach programs; and, (3) early assurance of aid eligibility (beginning in middle school). Research has shown that successful college access programs offer these three components. In fact, an evaluation by the Lumina Foundation of one such program – Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars Program – found that participants were nearly five times more likely than non-participants to enroll in college.

As such, NASSGAP urges that the President’s proposed FY10 Budget include funding for the LEAP/GAP program at the authorized level of \$200 million. As outlined above, one effective approach to providing this increased funding would be to include the LEAP/GAP framework in the President’s proposed Access and Completion Incentive Fund.

We believe these recommendations will provide our nation with a true Federal/State partnership opportunity to improve access and persistence of at-risk populations to a postsecondary education. This is the right thing to do for our citizens and an absolutely necessary part of the country’s economic recovery. Without a skilled and educated population, our nation will not have the human capital, talent and skill to rebuild its economy. Your partners in the State agencies that serve college students across the nation stand ready to meet the challenges of the proposals we make.

We hope to have the opportunity to discuss our proposals and provide you with whatever information you need to make them a reality.

Regards,



Lee Andes
President – NASSGAP