

nassgap

national association of state student grant and aid programs

www.nassgap.org (571) 239-0511

Bart Astor, Director, Washington Office

April 4, 2007

Ms. Sara Martinez Tucker
Under Secretary
USDE Office of the Under Secretary
400 Maryland Ave SW Rm. 7W 315
Washington DC 20202

Dear Secretary Tucker:

I write to you as President of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP). As you know, NASSGAP represents states across the nation that administer need-based grant programs for students attending postsecondary education institutions and participate in the federal Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) Program.

I and fellow NASSGAP members thank you for inviting us to participate in Secretary Spelling's Education Summit held in Washington on March 22nd. The summit not only brought together partners in the postsecondary educational field, but brought out many interesting strategies for addressing access and affordability. One suggestion that stood out in the "Increasing Need-based Aid for Access and Success" group was to strengthen the partnerships among federal, state, institutional, and private sectors to leverage and maximize need-based aid for the most financially needy. Early intervention and outreach were also high priorities.

As you know, the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) and Special Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (SLEAP) programs are designed to provide federal incentives to insure that states maintain grant programs directed at the most needy. A bill submitted by Senator Jack Reed (RI) proposes to increase the authorization for LEAP and replace SLEAP with Grants for Access and Persistence, through which increasing federal matching levels will spur states to establish public-private partnerships with institutions of higher education, private corporations, and philanthropies to leverage new investments in need-based grant aid for low income students. As stated in the bill's summary, the goals of Access and Persistence Partnerships are to:

- Provide low-income students with a grant that fills the gap of their unmet need;
- Increase participation of low-income students in early information, intervention, mentoring, and outreach programs; and
- Provide early notification to low-income students in grades 7 through 12 of their eligibility for financial aid.

President
Mary Ann Welch
Rhode Island Higher
Education Assistance
Authority
560 Jefferson Blvd
Warwick, RI 02886
(401) 736-1171
mawelch@riheaa.org

President-Elect
Marilyn Cargill
Vermont Student
Assistance
Corporation
P.O. Box 2000
Champlain Mill
Winooski, VT 05404
(802) 655-9602
cargill@vsac.org

Secretary
Vicki Merkel
Oregon Student
Assistance
Commission
1500 Valley River Dr,
Suite 100
Eugene, OR 97401
(541) 687-7385
vicki.b.merkel@state.or.us

Treasurer
Lee Andes
State Council of Higher
Education for Virginia
James Monroe Bldg 10th
Floor
101 North 14th Street
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 225-2614
leecandes@schev.edu

Past-President
Melanie Amrhein
Louisiana Office of
Student Financial
Assistance
PO Box 91202
Baton Rouge, LA
70821
(225) 922-3269
mamrhein@osfa.state.la.us

Member-at-Large
Lois Hollis
Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Capital Station
Austin, TX 78711
(512) 427-6465
lois.hollis@theccb.state.tx.us

Member-at-Large
Stephanie Butler
Alaska Commission on
Postsecondary Education
PO Box 110505
Juneau, AK 99811-0505
(907) 465-6743
stephanie_butler@acpe.state.ak.us

The current LEAP program, as well as the proposed Grants for Access and Persistence (GAP) program together seems to address the very strategies proposed at the Educational Summit.

Given the tremendous potential for LEAP/GAP to foster partnerships among federal, state, institutional, and private sectors to leverage and maximize need-based aid for the most financially needy and to promote early intervention and outreach, we were encouraged by your recognition at the Summit of the importance of maintaining and strengthening the federal-state partnership in providing monetary support and early awareness to financially needy students.

A NASSGAP-commissioned report examining the long-term success of LEAP found that if federal funding for the program were eliminated, it would likely cause the termination of need-based student grant programs in at least five states and result in losses in need-based funding in nearly 9 out of every 10 states. The full report can be downloaded from the NASSGAP website at www.nassgap.org. The attached press release on the commissioned report as well as the attached LEAP fact sheet further highlight the true benefits of continued funding of the LEAP program.

At a time when limited federal funds require careful analysis of the best use of those funds, it is NASSGAP's recommendation that the common goal of providing college access to our most needy citizens be maintained through the federal-state partnership of the LEAP program and that support be given to redesigning SLEAP to address extending partnerships to institutions and the private sector to increase aid and early intervention.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss strategies to help achieve the Secretary's goal of increasing the states' commitment to need-based aid. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Mary Ann Welch
NASSGAP President
(401) 736-1171

CC: Kristin Conklin, USDE
Bart Astor, Director NASSGAP Washington Office
Chas Treadwell, NASSGAP Federal Relations