



ISSUES BRIEF 2009

HIGHER EDUCATION

Equal Access to Higher Education: Securing a Competitive Workforce in Minnesota

The Chicano Latino Affairs Council recommends that the Minnesota Governor and Legislature:

- Support flat rate tuition for all students to sustain a highly qualified and competitive workforce.
- Preserve funding to grant flat rate tuition to non-residents students at 8 metro-area colleges, and keep in place the 2007 policy granting flat tuition to all students attending these institutions. In the medium to long term, enact a resident tuition bill that includes all public higher institutions in the state.
- Extend a flat tuition rate to the rest of the University of Minnesota system. Currently only U of M Morris and Crookston offer one tuition rate to all students.

In 2007, the Omnibus Higher Education Bill eliminated the non-resident tuition rates at eight two-year institutions of higher learning, expanding the same tuition rate to non-resident and resident students in 22 of the 32 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. This was an important step to increase educational opportunities for non-resident students in the metro area where these institutions are located, and home to a significant concentration of Latino students. However, the clause is scheduled to expire in June 2009 and there is a need to guarantee that the flat tuition rate and policy remains in place.

Extending the higher education clause of 2007 and implementing resident tuition must be seen as an investment and an economic development strategy that will:

- Increase the number of Latino students attending public institutions of higher learning, and minimize drop-out rates affecting underachievement of students of color, particularly Latino students. These youthful populations will continue to make up a growing share of higher education student enrollments and bring additional revenue to the university system. Since 1998, white students' enrollment in higher education has declined, while minority students' participation is on the rise from 10% to 17% in 2007. This trend will likely persist as, according to the Office of Higher Education, students of color will comprise about 20 percent of Minnesota high school graduates in 2015, with the largest increases among Latino and Black students.
- Help secure the future workforce of the state. The state faces a shortage of skilled workers due to a declining labor force growth. The state's future economic competitiveness depends on having a highly skilled and solid educated labor force able to replace the retiring workforce in strategic economic areas.
- Keep alive the state's historical and strategic tradition of investing in human capital to be one of the most productive places in the world and preserve its outstanding standard of living. Educating all students represents a public benefit that translates into increasing workers' productivity and tax revenues resulting from higher income. In addition, costs would be offset by savings in public health, welfare, and public safety.