



Dr. Nicholas Neupauer and Dr. Robert Smith Guest Column From The Butler Eagle

4.15.2009

By NICHOLAS C. NEUPAUER and ROBERT SMITH

Recently, there has been much attention around the issues of accessibility to and affordability of higher education in Pennsylvania. This is an especially timely discussion in these tough economic times.

Gov. Ed Rendell laid out his perspective on the public policy agenda when he presented his budget address to the General Assembly last month. As part of his agenda, he recommended creation of a tuition relief program based on financial need. He also recommended that access to this program be restricted to students attending one of the public sectors of higher education in the commonwealth, either by enrollment in one of the 14 community colleges or one of the commonwealth's 14 state-owned universities.

The governor's plan emphasized accessibility and affordability. The governor recognizes that public institutions of higher education already are cost conscious and are taking appropriate steps to control costs and maintain access. The plan provides additional funding to support enrollment in public institutions.

The dollars will simply go further than if the program was made available to support all institutions in higher education, public or private, within the commonwealth.

Butler County is fortunate to have both Butler County Community College and Slippery Rock University within its borders. The governor's proposal would be a significant opportunity for Butler County residents to achieve dreams of a college education.

Not only are both institutions affordable choices for higher education goals, but we collaborate closely so that credits transfer, and students have the maximum choices for their degree goals.

With BC3 and SRU, students have guarantees on the transferability of their credits between these two public sectors of higher education.

We believe the governor's proposal is an unusual opportunity. It starts with the premise that public dollars can best be utilized in policy initiatives that support public institutions. It acknowledges the need to provide access to higher education to as many residents as possible.

The governor also proposed the expansion of existing financial assistance to students attending both public and private universities by increasing the amount of state funding for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA).

As public institutions, our missions are to serve the residents of Pennsylvania, and Butler County in particular. The governor has offered an extraordinary financial opportunity that may be once in a lifetime.

We agree with the governor that investment in students attending community colleges and Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities serves as the best mechanism to advance the public policy of creating a better-educated workforce.

We look forward to the challenge.

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