

ACADEMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND SMART GRANT PROGRAMS: THE SECOND-YEAR

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Research that Matters

Modifications to the Legislation

- Negotiated rulemaking sessions were held in winter and spring of 2007
- Since then, ED has responded to several of the stakeholders concerns by modifying regulations where possible
- Recent legislation (H.R. 5715 and H.R. 4317) modified the programs, thus addressing some of the earlier concerns
- Lingering concerns are not expected to be addressed before the programs sunset following the 2010-11 academic year

Issues Raised During the First Year

- Purpose of program generally applauded
- Conception and design criticized:
 - Merit component a break from traditional Federal aid
 - GPA requirement difficult for student aid office to verify
 - Defining a rigorous high school program requirement poses complex implementation problems
 - Mandatory institutional participation was difficult in first year because of confusion about requirements
 - Excluded part-time students, non-citizens, and students in certificate programs
 - Limited list of approved STEM majors

Lingering Issues in the Second Year

- Merit component
 - Government Accountability Office (March 2009)
- Mandatory participation
 - Office of the Inspector General (August 2008)
- Administrative burden
 - Institute for Higher Education Policy (February 2008)
 - National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (April 2009)

Lingering Issues in the Second Year

- Rigorous high school program requirement & postsecondary GPA
 - Government Accountability Office (March 2009)
- 4-year high school transcript

Modifications to the Legislation

- Concerns addressed by H.R. 5715 and H.R. 4137:
 - Expands eligibility to students who are part-time, certificate-seeking, non-citizens (permanent residents), or enrolled in SMART-equivalent courses at liberal arts colleges
 - Definition of “academic year” change to “year”
 - Expands 5th year eligibility to SMART grant students enrolled in 5-year programs
 - Only states can define “rigorous secondary school program”
 - Redirects surplus back into the ACG/NSG programs

Some Remaining Concerns

- Merit component
- Mandatory participation
- Full high school transcript is still required
- Minimum GPA requirements
- SMART grant does not include all STEM majors

State Student-Level Data

- Secured participation from three states:
 - Florida
 - Tennessee
 - Texas
- Track students over time
- Student characteristics, course enrollment, GPA, financial aid data
- Initial analysis completed Fall 2009

Resources

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (2009). National Conversation Initiative Preliminary Recommendations. Retrieved on April 22, 2009 at: <http://www.nasfaa.org/PDFs/2009/NCIPreliminaryRecs.pdf>

The College Board (2008). Fulfilling the Commitment: Recommendations for Reforming Federal Student Aid. Retrieved on October 1, 2008 at: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/rethinking-stu-aid-fulfilling-commitment-recommendations.pdf>

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