

WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18c-1-3

§18C-1-3. Additional legislative findings; purpose of financial aid programs.

(a) Legislative findings:

(1) Education attainment is inextricably linked to economic development, and, in the current global economy, the state is competing not only with other states, but also with other countries;

(2) The federal government no longer funds student financial aid as generously as it has in the past. Therefore, the state must commit to increase both access and affordability to higher education opportunities for its citizens;

(3) In recent years the state has substantially increased appropriations to both merit-based and need-based student financial aid programs;

(4) The ultimate state goal in providing student financial aid is to create a culture that values education and improves the quality of the state's workforce, thereby enhancing the quality of life for its citizens;

(5) The state can provide a successful system of student financial aid only by balancing the needs of students from all levels of financial need and academic ability;

(6) A comprehensive system of student financial aid will yield the maximum return on the state's investment by increasing the skills, qualifications and education achievement of citizens from all backgrounds; and

(7) Sources of student financial aid can be distinguished as providing either access or affordability to higher education opportunities;

(8) Access refers to a student's financial ability to pursue post-secondary education. Affordability refers to a student's freedom to choose where to attend college based on available resources;

(9) West Virginia is committed to making post-secondary education both accessible and affordable for its citizens. To this end, it is essential that the state provide multiple financial aid programs which accomplish different goals;

(b) Purposes of financial aid programs:

(1) The West Virginia Higher Education Grant Program is a need-based program that provides funding primarily to traditional college-age students who do not have sufficient financial resources to attempt post-secondary education. This grant program is a vitally important source of financial assistance for needy residents of the state and should continue

to receive strong financial support.

(2) The HEAPS Grant Program is a need-based program that provides funding primarily to nontraditional college students, including:

(A) Adult students who desire to pursue post-secondary education on a part-time basis and who do not qualify for other forms of financial assistance;

(B) Place-bound students, often parents employed full-time, who require evening and weekend access to college courses; and

(C) Individuals pursuing workforce training or skill development training necessary to enter the job market quickly.

(3) The Underwood-Smith Teacher Scholarship Program is a merit-based program that encourages students who have demonstrated outstanding academic abilities to pursue teaching careers. This program serves to meet West Virginia's statewide, geographic and discipline-specific needs for highly qualified teachers.

(4) The West Virginia Engineering, Science and Technology Scholarship Program is a merit-based program that encourages talented students to pursue baccalaureate degrees in engineering, science and technology-related disciplines. This program serves to increase the size and quality of the pool of individuals pursuing careers in engineering, science and technology-related fields.

(5) The PROMISE Scholarship Program is a merit-based program that enhances student achievement by encouraging high school students to work harder to attain the necessary grades and test scores to qualify for a PROMISE scholarship and provides an incentive for the most capable students to attend college in the state. PROMISE provides affordability to traditional college-age students.

(c) An appropriate blend of student financial aid programs provides the state with the necessary tools to educate its citizenry for a broad range of economic opportunities:

(1) Without proper funding for need-based programs, lower income students may not be able to realize their full potential; (2) Adults may not obtain the training they need to compete in the current and future job market;

(3) High-achieving students may not pursue rigorous courses in high school or attend college in West Virginia, all of which contribute to devaluing post-secondary education and perpetuating the culture of educational underachievement; and

(4) The state must continue to strive to support equally the need-based and merit-based student financial aid programs.