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# Wolf, Lawmakers Shouldn't Cut Grants to Private Colleges

## **Abstract**

Earlier this week, students from private colleges and universities across the Commonwealth gathered in Harrisburg to meet with legislators and make the case for the importance of the state's commitment to higher education.

More specifically, for state grant programs that help to make college affordable for low- and moderate-income students and their families.

I have a keen interest in making sure that talented students of all income levels have the opportunity to attain a high quality education. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

private colleges, higher education, Institutional Assistance Grant, Tom Wolf

## **Disciplines**

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## **Comments**

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## Wolf, lawmakers shouldn't cut grants to private colleges: Janet Morgan Riggs

By Janet Morgan Riggs

on April 07, 2017 at 9:40 AM

Earlier this week, students from private colleges and universities across the Commonwealth gathered in Harrisburg to meet with legislators and make the case for the importance of the state's commitment to higher education.

More specifically, for state grant programs that help to make college affordable for low- and moderate-income students and their families.



Janet Morgan Riggs

(Gettysburg College photo)

I have a keen interest in making sure that talented students of all income levels have the opportunity to attain a high quality education.

While I appreciate the challenges of balancing the state budget, I am puzzled by Gov. Tom Wolf's proposal to cut the Institutional Assistance Grant (IAG) program, a program that is front and center for these student lobbyists.

These grants are distributed to private institutions based on the number of low- and moderate-income Pennsylvania students they serve.

Wolf's proposal to cut this program--his only proposed higher education cut--directly targets those students who need financial assistance the most. In addition, his proposal targets Pennsylvania's private college and universities, which play a significant role in the education of our state's students.

Currently, the state provides \$1.25 billion in institutional aid to public institutions, compared with \$25 million to private institutions, despite the fact that private institutions graduate nearly half of the state's college students.

Wolf wants to slash the IAG program by 50 percent, reducing private institutional aid to \$12.5 million.

That might make sense if private institutions of higher education were under-performing.

So let's look at some quick facts and figures.

Private colleges and universities award 48 percent of all bachelor's degrees in the state and 67 percent of all advanced degrees.

Forty-nine percent of the bachelor's degrees granted to students in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are awarded by private colleges--a vital investment in skills training for the future of the state's economy.

Students who attend private colleges are more likely to graduate in four years as compared to their peers who attend state-related or state-system schools.

Specifically, 67 percent of students attending private colleges graduate in four years, relative to 49 percent at state-related institutions and only 36% at state-system schools.

Graduating faster allows these students to begin their careers sooner and also keeps the cost of a degree down.

Pennsylvania's private colleges and universities are committed to making a college education affordable.

Consequently, more low-income students attend private than public Pennsylvania colleges and universities. For example, during the last fiscal year Gettysburg College awarded over \$50 million in financial aid to 70 percent of our student body.

This kind of commitment has big impact on our students. Specifically, students who attend private institutions graduate with less debt on average than do students who graduate from public institutions.

Finally, private colleges and universities can be found in 100 communities across the Commonwealth. When combined, these colleges and universities are the fourth largest employer, contributing nearly \$18 billion to the overall PA economy and over \$200 million in state and municipal taxes.

When the IAG program was enacted in 1974, its creators recognized the importance of a diverse system of higher education that encompasses both public and independent institutions.

They saw the benefit of supporting private higher education and understood that independent institutions make a significant contribution to the Commonwealth.

The facts and figures reveal an enviable track record for private higher education in PA--and one that is serving our low- and moderate-income students well.

Cutting the IAG program would undermine that success.

Our House Representatives seem to be listening. Earlier this week they voted to restore half of the Governor's proposed cut back to the IAG program. But that's not enough.

I am hoping our legislators continue to consider the perspective of those students who visited them in Harrisburg and whose potential will be compromised by a reduction in the IAG program.

**Janet Morgan Riggs is president of Gettysburg College and chair of the board of directors of the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Pennsylvania.**

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