

# STATE OF COLORADO



DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
*Colorado Commission on Higher Education*

Bill Ritter, Jr.  
Governor

David E. Skaggs  
Executive Director

*For Immediate Release*  
July 15, 2008

Contact: John Karakoulakis  
(303) 866-4742

## **Is the College Opportunity Fund working?** *Review underway to study pros and cons of higher ed stipends*

DENVER – The Department of Higher Education (DHE) today announced that it has contracted with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to conduct a study of how well the College Opportunity Fund (COF) is working for Colorado students and the colleges and universities in the state.

The Colorado Legislature and then Gov. Bill Owens created the COF in 2004 as a way to tie a portion of state funding for higher education directly to students who enroll in any of Colorado's public colleges or universities (and in some private colleges). The legislation required that the Colorado Department of Higher Education evaluate the program and report back to the legislature by 2010. The study also comes after some criticism that the COF stipend is cumbersome for colleges and universities to administer and that many students are not aware the funding is available.

The review will examine how the COF has affected student participation in higher education as well as how the colleges and universities administer it. Researchers will also consider whether the original objectives of the program are being achieved.

“We’re very pleased that the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education can apply its expertise and objectivity to an evaluation of the COF,” said David Skaggs, Executive Director of the Department of Higher Education.

“This method for funding higher education is unique to Colorado, and the legislature wisely directed an evaluation after the first few years. That’s what this study is all about,” Skaggs added. “We need to better understand both the positive and any problematic aspects of the current COF system in order to see if any changes are needed.”

After a detailed analysis is completed, WICHE will report on its findings and present options for any policy changes that appear warranted. These findings will be provided to the legislature, meeting the requirement to report back by 2010.

“We’ve set out to do a comprehensive evaluation not only of the COF and how it is functioning, but also how it intersects with other components of public funding for higher education,” said

David Longanecker, President of WICHE. “Our research will be impartial and should provide meaningful direction for moving forward.”

“We support improving public access to higher education,” said Tony Lewis, Executive Director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation, which is providing financial support for the study. “WICHE can use their expertise to lay out ways to improve the COF, and make it easier for schools to administer the program and for students to go to college.”

“We are fortunate and grateful that the Donnell-Kay Foundation is supporting this effort with a generous grant to the department,” said Skaggs. The WICHE study will cost \$79,000, with DHE paying \$39,000 and the Donnell-Kay Foundation \$40,000.

###