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HOPE Scholarship: Great intent, broken outcome

In 1993, the HOPE Scholarship funded 42,797 students with \$21.4 million. In fiscal year 2011, it will fund 239,687 students with \$688.4 million. As an educator, I am thrilled there is a system to help deserving students fund their college education.

As an educator, it is clear; we have 100,000+ young people in college wasting your tax dollars.

I know this is beginning to sound like a story of when I went to school, I walked uphill both ways in the snow barefoot.

However, there is a clear trend from the beginning of the HOPE Scholarship to today that a large percentage of these students should not be in college.

Furthermore, we are

doing a disservice to those young people and to you, the taxpayers.

For many years, this process was not a major issue. However, recent budget shortfalls and changes to the HOPE Scholarship have highlighted challenges. Therefore, it is important to review the benefits and problems of the HOPE Scholarship.

To be fair, the HOPE Scholarship is a great idea. I am happy to tell colleagues at universities in other states of the benefits.

It gives lower-income students a chance to improve their futures by completing college degrees.

Furthermore, it is designed to reward students who achieve in high school. Next, it was originally designed to be financed by the lottery and not by taxes. Finally, it provides an educated

workforce for the state.

All of these are noble goals and should be supported.

Unfortunately, the system has developed some problems. First, grade inflation appears to be occurring at all levels. It is hard to believe there are five times as many qualified students in 2011 as in 1993.

Viewing the process from the university level, it is clear many students do not have the necessary skills to be at a university but have “earned” a HOPE scholarship with their high school grades.

This traditionally was not much of a problem at the university level. For many years, the system self-corrected. The student would attend a university for a year, lose their HOPE scholarship due to their poor grades and depart.

However, the recent push for colleges to

“retain, progress and graduate” (RPG) has created new stresses. Universities will be rewarded with more state dollars by growing the number of students and then measured on RPG.

This creates negative incentives and does not support producing quality graduates. Furthermore, the problem is exacerbated by the newer generation of student who “expects” to be given a “B” just for attending. It has worked for them throughout their academic career.

I cannot count the number of times I have heard “But if I don’t get a ‘B’ in this class, I will lose my HOPE scholarship.” It is a plaintive cry from students who have not been held accountable at any academic level.

So, while the HOPE is a great and noble goal, the question becomes how should we ensure deserving students are given

a chance? The recent increase of GPA is a minor change and not likely to make a significant change. Add to this challenge the recent scandals of school systems cheating on exams.

We need a better way to allocate limited tax revenues to ensure the best return for your tax dollars. Also, if we don’t change the system and you are a graduate of the Georgia state system, it will devalue your degree.

Finally, do you really want an employee or co-worker that skated through an entire academic career to ensure HOPE and RPG?

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