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ABLE grants saves taxpayer money

By Belinda Keiser

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As higher education in Florida struggles with severe budget cuts, tuition hikes and enrollment caps, modest state tuition grants continue to prove effective in helping an important but sometimes over-looked class of students — working adult learners. The grants also provide the state's workforce with people trained in high-demand fields, stimulate the economy and help save the public's tax dollars.

A prime example is the \$4.4 million state Access to Better Learning and Education grant currently assisting more than 3,700 working, adult learners.

The ABLE grant saves taxpayer monies in that for every dollar invested in private education, two dollars are saved in taxpayer funds. State tuition grants go directly to the students to spend at the school of their choice; most private schools are not subsidized with state funding. This year's annual ABLE grant award is a maximum amount eligible of \$1,182 per student. Meanwhile the average taxpayer subsidy to a student attending a state university is approximately \$44,000 per student over four years or roughly 10 times the amount to Florida residents who choose to attend Keiser University. At Keiser University, three of four students work full or part time, and most are 25 to 35 years old.

As regionally accredited institutions, the 13 ABLE recipient schools meet the same standards as Florida's public universities. Students are prepared for careers in critical workforce shortage fields such as biotechnology, nursing, healthcare, elementary education, criminal justice, and information technology. Keiser graduates have an overall placement rate of approximately 90 percent.

As the need to compete globally and nationally increases, private, career colleges will continue to play a critical role in job creation, economic impact and talent development. Employment and enrollment continues to climb in this educational sector. The ABLE schools each pay tens of millions of dollars in local and state taxes. Keiser University alone has a \$542 million overall impact annually in the state's economy and supports over 19,000 jobs.

It is also clear the working adult learner plays an important role in Florida's economy, and they are a deserving group of students who should have the right to choose where to pursue their education and a stable future for themselves and their family.

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