



## Belinda Keiser: Adult learners and Florida are well-served by ABLÉ grants

*Belinda Keiser*  
*My View*

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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 help an important but sometimes overlooked class of students: working adult learners.

These grants also provide the state's work force 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 (ABLE) grant, which currently assists more than 3,700 working, adult learners who are pursuing the American dream of a better life for themselves and their families.

In today's deeply challenged economy, the ABLÉ 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 ABLÉ grant award is a maximum amount 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 given 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. ABLÉ grant recipients are often the first in their families to attend college. For example:

- Laurie Tiberio, 37, is married with three children, ages 16, 19 and 20, and she is an ABLÉ grant recipient. Laurie chose to pursue her bachelor's degree in legal studies at one of the private, career-focused universities eligible for the ABLÉ grant. Upon graduation, she plans to pursue a law degree at Stetson University.
- Veronica Tobar is a 28-year-old, single Hispanic woman. She was born in Ecuador and currently works as a financial associate at Citibank. She chose to use her ABLÉ grant to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration at a career-focused university where she has small class sizes and can take one class at a time, both of which accommodate her full-time employment.

These are but three of the thousands of ABLÉ grant recipients attending the 13 Florida colleges and universities participating in the program. As regionally accredited institutions, ABLÉ recipient schools meet the same standards as Florida's public universities. Students are prepared for

careers in critical work force shortage fields in Florida such as biotechnology, nursing, health care, elementary education, criminal justice and information technology.

Most of the ABLE recipients already live in the towns and cities where they attend school and typically stay there after graduation to work in their new careers, usually in high-demand jobs that fulfill Florida's work force needs. Keiser graduates have an overall placement rate of approximately 90 percent, and other ABLE recipient schools also have high job-placement rates.

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 to meet this challenge. Employment and enrollment continue to climb in this educational sector. The ABLE schools each pay tens of millions of dollars in local and state taxes. Keiser University, for example, pays \$21 million annually in local and state taxes, has a \$542 million overall impact annually in the state's economy and supports more than 19,000 jobs. And, alumni of KU contribute \$274 million more annually to the state's economy than they did before their graduation.

It is also clear that working adult learners play an important role in Florida's economy, and that they are a deserving group of students who should have the right to choose where to pursue their education and, in extension, a stable future for themselves and their family. Statistics also prove that, as Florida faces billions of dollars in shortages for public education, a modest investment such as the ABLE grant must be preserved because of the beneficial multiplier effect on the economy and contributions to work force needs.

## Additional Facts

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Belinda Keiser, who grew up in Tallahassee and graduated from Godby High School, is vice chancellor of community relations and student advancement for Keiser University, and is responsible for community outreach programs, charitable giving, public relations and government affairs. She also is vice chair of Workforce Florida Inc.'s board of directors. Contact her through the university's Web site at [www.keiseruniversity.edu](http://www.keiseruniversity.edu).

