

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **PENNSYLVANIA HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT RELEASED**

#### **Pennsylvania Needs Expanded Community College Opportunities and Improved High School Performance**

(Harrisburg) - The Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) and The Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania (TLA) today announced findings in a new report: *A Rising Tide: The Current State of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. The report shows that, overall, Pennsylvanians enjoy increasing access to higher education. However, a marked gap between educational attainment in majority and minority populations remains, young adults in rural communities remain at significant disadvantage, and the state's shortage of technically proficient workers is likely a result of inadequate secondary education – particularly in the areas of science and mathematics.

The report, *A Rising Tide: The Current State of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, focused on four main questions: 1) Who is and is not being served by higher education in the Commonwealth? 2) Is a Pennsylvania college education still affordable? 3) Are institutions in Pennsylvania graduating enough scientists and engineers to fuel a growing Pennsylvania economy? and 4) Is the need to remediate large numbers of students driving up costs and, hence, prices?

"While much of what we found was expected, in two key areas we broke new ground; first by demonstrating that geography and school quality was more important than costs in determining who goes to college in Pennsylvania; and second by highlighting what happens when young adults do not have ready access to a community college – which is the case in more than half the counties in the Commonwealth. My bet is that what is true of Pennsylvania is true of the nation as a whole. The role of costs in limiting college enrollment has been greatly exaggerated," said Robert Zemsky, Professor and Chair of The Learning Alliance for Higher Education, University of Pennsylvania.

"The Report identifies important policy issues that state policymakers, community leaders and higher education leaders need to examine together, said Ron Cowell, President of The Education Policy and Leadership Center." He announced that EPLC will convene an all-day Invitational Higher Education Symposium on May 31 to further discuss key issues of higher

education access and affordability, the readiness of high school graduates for college studies, and the links between higher education programs and the state's workforce and economic development needs.

The report in part draws on data from a survey of 519 high school graduates, ages 18 to 34, conducted by Berwood Yost and G. Terry Madonna of the Floyd Institute's Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin and Marshall College. In addition, using data from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for 1994 and 2004, the National Center for Higher Education Management Tracking Systems (NCHEMS) and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the report authors tracked educational attainment rates in Pennsylvania from 1990 onwards.

A Rising Tide: The Current State of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides the following key findings:

- In general, Pennsylvanians enjoy increasing access to higher education. More start college, earn a baccalaureate degree, and continue their higher educations through graduate and professional study;
- Little progress has been made to close the persistent gap between majority and minority educational attainment, and also the gap between the higher education prospects of young people schooled in rural as opposed to urban and suburban communities;
- Young adults in rural communities remain at significant disadvantage, in part because they are more likely to attend a poorly performing school and college attendance is not as strong a tradition in the communities;
- Most young adults in Pennsylvania found their higher education options to be expensive, but affordable;
- The shortage of technically proficient workers in Pennsylvania probably has more to do with the quality of secondary education, particularly in science and mathematics, than it does with the absence of opportunities to pursue a baccalaureate degree in those subjects at a Pennsylvania college or university.

The full, 53-page report is available on the EPLC web site at <http://eplc.org>, and also on the TLA web site at <http://thelearningalliance.info>.

The Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) is an independent, non-partisan, not-for-profit organization based in Harrisburg, PA. The mission of EPLC is to encourage and support the use of more effective state-level education policies to improve student learning in grades P-12, increase the effective operation of schools, and enhance educational opportunities for citizens of all ages.

The Learning Alliance for Higher Education (TLA) is a non-profit learning laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania. Its mission is to provide expertise, research, and analysis on a just-in-time basis. In performing the task TLA draws on a network of nearly 100 national experts with broad experience in both public policy and institutional practice.