



**COLORADO**

**Colorado Commission on  
Higher Education**

Department of Higher Education

# Report on the Development of New Tuition Policies

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## Introduction

In Colorado and across the nation, the rising cost of college tuition is receiving considerable public attention. At the same time, the importance of having a postsecondary credential has never been more important. The postsecondary credential a student earns can provide substantial returns on investment in the form of higher income and greater employment opportunities. Equally important, Colorado's Master Plan calls for increasing the attainment of high quality postsecondary credentials to meet anticipated workforce demands by 2025. However, Colorado's decade-long shift from a funding model, largely supported by state appropriations, to one primarily dependent on tuition revenues has challenged institutions' ability to balance operational realities with the need to provide affordable access to higher education for Colorado families.

HB 14-1319 directed the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (the Commission, CCHE) to submit to the General Assembly by November 1, 2015, new tuition policies that ensure both accessible and affordable higher education for Colorado residents, while reflecting the level of state funding for institutions, and the need of each institution to enhance its financial position and sustainability. In addition, the Commission is statutorily required to provide a tuition policy recommendation with the annual budget request.

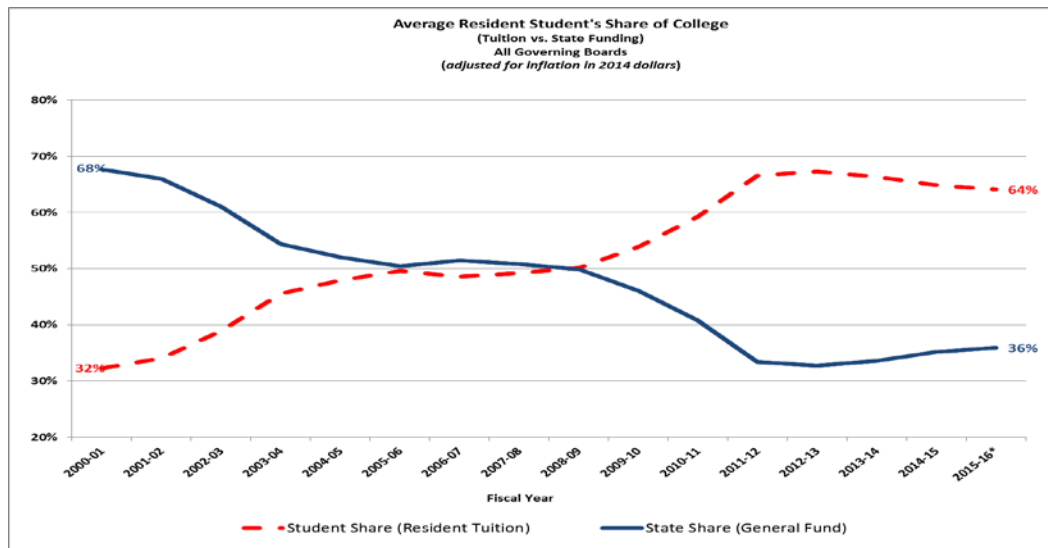
Last fall, the Department of Higher Education (the Department, DHE) conducted a statewide public education and outreach process to gather input about higher education, and one of the top priorities identified was affordability. Concurrently, as part of the implementation plan for HB 14-1319, the Department established a Cost Driver and Analysis Expert Team to provide the Commission with a thorough analysis of what is driving costs of higher education in Colorado. The results of this analysis found that Colorado's public institutions, of all types, have fewer resources with which to support basic operations than do similar institutions in nearly all other states.

### The Charge

Pursuant to HB 14-1319, by November 1, 2015, CCHE shall submit to the Legislature tuition policies that ensure both accessible and affordable higher education for residents.

- Tuition policies must also reflect:
  - Level of state funding needed for institutions
  - The need of each institution to enhance the quality of programs and offerings to strengthen their financial position
- Tuition policy recommendations must be developed in consultation with governing boards and interested parties using an inclusive and transparent process.

The last 15 years have witnessed a marked reversal in who bears the burden of higher education costs. As General Fund support is reduced, tuition increases make up the difference - resulting in higher costs for students and families. As illustrated below, in FY 2000-01, the state supplied 68 percent of the cost of college, while students and families paid 32 percent. By FY 2011-12, those numbers had reversed: students and families were covering two-thirds of the costs and the state was paying for a third.



In fiscal years 2014-15 and 2015-16, Colorado's public institutions witnessed their smallest year-over-year percent increase in tuition rates in more than a decade. This was largely the result of increases in General Fund support for higher education.

Finding the right balance between the seemingly opposing ideas of affordability for families and strengthening the financial position of institutions, is at the core of the Commission's tuition policy process and recommendation. Also of critical importance is the understanding that state appropriations are the fundamental incentive that will keep tuition low while also enhancing the quality of Colorado's public institutions of higher education.

This report brings forth recommendations that represent a comprehensive analysis of tuition policies, which can be used in Colorado to promote greater affordability, operational stability and funding flexibility at the state public postsecondary institutions. Most importantly, the Commission's new tuition policy signals a paradigm shift from the historic method of limiting tuition increases in footnote of the Long Bill, or through special legislation, to a cost-driven approach, which makes a persuasive case for additional state funding.

### Process for Developing New Tuition Policies

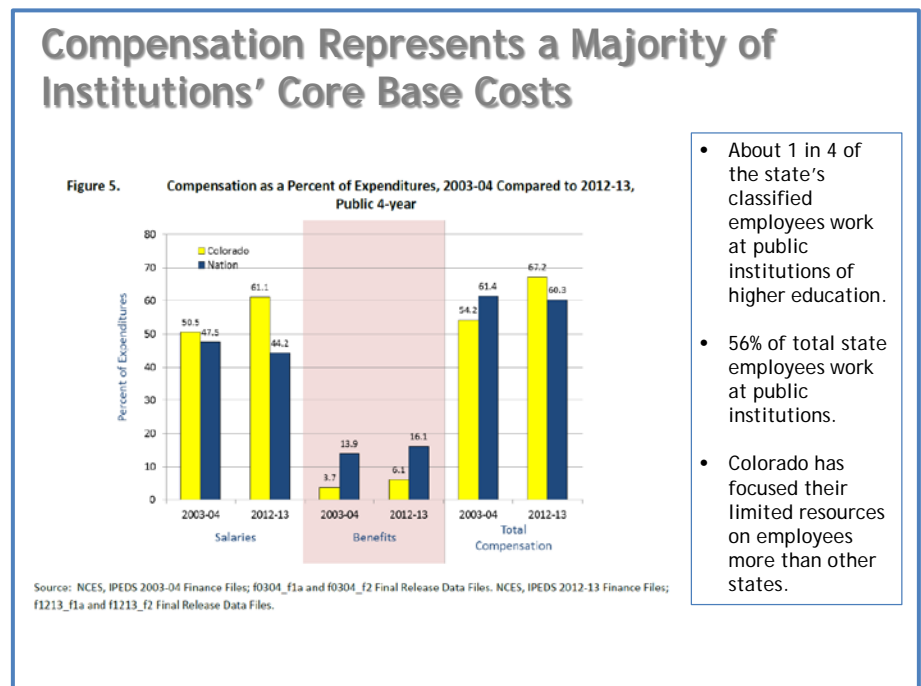
The charge to develop new tuition policies comes at a time when the rising cost of tuition is receiving considerable public attention nationwide; this holds true in Colorado, as well. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education and the Department of Higher Education, in

consultation with the governing boards and other interested parties, conducted a comprehensive analysis of higher education costs and tuition policies that could be used to promote greater affordability, operational stability and funding flexibility at the state public postsecondary education institutions.

The Department contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to analyze higher education costs in Colorado, and how these compared to national costs (*Why Higher Education Costs are What They Are and Tuition-Setting Practices in Colorado's Public Colleges and Universities*). In addition, the Department established a Cost Driver and Analysis Expert Team—comprised of individuals from Colorado's 10 governing boards, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and the Office of State Planning and Budgeting—to advise, provide feedback, review and work with NCHEMS throughout their analysis process. The hard work and insight provided by the Cost Driver team members was a valuable and essential component of the tuition policy process.

Higher education is fundamentally a personnel-heavy, knowledge-based business. According to the NCHEMS report, the majority of costs at Colorado public institutions of higher education are a direct result of faculty and staff compensation. Remaining costs include supplies, interest, depreciation and operating expenses (utilities, insurance, office and laboratory supplies, maintenance of plant etc.). The report also found that:

- Colorado institutions have fewer resources to expend on activities designed to fulfill their missions than do other similar institutions elsewhere in the country.
- Colorado institutions are spending an increasing share of their resources on faculty and staff.
- Colorado institutions are more reliant on part-time faculty as a cost cutting measure than their national counterparts.

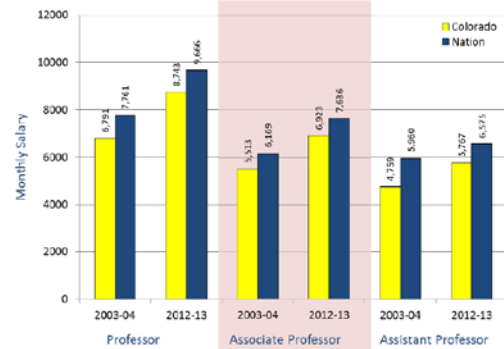


- Since such a large portion of institutional revenue comes from tuition, setting tuition rates is a high stakes endeavor, which is strongly impacted by changes in state funding. Despite all of this, Colorado is doing a better job, as compared to other states, of providing opportunities to the lowest income students and families.

## Colorado Institutions' Compensation is Lower than National Average

- Individual employee's compensation at Colorado's public institutions is lower than the national average for all public institutions.

Figure 15. Monthly Salary Comparisons, 2003-04 Compared to 2012-13, Public 4-Year



Source: NCEES, IPEDS 2003-04 Faculty Salary File; sal2003\_a Final Release Data File. NCEES, IPEDS 2012-13 Faculty Salary File; sal2012\_13 Provisional Release Data File.

Department staff, NCHEMS representatives and the Cost Driver Analysis Team collected, analyzed, and synthesized vast quantities of data over the course of fall 2014 through spring 2015. This significant undertaking culminated in the summer of 2015, bringing together commissioners, subject matter experts and other stakeholders at the CCHE retreat to establish new tuition policies.

### Developing a Framework

As the Commission, the governing boards, and other interested parties worked cooperatively to structure an ongoing tuition policy for the state, it was determined that articulating a set of values would be helpful in finding the right balance between affordability for students and sustainability of the institutions, especially in light of the current, somewhat challenging, state budget environment.

#### Value 1: State Investment in Higher Education

All of Colorado's public institutions of higher education have fewer resources to support basic operations than do similar institutions in other states. This low level of funding means that Colorado institutions are less able to absorb revenue shortfalls through productivity enhancements. State appropriations are the key incentive to keeping tuition low and play the biggest role in determining the actual tuition

*At public institutions, successful tuition policy will likely be linked to state appropriations. Because so many institutions rely on appropriations and tuition as primary sources of revenue, a decline in one revenue source means the other one must increase or costs must decrease.*

-National Conference of State Legislatures, September 2015

rate charged to students. The extent to which state funding increases or decreases is directly linked to the extent tuition increases can be limited.

### *Value 2: Tuition Impact on Students and Families*

Incorporating student and family-focused measures of affordability is an important and evolving value. This is especially relevant as students and families bear more and more of the support cost for public postsecondary education in Colorado. Substantial reductions in state support have shifted the majority funding burden of higher education to students and families. As illustrated above by, in fiscal year 2001, the state covered 68 percent of the cost of postsecondary education, while students and families paid the remaining 32 percent. Despite increases in state investment in the last two years, the state's share is only 36 percent, while students and families are paying 64 percent.

Throughout the tuition policy development process, there was great deal of discussion surrounding the concept of affordability and the difficulty in defining affordability. Many believed it would be useful to have an acceptable Colorado-specific measure of affordability. Department staff explored whether there was a readily available measure that might be easily incorporated into the tuition recommendation for fiscal year (FY) 2016-2017, but did not find an acceptable approach. As part of the proposed ongoing process, a significant undertaking of the Commission will be to pursue, along with the governing boards and interested parties, development of some Colorado-specific measure(s) of affordability (e.g. change in median family income).

### *Value 3: Flexibility for Institutions*

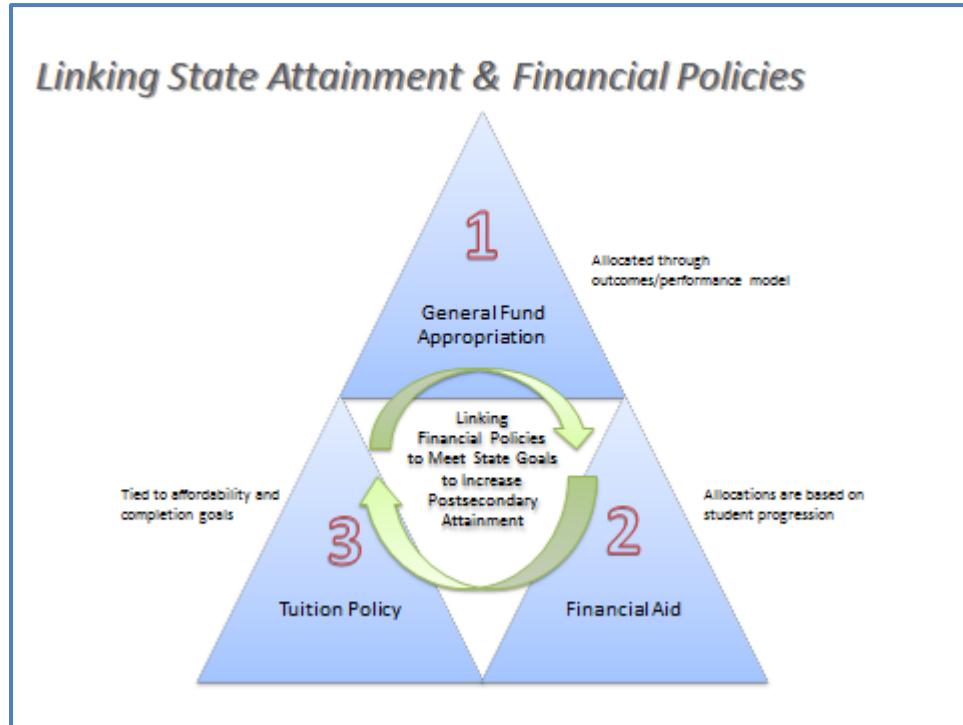
In Colorado, governing boards have constitutionally granted responsibility and authority over the financial management of their institutions; a major component of sound financial management is the setting of tuition. Members of governing boards are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate (except for the Regents of the University of Colorado, who are elected). This value affirms that governing boards are best equipped to set tuition and hold fiduciary duty to their respective institutions. Value 3 reinforces the role of the governing boards in setting tuition within their fiduciary duty to institutions, while simultaneously recognizing the need for a mechanism whereby a governing board could request an exception/waiver from a tuition increase limit.

### *Value 4: Accountability and Meeting Completion Goals*

The Commission, among other duties, is charged with preparing a statewide master plan pursuant to the requirements set forth by the Legislature, in addition to coordinating with governing boards to implement statewide policies. Value 4 acknowledges the Commission's commitment to Colorado's Master Plan goals while also recognizing the importance of accountability when a governing board has requested to exceed the tuition increase limit through a Tuition Accountability Plan.

This value-based framework adopted by the Commission links statewide attainment goals and ensures that the major elements of higher education financing policy - appropriations, tuition, and financial aid - are aligned in order to address college affordability and student access and success.





### New Tuition Policy Process

Pursuant to C.R.S §23-5-129 (6)(c) and C.R.S §23-1-108 (12)(b), beginning in FY 2016-17 and each year thereafter, the Commission shall be required to include in the annual budget request tuition recommendations for resident undergraduate students for each state institution of higher education. The Commission and the Department recommend keeping this portion of statute. As part of this request, it is critical that tuition revenues are not appropriated and remain an informational item in the Long Bill.

#### *Roles & Responsibilities*

Governing boards have the responsibility and authority for the financial management of their institutions. A major component of sound financial management is the setting of tuition. Since institutions have unique roles and missions and differing student needs, governing boards are best equipped to set tuition and hold a fiduciary duty to their respective institutions. The Commission has a responsibility to exercise oversight and to ensure that educational quality and student access are maintained.

#### *Business Cycle Approach to Determine the Tuition Policy Recommendation*

The Commission, in consultation with the governing boards and other interested parties, has developed an annual process and methodology for setting tuition increase limits. Such a process takes into consideration the following:

- The condition of the state general fund and state investment levels in higher education;
- The impact of tuition increases on students and families;

- The financial health of institutions and their ability to enhance overall quality; and
- Accountability and progress towards completion goals

*Flexibility for Institutions*

Governing boards will have the ability to request flexibility from the Commission’s tuition increase limits through a Tuition Accountability Plan. The content of Tuition Accountability Plans will include:

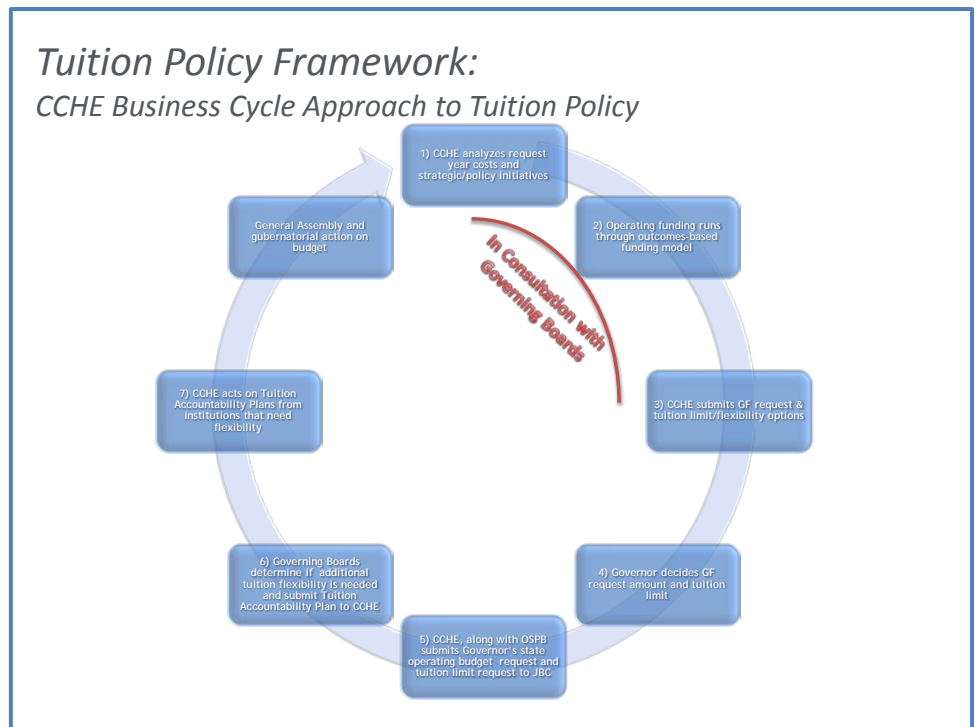
- Price and tuition strategies including substantiated business case for the increase;
- A demonstration of how the governing board will work to protect resident low and middle income students;
- How tuition increases will help the institution meet the Commission’s Master Plan Goals; and
- Evidence that completion goals are being met.

The Commission will review each request for tuition flexibility and either approve or deny the request for tuition increases above the recommended tuition increase limit. If the Commission denies the request, the governing board shall not exceed the undergraduate resident tuition increase limit, if applicable.

*Business Cycle Calendar*

The following steps mirror the state’s budget cycle and integrate the tuition recommendation process with the General Fund appropriation process, while also including a mechanism for the Governing Boards to request additional flexibility above the tuition increase limit through a Tuition Accountability Plan (with the Commission’s approval).

1. CCHE works with governing boards to analyze budget request year base costs and the costs of possible strategic improvements (June, July).
2. Operating funding runs through the funding allocation model to determine allocations for the budget year (July, August).
3. CCHE submits to



the Governor: the General Fund operating request and tuition limit/flexibility options (Aug, September).

4. Governor determines General Fund operating request and tuition limit/flexibility request (October).
5. CCHE, along with the Office of State Planning and Budgeting, submits Governor’s General Fund operating request and tuition limit/flexibility request to Joint Budget Committee (November 1).
6. Governing Boards, based on the Governor’s request, determine if additional flexibility is needed and if so, submit Tuition Accountability Plans to CCHE (December, January)
7. Step 7: CCHE acts on Tuition Accountability Plans from governing boards that request additional flexibility (spring)
8. Step 8: General Assembly and Governor’s action on the budget (spring)

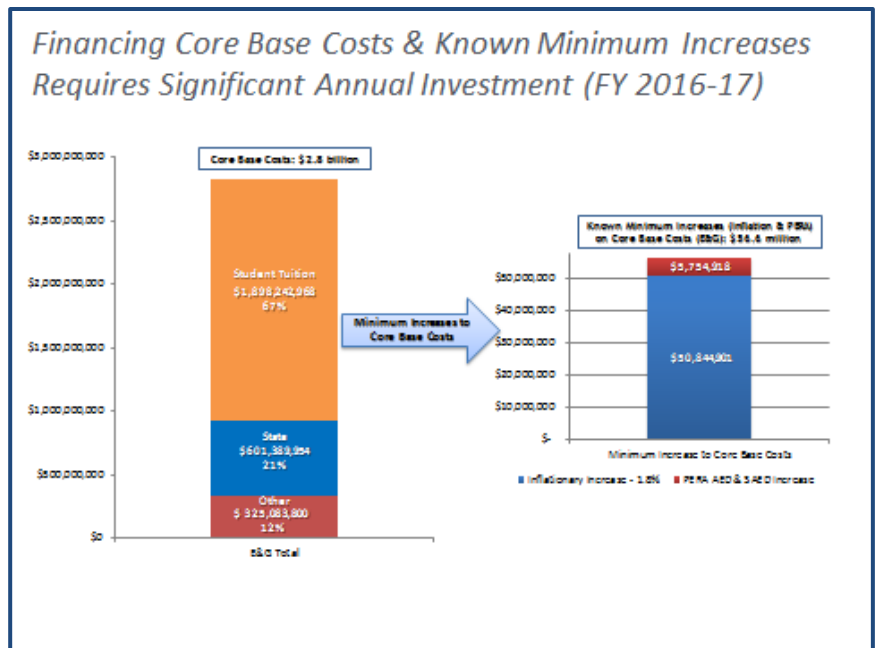
### Tuition Policy Recommendation for FY 2016-17

For FY 2016-17, governing boards shall have the authority to raise tuition rates for resident undergraduate students within specified tuition increase limits. The tuition increase limits will be directly linked to the level of General Fund support. In other words, an increase in General Fund investment results in lower tuition increase limits, while a decrease in General Fund investment results in higher tuition increases, and a Commission recommendation of flexibility for governing boards to set tuition.

#### Analysis

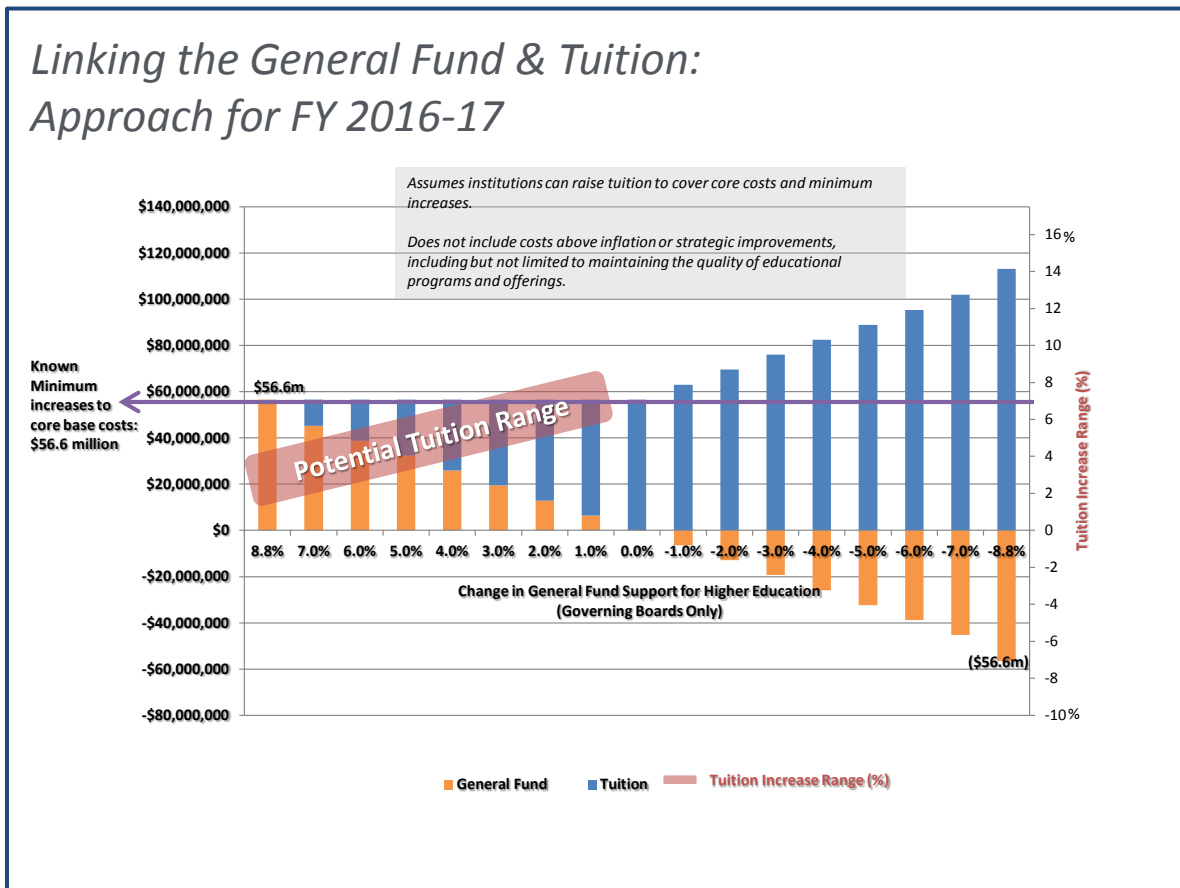
Public institutions of higher education have fixed costs they must meet in order to maintain their institutions. In 2015, the Department of Higher Education performed an evaluation of higher education costs and on the relationship of those costs to tuition. Based on this analysis, the Department conservatively estimates that the base cost increases that institutions must bear is \$56.6 million.

It is important to note that this estimate does not include costs above inflation, additional salary increases, or strategic improvements, including but not limited to maintaining the current quality of educational programs and offerings. The analysis conducted by the Department incorporates these factors not captured in the cost estimate by applying a *Cost plus Policy* basis for analyzing and determining the tuition recommendation. This allows for the



recommended tuition limit, if applicable, to capture each institution’s own unique niche - reflecting competitive environments, level of state support, and other distinct characteristics.

Utilizing this *Cost plus Policy* approach, if the state meets the entire minimum cost estimate, institutions would require lower tuition rate increases, in order to pay for mandatory cost increases and strategic improvements. As illustrated below, if the state is unable to cover these minimum costs, tuition rate increases are likely to continue rising.



### Recommendation

For FY 2016-17, the tuition policy recommendation is as follows:

- If the state General Fund appropriation is flat or falls below the level appropriated in FY 2015-16 (\$672 million), there will be no restrictions on tuition levels set by governing boards.
- If the state General Fund appropriation increases above the level appropriated for FY 2015-16, the tuition increase limit on resident undergraduate tuition is dependent upon the level of state investment. For example, a state General Fund increase of 5 percent will result in a CCHÉ requested tuition increase limit of 6 percent.

- Because all state general funds are allocated through the higher education allocation funding formula, some governing boards may receive an allocation that is less than the overall percentage growth for higher education. Those governing boards receiving less than the overall percentage growth may increase tuition by one percentage point higher than the tuition recommendation limit (e.g., if the overall increase is 5 percent with a tuition increase limit of 6 percent; a governing board receiving a general fund increase of less than 5 percent would be able to increase tuition up to 7 percent).
- Governing boards will have the ability to request flexibility above CCHE tuition increase limit through a Tuition Accountability Plan.

### Next Steps

- Amend Commission policies to clearly outline the new processes and the Commission's role therein. Official Commission policies will also include the development of Tuition Accountability Plan forms, processes and procedures.
- Request technical and clean-up changes to applicable statutes.

