

State funding for higher education in US slashed by 20 percent since 2008

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State spending on higher education across the United States has fallen precipitously in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse, according to a study published Wednesday by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP).

On average, states are spending \$1,805, or 20 percent, less per student than before the recession. Five states—Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina—slashed their higher education funding by more than 35 percent since 2008, with Arizona cutting its spending by an astronomical 47 percent.

Decades-long cutbacks in state and federal funding for higher education have been used to justify massive increases in tuition, combined with budget cuts to educational and other services at public colleges and universities.

The CBPP report highlights the cumulative impact of this process, noting, “In 1988, public colleges and universities received 3.2 times as much in revenue from state and local governments as they did from students. They now receive about 1.1 times as much from states and localities as from students.”

Simultaneously, wages have stagnated or declined for the vast majority of workers, so that, “Since 1973, average inflation-adjusted public college tuition has more than tripled—increasing by nearly 270 percent—but median household income has barely changed, up merely 5 percent.”

The report added, “Tuition jumped nearly 28 percent between the 2007-08 and 2013-14 school years, while real median income fell roughly 8 percent over the same time period.”

As a result of budget cuts, tuition at universities in Arizona has skyrocketed by an average of 83.6 percent since 2008. In five other states—California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, and Louisiana—the cost of tuition has

increased by more than 60 percent, while every state has seen a marked increase in average tuition since 2008.

The CBPP report notes, “Annual published tuition at four-year public colleges has risen by \$2,068, or 29 percent, since the 2007-08 school year,” while at the same time colleges have “cut faculty positions, eliminated course offerings, closed campuses, shut computer labs, and reduced library services, among other cuts.”

The CBPP report corresponds with the findings of another recent study on higher education by Mark Kantrowitz, a writer for the college advice website Edvisors. Kantrowitz found that the average college graduate in 2015 has accumulated over \$35,000 of student-loan debt, almost three times the amount of debt for a college graduate in 1995.

As states and the federal government have demanded ever-deepening austerity, college students are forced to rely on student loans. Roughly 71 percent of all 2015 graduates will have to repay some type of student loan, compared to 64 percent 10 years ago and less than 50 percent in the mid-1990s.

Parents of college students are often forced to take out additional loans, with roughly 17 percent of 2015 graduates’ parents also saddled by their children’s student loan debt. The average parent who takes out a student loan for a 2015 graduate has incurred \$30,867 of debt, up 4 percent from \$29,684 in 2014.

Newly-issued student loan debt is expected to reach a record \$68 billion this year for undergraduates and their parents, more than 10 times the total in 1994 and an enormous addition to the ballooning \$1.2 trillion total student loan debt in the U.S.

The only states that have increased funding for higher education since 2008 are Alaska, Wyoming and North

Dakota, which respectively rank 50th, 49th and 45th in total college enrollment. With a combined enrollment of roughly 118,000 students, these states account for a mere 0.6 percent of the total college student population in the U.S.

The defunding of higher education is a component part of the broader drive to dismantle public education in the U.S., as the American ruling class moves to claw back the gains won by previous generations of workers.

The Obama administration has played a central role in this assault, enforcing a 12 percent cut to Title 1 funding geared toward low-income schools, while providing \$248 million in charter school funding and \$378 million for standardized testing to further justify the firing of teachers and closure of public schools. A 2014 CBPP report found that 54 percent of K-12 public schools in the U.S. saw rising class sizes for the 2011-12 school year.



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