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NEW WEBSITE HELPS STUDENTS ACCESS INCREASED FINANCIAL AID FOR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

McGuinty Government Improving Access To Higher Education

TORONTO – A new website that helps college and university students access increased financial aid and scholarships was unveiled today by Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

“Our easy-to-use Access Window website will help students estimate how much of our increased financial aid they can qualify for when making decisions about college or university,” said Bentley while presenting the site to high school students at Bloor Collegiate Institute in Toronto. “We guarantee that students can afford tuition, fees and books – thanks to our new Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) grants and the scholarships and bursaries available at our colleges and universities.”

Under the McGuinty government’s Reaching Higher plan, which doubles Ontario’s investment in student aid, more students qualify for OSAP, assistance maximums have increased, more students are receiving grants, all while limiting student debt. In 2006-07, 120,000 students will receive grants – benefiting 72,000 more students than in 2004-05. In addition, the number of Ontario college and university students qualifying for OSAP has increased by 25 per cent. Almost 200,000 students from lower- and middle-income families will receive financial aid through OSAP this year.

The new OSAP Access Window website – available at ontario.ca/osap – provides students with the following information:

- The approximate cost of their college or university program, including the cost of tuition, books, other mandatory fees and living expenses for one year
- The amount of loans and grants that are available to help pay for their studies through OSAP
- The approximate amount they and their family may be expected to contribute
- A repayment calculator for estimating monthly OSAP loan repayments after graduation
- Information and tips on how to apply for OSAP.

“Our government believes in a progressive system of student assistance: the most aid goes to those students who need it most,” said Tony Ruprecht, MPP for Davenport. “Our goal is to ensure Ontario students have access to postsecondary education based on their ability to learn and not their ability to pay.”

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Since Ontario colleges and universities also provide \$496 million to students through bursaries and scholarships every year, the new Access Window website also provides links to the financial aid sections of college and university websites.

In partnership with Ontario's colleges and universities, the government has implemented its new Student Access Guarantee. Under the guarantee, no qualified Ontario student is prevented from attending the province's public colleges and universities due to a lack of financial support programs and students in need have access to the resources they need for their tuition, books and mandatory fees.

"Bursaries and other forms of financial assistance won't help students if they don't know they're available," said Paris Meilleur, President of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. "This tool will assist students to access the funds they need to afford the costs of pursuing postsecondary education."

"This new web portal/window will provide students and their parents with valuable information in turn making our postsecondary institutions more accessible and affordable," said Tyler Charlebois, Director of Advocacy for the College Student Alliance."

The new website is just one way the McGuinty government is working to improve access to the province's postsecondary education system. Other initiatives include:

- 86,000 more undergraduate students since 2002-03, a 22 per cent increase.
- Providing 60,000 students who come from families with incomes up to \$75,000 with upfront tuition grants this year covering between a quarter and all of the cost of their tuition, as compared to two years ago when no student received upfront tuition grants.
- Limiting student debt through the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant for about 80,000 students – who are eligible for loans of more than \$7,000 a year and complete their academic year – by forgiving the excess amount.
- Improving OSAP so that 145,000 students will qualify for more student aid this year.
- Updating allowances for book and supply costs to better reflect real costs and introducing an annual allowance for computer and computer-related costs up to \$500.

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Contacts:

Sheamus Murphy
Minister's Office
416-325-7215

Tanya Blazina
Communications Branch
416-325-2746
Public Inquiries: 416-325-2929
or 1-800-387-5514
TTY: 1-800-263-2892

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