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Lt. Governor urging smoother high school-college transition

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CHAMPAIGN — Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon says there are inherent conflicts between splitting education governance in Illinois between two camps.

There are widely different policies for one, kindergarten through 12th grade, and, the other, higher education, that make the transitions from high school to community colleges, and from there to four-year colleges, "not quite seamless."

Communication needs to be improved on both sides of the split, says Simon, who will appear at Parkland College today.

Simon will be at a round-table discussion and tour at 9:30 a.m. at the Center for Academic Success, D-Wing, Parkland College, 2400 W. Bradley Ave., C. She will also be available at 11 a.m. Thursday for a press conference. Later in the day, she'll be at Lake Land College in Mattoon.

A former Southern Illinois University law professor who is married to an instructor at John A. Logan College near Carbondale, Simon said education is one of her top priorities, also mentioning rural health and government ethics.

Parkland is the 25th community college on her visit list; she expects to have been to all 48 by the end of October.

She said she has learned from listening to the people who come to her round-table discussions.

Simon said there needs to be better communication between high schools and colleges about transferring classes and moving on to new campuses.

There are also inconsistencies, in which some colleges grant credit for similar work done and others don't.

"Say there's a course that has always transferred before. You have a change in department head at a four-year school, and it no longer transfers," she said. "And there needs to be work by high school counselors to keep up with what colleges are doing."

"We have some room to improve the transition from high school to community college to four-year school."

There are differences statewide, she said, in part because "most community colleges will have a relationship with a nearby four-year school."

Her goal is to have the percentage of working-age adults with college degrees or certificates rise to 60 percent from 41 percent by 2025.

Community colleges are key to that greater accessibility, the lieutenant governor said.

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"In the big picture, among the positive things going on are the ways that community college can respond to local needs and make education more accessible, whether in terms of time or finances," she said.

The schools are local and able to move quickly.

"Community colleges are in a particularly good place to meet the needs of local business; they're great at making those matches," she said.

Simon said she has been hearing a lot about affordability as the economy continues to sputter. She said a frequent subject for students who speak to her is maintaining Monetary Award Program grants to allow them to stay in school.