

Illinois Community College Faculty Association

Friday, October 10, 2008

Keynote Address

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**Intro**

- Thank you for this opportunity to bring to your attention an important endeavor for higher education in Illinois, and an even more important endeavor for the future of Illinois: The Public Agenda for College and Career Success.
- Thanks also to Geoff Obrzut and Elaine Johnson of the Illinois Community College Board for their support and help in the Public Agenda initiative. They have been invaluable partners in this endeavor.
- At IBHE we are living and breathing the Public Agenda planning process, and are only too happy to share our experience with others.
- Today, I am especially happy to be sharing it with those of you actively engaged in teaching and supporting the learning of thousands of Illinoisans who want additional education, and are seeking it in your classrooms throughout our wonderful community college system.
- The timing also could not be better: we are ready to embark on the public comment period for the preliminary report, and we need your input.

**Background**

- The planning process got underway early this year under the mandate of the General Assembly. HJR 69 called on IBHE to establish a task force, appointed by the Governor, to develop a master plan and Public Agenda that will link higher education to the state's effort to build and sustain a strong economy. The Task Force has a broad-based membership that includes legislators, representatives of business and labor, P-12 educators and advocates, university and community college faculty and administrators, among others.
- The purpose of the planning effort is to develop an action agenda, based on quantifiable evidence, for the state and its higher education system to address the education, workforce, social and economic needs of Illinois by setting priorities, developing policies, and allocating resources.
- The Task Force has been meeting since March, and has been assisted by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, fondly known as NCHEMS, which is the premier nonprofit public policy consultants in the nation in assisting states with planning endeavors such as ours. NCHEMS analyzed population and demographic trends, economic and workforce conditions, and the education pipeline, postsecondary access and completion, student learning and education finance – all of which led to a catalog of public needs that has driven the Public Agenda process.
- The Task Force established four goals that emerged from the research conducted by NCHEMS, and that have been informed by a series of regional hearings held in June and hosted graciously by community colleges in every region of Illinois. These forums have been a valuable sounding board for us to hear from local civic, business,

labor and education leaders, and elected officials. In addition, we have met with a broad group of stakeholders to get information and feedback, including community college trustees, presidents, faculty and staff.

- The four goals which form the basis of the Public Agenda are:
  - 1) Increase education attainment to match best-performing U.S. States and world countries.
  - 2) Ensure college affordability for students, families, and taxpayers.
  - 3) Increase number of quality postsecondary credentials to meet the demands of the economy.
  - 4) Better integrate Illinois' educational, research, and innovation assets to meet economic needs of the state and its regions.
- Next week we will release the Preliminary Public Agenda which includes recommendations, strategies, performance measures, and benchmarks to address these four goals. After the public comment period ends in November, the Task Force will refer a final Public Agenda to the Illinois Board of Higher Education at its December meeting. At that time the IBHE will consider the report, and commend it to the Governor and General Assembly for their consideration—and action.

### **The Public Agenda, So Far**

Today I want to speak primarily about Goal 1 of the Public Agenda and briefly address three of the specific recommendations which rely in large measure on the expertise, experience, and, frankly, the buy-in of you and your colleagues in community college classrooms.

**First: we must increase success of our students at each stage of the P-20 education pipeline to eliminate achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability.**

- Let me share just a few disturbing statistics:
  - Only 7 states have a greater disparity in educational attainment than Illinois.
  - A child in the lowest quintile of family income has just a 1 in 10 chance of getting a college credential; those in the second quintile, a 1 in 4 chance.
  - Whites are 28% more likely to have a college degree than minorities.
  - Just six in 10 Hispanics, barely half of African Americans and fewer than 4 in 10 African American males leave high school with a diploma.
  - The fastest growing segment of the population, young people of color, are the least educated.
- I don't need to tell you that, of those who do graduate high school, many are not ready for career or college. Guy Alongi told the Board of Higher Education earlier this week that community colleges spent \$27 million on remedial coursework last year, just getting students ready for college credit courses.
  - You also know that some of that remedial work goes to assist the many adult learners entering college or returning after years in the workforce – they simply need to brush up on math or English skills that may have grown rusty. That is a legitimate use of developmental education.

- But too much remediation is devoted to first-time freshmen entering college from high school, and that is a double expense to the education system that it simply cannot afford . . . not to mention the cost to the student, who in many cases is burning up student financial aid for courses that don't count toward a degree.
- As educators at the community college level, you have a pivotal role in engaging in deliberate collaboration with the high school faculties in your community to plug the holes in the leaking pipeline between high school and postsecondary education. I implore you to review the strategies we lay out in the Public Agenda...and add your 2 cents or 2 dollars worth.

**Second, we need to increase the number of adults reentering education and completing a postsecondary credential.**

- Obviously, we must rely on the community college system to make this recommendation a reality. The future economic demands for Illinois cannot rely on traditional age college students. We need to reach out to adults from those needing basic education, to those needing a specialized certificate, to those needing a college degree both to meet the state's workforce needs and to help its citizens.
- And Illinois ranks only 27<sup>th</sup> among states in the percentage of its population with an associate degree.
- We need your partnership in providing the resources to help adult learners complete a postsecondary credential. This includes adequate adult education programs, appropriate academic and support services,

and increased financial aid opportunities. We also must establish partnerships with employers aimed at adult learners.

**A third recommendation that depends heavily on community college involvement is to increase education attainment through improved transitions between associate and baccalaureate degree levels.**

- Transfer rates between community colleges and four-year institutions vary widely across the state. Supporting baccalaureate completion opportunities requires a seamless transition between the 2 year and 4 year institutions.
- The Public Agenda offers several strategies for strengthening articulation and expanding baccalaureate completion programs on community college campuses through partnerships with four-year institutions, and increasing opportunities for two plus two plus two programs linking high schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate institutions.
- We look forward to your feedback and suggestions to make these opportunities a reality.

### **The Other Goals**

I don't want to give short shrift to the other goals of the Public Agenda because each is critical in meeting the economic and social needs of the state – increased affordability, improved creation and completion of degrees and credentials, and a stronger connection between the innovation assets of higher education and the economic vitality of the state.

But to a large degree, success in meeting those goals depends on how well we succeed in meeting the challenges of Goal 1: bringing all Illinoisans, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or disability into the educational mainstream – and therefore into the economic mainstream – of the state.

### **A Call to Action**

Why does this matter?

First, it's the right thing to do.

- When only 1 in 10 young people from the lowest income families makes it to college . . .
- When just 4 out of 10 black males even make it out of high school . . .
- When zip code or race or ethnicity or disability is the prime predictor of college or career success . . .
- Then that is just plain wrong.

We are denying tens of thousands of our fellow Illinoisans the most fundamental right and basic opportunity to participate in society and to reach their potential as full and productive citizens.

We need to be better than that, and do better than that because it's the right thing to do.

Second, it's the smart thing to do.

Every demographic, educational, social, and economic trends points in the same direction:

- Continuing our present course takes us down a path of peril: our workforce will not meet the needs of employers, our education system will stagnate, and our economy will continue to decline.
- OR: we can accept the challenge of raising education attainment for minority students, low-income students, disabled students so we prepare all students for the demands and opportunities of the college classroom and the modern economy.
- To do otherwise is just plain dumb.

And we need your help.

First, let us know what you think about the Public Agenda.

- Visit our website at [www.ibhe.org](http://www.ibhe.org) and review the Preliminary Public Agenda.
- Use our web-based comment process to let us know what you think.
- Attend one of the Public Hearings scheduled, starting next Friday at SIU-Carbondale, and continuing through October (the full schedule also is posted on the website) to give us your insights, ideas, and perspective.
- Please join us in this discussion of the future of Illinois. Your voice as community college faculty needs to be heard. And, I promise, it will be listened to and heeded.

Second, join us in the implementation of the Public Agenda, as we move into a new year and a new legislative session (and new Legislature). The



recommendations, implementation strategies, and action steps – our Public Agenda To-Do List – will require that all of us in higher education take hold of an oar and pull in the same direction.

Finally, please invite me to return next year to discuss with you where we're at, where we're going, and how you can help get us there through the Public Agenda for College and Career Success.

Thanks for your attention. I hope your academic year ahead results in the successful achievements by most if not all of your students.