

Keynote Address
PrepMe – College Readiness Summer Institute
Loyola University
August 5, 2010

Thank you for your invitation.

I visited the PrepMe website to learn a little more about the organization and what you do, and discovered a handy calculator to put a value on my personal higher education experience. I was pretty impressed to find that my degrees are worth \$3,483,457. And I'm here to collect.

I'm really here to do three things:

- First, I want to tell you about some of the issues that we are struggling with at the state levels. These are issues, to a greater or lesser extent, that states throughout the Midwest and, indeed, the nation also are grappling with.
- Second, I want to explore with you what's on the state's public agenda, which has a name: the Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success.
- Third, I'd like to connect 1 and 2 to your lives in schools.

Budget and Education Finance

The state budget is not a pretty sight, not for Illinois or for many other states around this nation. While human services have taken a huge hit, education—from preschool to graduate school—have not been protected either. I don't need to tell you as school administrators how tight school budgets are for this upcoming school year. Not only are state levels for

education being cut (for public universities in Illinois they are taking an \$87 million hit), but also school districts and public universities are still waiting for appropriations owed them from the last budget fiscal year. At the postsecondary level, these budget shortfalls necessarily translate into increased tuition and fee rates. Unfortunately, Illinois' flagship need-based student aid program called MAP (the Monetary Award Program) is not keeping up with the costs of college nor the increasing numbers of low-income Illinoisans applying for assistance. As of July, there is a waiting list of over 60,000 eligible citizens who will NOT receive a MAP grant for the fall semester because the state allocation was already committed by April of this year for the upcoming school year. Suffice it to say, financially for many low and middle income students, going to college is becoming less and less an opportunity they can afford.

Out of this crisis, state legislators, state policy makers, and higher education officials have joined together to study how to pay for higher education in Illinois. Created through a House and Senate Joint Resolution and convened by the Board of Higher Education and, the Higher Education Finance Study Commission held its first meeting on July 27 and plans to meet throughout the fall to discuss a funding strategy that connects state appropriations, tuition policies and need-based student aid. This discussion is long overdue and is an important step in developing funding mechanisms that reflect the realities of balancing scarce public funds with expanding expectations that more Illinoisans need more postsecondary education in order to be well

trained for today's job market and better prepared for meeting the needs of future workforce demands.

Student Success

Of course, as educators you know that increasing enrollments is not the endgame. In order to bridge the achievement gaps, we must keep our eye on the prize: improved student success and completion. And these goals require the attention of the full length of the so-called P-20 educational pipeline from pre-school to graduate school. The Illinois Board of Higher Education works closely with our sister state agencies, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, to improve college and career readiness for Illinois' students. As high school level educators, you are the keystone of many, if not all, of the reform initiatives. Please allow me to simply tick off a few. I will be happy to take questions, and perhaps at that time I can fill in some of the details for some of these:

- Illinois has joined with 22 other states to form an Alliance of **Complete College America** for the purpose of increasing the number of college degrees and credentials of value so that by 2025 at least 60% of all Americans have completed postsecondary education. Currently, 41% of Illinoisans have degrees.
- Illinois is an **American Diploma Project** state actively engaged in aligning high school standards with postsecondary and workplace requirements. As a complement to this effort, Illinois has joined the national **Common Core State Standards initiative**.

- The Illinois Community College Board is working with high schools and community colleges to develop developmental interventions in the junior and senior years of high school to reduce remediation needs at the college level. **The College and Career Readiness Pilot Project**, has strong support from the General Assembly, with hopes that it will be scaled up as a statewide endeavor.
- In June, historic legislation was passed and became law to put into motion the reform of the **certification process for Illinois' school leaders**. ISBE, working closely with IBHE and leaders of schools of education throughout the state, is poised to issue new rules late this summer for the requirements for principal training along with standards for school leader endorsements.
- Last year the General Assembly enacted two key proposals to strengthen the P-20 coordination; first, a **P-20 Council** has been created and has been meeting, chaired by former state senator and education advocate, Miguel del Valle. And the **P-20 Longitudinal Data System for Illinois** is being developed, serving as a strong component for providing data for agencies and researchers on students from pre-school through graduate school, and into the workforce.
- All of these efforts have resulted in a team of Illinois educators returning to Washington, DC next week, a finalist in the federal **Race to the Top grant competition** to reform standards, assessments, curriculum, and school leadership. We all have our fingers crossed that Illinois will be successful this round.

The Illinois educational scene is not sitting on its hands. And, these efforts are not just happening in a willy-nilly fashion. There is a blueprint for education policy that exists and it is called:

The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success

[I have provided copies of the Executive Summary for you to take away with you.]

In simple terms, it is a roadmap to the future. It guides our education system, the legislature and Governor. At the Board of Higher Education – and to a large degree at our sister education agencies, the Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission – the Public Agenda directs our priorities and actions, our budgets and policies, and our relationships with institutions, including faculty and staff, the business and labor communities, and elected officials. There are several areas, especially related to increasing educational attainment, which also allow us, if not require us, to collaborate with the Illinois State Board of Education. Many I discussed earlier. Students and their families as well as all Illinoisans will be the beneficiaries of our concerted actions.

This won't happen overnight – the Public Agenda is a 10-year plan that will require some fine-tuning as we move forward, as conditions change, as new challenges arise. But the four bedrock goals that form the superstructure of the Public Agenda must be met. We must:

1. Increase educational attainment,
2. Make Illinois 1 of the top 5 states in affordability,

3. Increase production of degrees in high-demand workforce areas, and
4. Integrate the state's superb research into its economic development strategies.

The Illinois Public Agenda study revealed that there are *two* states of Illinois

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one is well off, one is struggling;
one is highly educated, one is educationally underserved;
one is economically vibrant, one is economically stagnant.

These two states of Illinois are separated by a vast and widening **prosperity gap**, which is the direct result of differences in educational attainment.

The State of Illinois simply cannot compete – perhaps not even survive – in the global economy unless we close this gap in educational attainment. Simply put, Illinois needs more people with more education. This responsibility is not only necessary, it's urgent. We need action and we need action now.

The Illinois Public Agenda documents clearly that the future of Illinois depends upon more affordable access to higher education for more Illinoisans. In fact, when compared to other states, Illinois is below the national average for college graduates per 100 high school graduates. The

Public Agenda issues the challenge and details the steps we must take to close the attainment gap in our state.

I'll end by issuing a challenge to you, as colleagues. As educators you DO get it.

Please consider utilizing the Illinois Public Agenda for identifying those statewide priorities where the broad education community can provide leadership, expertise and resources to move to that unified, prosperous One Illinois.

Keep on doing what you do best, and is exemplified by your being here today. Prepare high school students for continuing their education. Not only by achieving good college entrance exam scores, but by challenging them to take a rigorous high school curriculum. And, directing them to the supports they and their parents need—particularly if they are going to be the first generation heading off to postsecondary training—to pay for college and succeed by completing.

As partners for the cause of higher education, please help us with sharing the Illinois Public Agenda with other state leaders in industry, state and local governments, and the General Assembly with who you are in close contact.

Finally, each one of us personally needs to get on the bandwagon of encouraging others, young people, people between jobs or mid-career, and even the ever increasing group of “retiring” baby boomers to rise to President Obama’s challenge to the nation that applies very directly to us here in Illinois: To be first again in the number of people receiving (and successfully completing) postsecondary education.