

# THE ILLINOIS COMMITMENT

## A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ILLINOIS HIGHER EDUCATION

*The Illinois Commitment* was initially adopted by the Illinois Board of Higher Education in February 1999 as the state's strategic plan to guide higher education through the first decade of the millennium. The Board conducted a mid-term review of this plan during 2003-04 to ensure its continued relevance and responsiveness to the needs of the state and the higher education community. *The Illinois Commitment*, as revised in 2004, provides a policy framework that enhances accountability and communication efforts for higher education's stakeholders while being more responsive to a rapidly changing environment.

*The Illinois Commitment* emphasizes the diversity of Illinois higher education with the understanding that each institution will be expected to address the six statewide priorities in a manner that is consistent with the institution's mission, resources, and constituencies. Each institution will submit a performance report annually to share the ways it has contributed to achieving the state's higher education priorities. An annual statewide "Performance Report" will provide collective accountability in assessing progress toward meeting the six policy areas of *The Illinois Commitment*.

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**THE ILLINOIS COMMITMENT** is premised on the conviction that higher education provides the foundation for Illinois' future by enhancing the social, economic, and civic well-being of the state and its residents.

### **POLICY AREA ONE: ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Higher education will help Illinois sustain strong economic growth through its teaching, service, and research activities.

### **POLICY AREA TWO: P-20 PARTNERSHIPS**

Higher education will join elementary and secondary education to improve teaching and learning at all levels.

### **POLICY AREA THREE: AFFORDABILITY**

No Illinois resident will be denied an opportunity for a college education because of financial need.

### **POLICY AREA FOUR: ACCESS AND DIVERSITY**

Illinois will increase the number and diversity of residents completing training and education programs.

### **POLICY AREA FIVE: HIGH QUALITY**

Illinois colleges and universities will be accountable for providing high quality academic programs and the systematic assessment of student learning outcomes while holding students to ever higher expectations for learning and growth.

### **POLICY AREA SIX: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY**

Illinois colleges and universities will continually improve productivity, cost-effectiveness, and accountability.

## PREFACE

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**Higher education provides the foundation for the future of Illinois - an educated, skilled, and responsible citizenry.**

### **Illinois Higher Education: Enhancing the Social, Economic, and Civic Well-Being of Illinois and its Residents**

Illinois has one of the largest and most diverse systems of higher education in the nation, ranking fourth among all states in total enrollment and sixth in total degrees awarded. Illinois currently offers postsecondary opportunities via 9 public universities on 12 campuses, 48 community colleges operating within 39 districts, 98 independent not-for-profit colleges and universities, and 28 independent for-profit institutions. Collectively, these institutions enhance and enrich the quality of life for all Illinois residents. Individually, each of these institutions contributes to the well-being of the state and its residents in a distinctive manner unique to its mission that provides a wide range of civic, educational, cultural, and economic benefits, including: <sup>1</sup>

- ◆ Preparing an informed and responsible citizenry that has an understanding of, and appreciation for, the fundamental principles of democracy as well as adequate preparation to succeed in a rapidly changing, global environment.
- ◆ Developing the state's workforce by preparing individuals to enter the labor force, retraining workers, and providing continuing education.
- ◆ Promoting basic and applied research activities to foster the development of new technologies, products, and services.
- ◆ Attracting new businesses to the state and helping to retain businesses already here.
- ◆ Serving as community resources by assisting schools, community groups, state and local governments, industries, and businesses through a multitude of services and outreach programs.
- ◆ Offering cultural, artistic, and athletic events and programs to communities throughout the state.
- ◆ Cultivating the development of individuals who value service to the community, ethical behavior, diversity, life-long learning, and reflection on values and beliefs. <sup>2</sup>

The Illinois Board of Higher Education recognizes and affirms the multi-faceted roles of higher education institutions and the many benefits that extend to the state and its residents from higher education.

### **What is *The Illinois Commitment*?**

*The Illinois Commitment* provides a roadmap to guide the higher education community in addressing statewide priorities within an increasingly dynamic and fluid environment. The Board has worked collaboratively with the higher education community and other interested stakeholders in identifying statewide priorities to drive this public agenda. The six policy areas underlying *The Illinois Commitment* are key to the future success of Illinois, with each providing an essential role in meeting the needs of the state and its residents.

As a policy framework, *The Illinois Commitment* is designed to be a “living”, dynamic document that will foster proactive and collaborative efforts from the higher education community and other interested stakeholders to address the challenges facing the state. The policy framework establishes a comprehensive public agenda that integrates both objectives and performance indicators for each policy area to enhance communication, transparency, and accountability for progress and results.

- ◆ **Short- and long-term objectives** for each policy area are reviewed and revised on a regular basis to provide a flexible and responsive approach in helping guide the public agenda for Illinois higher education. The objectives define key activities that will be undertaken by the Board (in conjunction with the higher education community and others) to address the six policy areas, within the context of the Board's statutory responsibilities.
- ◆ **Performance Indicators** (as adopted by the Board in February 2003) provide an objective assessment of the progress of Illinois' system of higher education in addressing the policy areas of *The Illinois Commitment* and identifying potential areas for improvement at both the state and institutional levels. <sup>3</sup>

## POLICY AREA ONE: ECONOMIC GROWTH

**Higher education will help Illinois sustain strong economic growth through its teaching, service, and research activities.**

Illinois higher education must be proactive in providing leadership, innovation, and creativity in a rapidly changing global environment. The new knowledge-based economy relies heavily upon the development of human capital, which inexplicably links the importance of a postsecondary education to economic growth. The benefits of academic research need to be brought swiftly to business and industry, to school classrooms, and to patients' bedsides. Higher education needs to identify promising areas of research and bring together resources to solve scientific, technical, and social problems. The faculty and other professional staff of colleges and universities will provide professional expertise and practical, useful advice, and assist in developing new products and launching new businesses.

Illinois higher education will help Illinois sustain strong economic growth by:

- ◆ Providing students with up-to-date skills, knowledge, and learning traits to succeed in the workplace;
- ◆ Conducting basic and applied research in conjunction with government and industry to improve the knowledge base and economic circumstance of both the state and nation;
- ◆ Providing cultural and civic opportunities to provide an inviting environment for families and business; and
- ◆ Ensuring academic programs, research, and public service initiatives are relevant to the needs of students, the state, and business and industry.

*“Postsecondary education has never been as important as it is today.  
Economic competitiveness depends on states' ability to educate and train their citizens,  
attract and retain talent, and develop clusters of innovation.”<sup>4</sup>*

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Conduct a survey of Illinois business and industry in 2005 regarding satisfaction with Illinois higher education.
- ★ Continually review IBHE grant programs related to Workforce and Economic Development (e.g., State Matching Grants, College Work Study, Health Sciences Education Grants) to ensure they are meeting stated purposes.

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ Satisfaction of Illinois businesses and industry with Illinois higher education (every 3 years)
- ★ Annual sponsored research expenditures
- ★ Annual number of graduates by level and broad field of study

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Percent of degree/certificate recipients either employed or enrolled in further education within one year of graduation
- ★ Description of effective practices

## POLICY AREA TWO: P-20 PARTNERSHIPS

### Higher education will join elementary and secondary education to improve teaching and learning at all levels.

The rapidly changing environment (e.g., shifting demographics, economic changes, workforce demands) in Illinois demands that the education system provide a seamless continuum of educational opportunities for its residents from pre-school through graduate school. P-20 initiatives and partnerships enhance the opportunity for Illinois residents to be academically prepared to pursue a postsecondary education and ultimately succeed in this journey. As Illinois' overall well-being becomes more and more dependent on an educated populace, the need for all levels of education to work together is critical. Among a variety of other benefits, P-20 partnerships can help to close achievement gaps between white and minority students, create smooth transitions between various levels of education, enhance teacher education and professional development, reduce the need for remediation at the college level, and improve teaching and learning at all levels.

The Board recognizes the preparation of teachers as one of the most important contributions that higher education can make to the well-being of the state and its residents. Research shows that the single most important factor in increasing student learning is the quality of the teacher. To improve the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers, higher education needs to form local partnerships with schools to develop support programs for new teachers and to provide opportunities for experienced teachers to update their skills.

*“Improving teacher education and enhancing teaching as a modern profession are essential if we are to improve the educational experience and success of children in Illinois.”<sup>5</sup>*

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Implement the Associate of Arts in Teaching (A.A.T.) degree (including a model A.A.T. in Early Childhood Education per House Resolution 845) in conjunction with ICCB, ISBE, and Illinois colleges and universities.
- ★ Improve data and information regarding the preparation and continuing professional development of Illinois teachers through the Teacher Data Warehouse and other related initiatives.

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ Annual number of students completing requirements for initial teacher certification by race/ethnicity and gender by certificate area

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Annual number of students completing requirements for initial teacher certification by certificate area
- ★ Description of effective practices

## POLICY AREA THREE: AFFORDABILITY

**No Illinois resident will be denied an opportunity for a college education because of financial need.**

Illinois has a long and proud history of promoting an affordable and accessible system of higher education for residents of the state. Over time, a policy framework to address the goals of access and choice has evolved in Illinois that has not only enabled the development of a significant need-based student aid program (i.e., the Monetary Award Program), but also has addressed the many other dimensions of the affordability issue, including the impact of pre-collegiate academic preparation on student success, the importance of moderate and predictable student cost increases, and the impact of changing student enrollment dynamics.

However, recent trends within Illinois higher education have raised concerns that the goals of access to, and choice among, higher education opportunities may be at risk. In response to these concerns the Committee on Affordability (2003), a joint venture of the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, recommended 20 strategies that can be taken by the state, institutions, and students and families to maintain and enhance the affordability of Illinois higher education. These strategies focus on three broad policy areas - enhancing academic preparation and performance, assisting needy students, and keeping college costs affordable - that will help shape affordability efforts for Illinois residents in the years to come.

*“As a society, we must ensure that all students, whatever their financial resources, can afford a college education and have access to the wide variety of quality higher education programs in the state of Illinois.”* <sup>6</sup>

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Implement the recommendations of the Committee on Affordability in conjunction with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, higher education community, Governor, and General Assembly. <sup>7</sup>

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ Average undergraduate tuition and fees versus Illinois per capita disposable income (by sector)
- ★ Proportion of enrolled undergraduate students who receive financial aid by type of aid and overall (by sector)
- ★ Net price of attendance for undergraduates who apply for aid by income quintile (by sector)

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Net price of attendance for undergraduates who apply for aid by income quintile
- ★ Description of effective practices

## POLICY AREA FOUR: ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

### Illinois will increase the number and diversity of residents completing training and education programs.

In a rapidly changing world, access to higher education is a critical component for success - both for an individual and for the state. Educated citizens nurture business and industry and attract new enterprises. Educated states invest in better schools, improved health care, and increased economic development.

Illinois has always placed an emphasis upon the inextricably linked priorities of access and diversity in higher education. Today, the current demand differs in both scale and character from previous eras. There is no longer a “typical” college student as more people of all ages and from all groups aspire to go to college. Increasing enrollments and a more diverse student population pose challenges to Illinois’ higher education institutions to continue meeting the needs of all residents and ensuring access to a postsecondary education.

The Board must continue to provide leadership in ensuring that access and diversity issues remain a high priority for all higher education institutions. Recommendations based on policy studies, such as increasing faculty diversity and improving access for students with disabilities, will help guide colleges and universities in their efforts to enhance postsecondary opportunities for all Illinois residents.

*“Illinois higher education must reconceptualize its ideas about access, examining not only whether students have access but whether students have access to the programs and services that best meet their needs... We must pursue a philosophy of educational development which seeks to help all students fully realize their educational potential and whereby institutions commit themselves to that purpose.”<sup>8</sup>*

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Begin implementation of the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Higher Education program as specified in Senate Bill 3107 (Public Act 93-0862).
- ★ Monitor the implementation of the two pilot projects at Chicago State University and Northeastern Illinois University to improve student retention and graduation rates.
- ★ Review the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) Access and Diversity Grant Program to ensure supported projects are meeting their intended purpose, including Minority Transfer Centers.
- ★ Develop and implement more effective information systems and improve the transition from high school to post-secondary institutions of students with disabilities through the work of the Board’s Disabilities Committee.

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ Completions by race/ethnicity, disability status, and gender (by level and sector)

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Completions by race/ethnicity, disability status, and gender (by level)
- ★ Description of effective practices

## POLICY AREA FIVE: HIGH QUALITY

**Illinois colleges and universities will be accountable for providing high quality academic programs and the systematic assessment of student learning outcomes while holding students to ever higher expectations for learning and growth.**

Measuring the outcomes and quality of student learning is one of the most critical and complex activities in higher education. The Board defines assessment of student learning in all programs as the systematic (at different points throughout the program, including end-of-program evaluation) determination of what students know and are able to do as a result of completing a unique program of study.<sup>9</sup> These assessment results must then be used to continuously improve the quality of curriculum, teaching, and student learning.

The Board has consistently stressed the importance of high quality academic programs and the need to assess student learning. *The Illinois Commitment*, as adopted in 1999, required all academic programs to have a comprehensive assessment process in place by 2004. To help achieve this goal, the Board worked collaboratively with the higher education community to assist institutions in developing processes for assessing student learning outcomes. A continuing challenge will be the maturation of these processes in which systematic feedback routinely improves curriculum and instruction in all programs, and thus enhances student learning.

The Board recognizes that a high quality postsecondary education may include a broad array of learning opportunities that extend beyond the classroom to assist in providing a well-rounded, value-added learning experience. These opportunities may include activities such as research, service learning, internships, and other civic engagement activities.

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Ensure that all academic programs at Illinois public colleges and universities have assessment processes in place.
- ★ Annually monitor and report assessment information provided by institutions as part of the regular program review cycle, as well as related information provided through the public university Baccalaureate Follow-Up Surveys.

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ State-level results from Illinois' participation in the National Forum on College-Level Learning pilot project on assessment of college student learning

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Extent to which institutional quality and effectiveness are recognized by graduates through alumni surveys
- ★ Pass rates on professional/occupational licensure exams relative to state and/or national averages
- ★ Description of effective practices

## POLICY AREA SIX: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY

**Illinois colleges and universities will continually improve productivity, cost-effectiveness, and accountability.**

Illinois higher education faces increasing external demands to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness, openness and transparency, and overall good stewardship of limited state resources. These heightened demands for higher education accountability are closely related to the economic downturn and the need for the state to more closely scrutinize the appropriation of scarce resources among many competing state priorities. The ongoing challenge for enhancing Illinois higher education's accountability is to ensure that mechanisms and processes are in place that are transparent, valid, and well-communicated to all stakeholders.

Illinois colleges and universities demonstrate accountability through several mechanisms to the Governor, General Assembly, and others. Illinois has taken a comprehensive and integrated approach to the development of quality assurance and accountability processes at the state level through the leadership of the Board in collaboration with the Illinois higher education community. The following activities and processes have been developed to increase productivity, cost-effectiveness, and accountability:

- ◆ An annual "Performance Report" depicting each institution's distinct contributions to the policy areas defined by *The Illinois Commitment*;
- ◆ Academic program review;
- ◆ Budget development and oversight;
- ◆ Institutional reallocation of base budget resources from lower to higher priorities; and
- ◆ Exploration and identification of efficiency/productivity enhancement opportunities across all activities.

### Objectives

(To Be Reviewed and Revised by the Board on a Regular Basis)

- ★ Examine and make recommendations on strategies for enhancing the efficiency of public university energy acquisition and utilization through the work of the Board's Utilities Committee.
- ★ Continue to monitor and review public university progress in achieving the 25% administrative cost reduction target by the end of fiscal year 2005.
- ★ Complete the work of the Board's Committee on Priorities, Productivity, and Accountability, including the development and implementation of final recommendations.

### Performance Indicators

(Approved by the Board in February 2003)

#### Statewide Indicators

- ★ Cost of instruction per credit hour, public institutions (sector averages)
- ★ Percent of first-time, full-time degree-seeking freshmen who complete their degree within 150% of catalog time, or are still enrolled or transferred (sector averages)

#### Common Institutional Indicators

- ★ Cost of instruction per credit hour, public institutions
- ★ Percent of first-time, full-time degree-seeking freshmen who complete their degree within 150% of catalog time, or are still enrolled or transferred
- ★ Description of effective practices

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

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*The Illinois Commitment* provides a roadmap to guide the higher education community in addressing statewide priorities in an increasingly dynamic and fluid environment. At the same time, *The Illinois Commitment* respects the unique contributions of each college and university in addressing the six statewide higher education priorities. To assess institutional progress in achieving the statewide priorities, institutions and agencies will annually submit Performance Reports that describe plans and actions for each policy area, as well as data for common institutional and mission-specific performance indicators. An annual statewide “Performance Report” will provide collective accountability in assessing progress toward meeting the six policy areas of *The Illinois Commitment*.

*The Illinois Commitment* will be reviewed and updated regularly by the Board and the higher education community to assess the status of progress made and to set priorities for the upcoming fiscal year(s) that will be utilized for such activities as the budget development process and policy studies. This regular review process will help to enhance accountability, transparency, and communication by maintaining *The Illinois Commitment* as a dynamic and responsive framework for policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>9</sup> Illinois Board of Higher Education. (2003). *Quality Assurance and Accountability*. Board Item #5.