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Quinn signs bill at WIU's Q-C campus

Steven Martens | Posted: Friday, August 12, 2011 10:26 pm

Calling Friday “a historic day, a landmark day,” Gov. Pat Quinn signed legislation creating a system that ties higher education funding to performance.

Quinn signed the bill during a ceremony at the Western Illinois University Quad-Cities campus in Moline and said the legislation will help the state reach its goal of increasing the number of adults with a secondary education diploma from its current level of 41 percent to 60 percent by 2021.

Quinn said creating an educated, skilled work force is critical to creating economic growth in Illinois.

“Jobs follow brain power,” he said.

Quinn credited Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon for her work on the legislation, which was approved unanimously by the Illinois House and Senate.

Simon, a former Southern Illinois University professor, said a group of stakeholders in higher education has begun researching how to set the standards. She said the group is consulting leaders in other states with performance funding programs to make sure Illinois’ program doesn’t have any unintended consequences.

She said one pitfall the state is hoping to avoid is discouraging colleges, universities and community colleges from admitting students they think may be at-risk to drop out of school before graduating out of a fear of jeopardizing their funding.

Simon said although graduation rates will be a factor in the performance standards, they cannot be the only factor.

“We have to understand that one size doesn’t fit all in performance funding,” she said.

Sen. Mike Jacobs, D-East Moline, and Rep. Pat Verschoore, D-East Moline, both thanked Quinn for his support of Western’s Quad-City campus and asked for his continued support for the expansion of the campus.

Jacobs and Verschoore also expressed their support for the bill.

“I think this bill will help us get our students the training they need to compete in the global economy,” Verschoore said.

George W. Reid, executive director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, called the legislation “a fundamental and important shift” in the way taxpayers support higher education that will help ensure Illinois students not only have access to a higher education, but improve the quality of that education.

Carolyn Ehlert Fuller, vice chairwoman of the Western Illinois board of directors, said the university supports the legislation and hopes to be a part of establishing the standards by which state funding will be awarded to colleges and universities.

The new law takes effect Jan. 1.