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## **Lt. Gov. Simon vows to fight for MCC**

By Larissa Chinwah

Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon joked that she couldn't solve the financial challenges of McHenry County College during a visit Monday, but the education point person for Gov. Pat Quinn said she holds a fondness for community colleges and vowed to fight for the smaller institutions.

MCC was Simon's 22nd stop on a tour of all 48 community colleges in the state to discuss completion rates and ways to improve college readiness for high school students.

"We need to do a better job as a state, particular in the transitional areas like high school to community college and community college to four-year institutions," Simon said during a round table discussion with McHenry County College faculty, board members and students. "Community colleges are the engine in terms of getting a greater percentage of people college-credentialed."

The graduation rate at MCC is better than 67 percent of community colleges nationwide, MCC President Vicky Smith said.

Faculty members highlighted the college's early intervention programs, student engagement and partnerships with local high schools, particularly in aligning English and math curriculums with in-district high schools.

Deb Alheit, a math instructor at MCC, said data shows that at least half of the students enrolled in MCC needed a developmental course in math.

"It is important to collaborate and align curriculums so that there is not so much of a disconnect," Alheit said. "A lot of students fail to realize what they learn in (high) school translates into what they learn here."

Tony Capalbo leads the federal financial aid program at MCC as well as a program that allows high school students to explore college classes and careers while still in high school. He noted the college's dual credit programs where high school students can earn credits toward both high school and college.

Smith listed a slew of challenges and opportunities the college faces, including reduced funding from the state, which has dropped from about 23 percent of the college's revenue five years ago to about 4.3 percent this year. The college received \$1.9 million from the state this year.

"I don't have a check to hand over," Simon quipped. "But I know the opportunities community colleges provide ... I want to represent a voice for community colleges. I am right there and I can be very annoying when I need to be."