

Dr. Frances Carroll
Remarks
Chicago Retired Principals Luncheon
September 22, 2009

I am pleased to have this opportunity discuss with you, the **Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success.**

What is the Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success?

In simple terms, it is a roadmap to the future. It will guide our higher 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 will direct 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. 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.

Why we did it.

The short answer is: The General Assembly made us.

But the real purpose was two-fold:

First, too many legislators don't get it – they don't understand what is obvious to all of us: higher education matters. It matters to the state's economy and the state treasury, to our workers and employers, to our quality of life and civic engagement and cultural vitality. Higher education matters to the future of Illinois. The Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success is just that: an agenda that effectively outlines for legislators (and other opinion leaders and policy makers in the state) why an educated Illinois is so necessary. In short, it helps more legislators get it.

Second, the Illinois Public Agenda study revealed that there are *two* states of Illinois –

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.

How the Public Agenda was developed.

Let me review briefly how we got to where we are today. A few statistics are revealing:

- The Public Agenda Task Force was comprised of 28 individuals who represented a vast array of higher education constituencies and stakeholders, including faculty and higher ed labor union representatives.
- The Task Force held six formal meetings, each at independent colleges and universities.
- There were 34 regional forums at 17 community colleges across the state, attended by nearly 700 stakeholders in higher education.
- The Task Force sponsored hearings at six public universities,

- The consultants from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) met with every public university president and held briefings for legislators, business leaders, union representatives, civic officials, plus many other one-on-one sessions with members of the General Assembly.
- The Public Agenda Task Force numbered 28, but the number of people who participated in the meetings, forums, hearings, and sent comments via e-mail or through the special website portal was close to 1,000.
- The Board of Higher Education was engaged in the process from beginning to end. I attended the Task Force meetings. I consider this important work, and am pleased to continue participating in its development.

The planning process was open, transparent, and collaborative. We not only listened to the voices of a variety of stakeholders, we heard what they had to say, and the document embraced by the IBHE changed significantly over the course of the process as we incorporated the suggestions and recommendations we received.

What now?

I believe this Public Agenda represents a significant accomplishment – the concerted effort of all stakeholders to understand the challenges and opportunities facing Illinois, and to chart a common course for meeting them.

On November 21, last year, the Public Agenda Task Force voted unanimously to adopt the Public Agenda and on December 8 the Board of Higher Education approved it.

[I have brought along copies of the executive summary for all of you.] And, it, along with the full report, is accessible on the IBHE home page, at www.ibhe.org.

Adoption of the Public Agenda is not the end, but merely the beginning of its implementation. We were told by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems consultants when we approved the report, “If you are spending your time...on things other than the Public Agenda, then you are on the wrong agenda.” That is the challenge I humbly—but firmly—offer up to you as well.

It is my hope that educators at all levels of the P-20 system—and that includes those of us who have emeritus standing in our profession will partner with the Board to pursue successful implementation of the many strategies, recommendations and action steps embodied in the Illinois Public Agenda.

I have to point out here a critical issue facing the low income college students of our state right now. Our flagship need-based student aid program called MAP (the Monetary Award Program) has been slashed in half in this year’s state budget. This means that nearly 138,000 low-income Illinoisans attending Illinois colleges will not receive the funding they were expecting for spring semester. The

very students we need to support to stay in school are the ones receiving the message they will have to drop out.

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. Needless to say, cutting MAP funds is not the path that is recommended.

Please, please, would you call your state representative and senator, and tell them for future of our college students and for the economic future of our state, please save MAP funding for the spring semester.

Now for some examples of how the Public Agenda is positively driving our legislative agenda. During this spring session of the General Assembly, we supported legislation, including:

Goal 1: SB 1828—Comprehensive P-20 Longitudinal Data System. It is now law, and being implemented with the aid of a major federal grant. While ISBE is in the driver's seat, the higher education community is in the front seat assisting to see this much-needed tool become reality in Illinois.

Goal 2: HB 1079, Dual Credit Quality Act, was enacted, to ensure programs for students to get high school and college credit for classes meeting collegiate academic standards.

And

Goal 2: HB 150—21st Century Scholars Program, an early intervention effort to entice middle school students to take a rigorous high school curriculum, passed the House unanimously, but got stalled in the Senate, but with a desire to keep talking next session.

The Public Agenda is driving policy initiatives. Here are some of the policies we are pursuing:

- High School to College Report—a new feedback report that shows high schools how their students are doing in college.
- The American Diploma Project (ADP)—an initiative aimed at aligning academic standards between the K-12 system and higher education. This project relies heavily on faculty in teacher education for consultation and support.
- Strengthening elementary and high school leader standards.
- Financial aid for adult learners.
- Expanding the College and Career Readiness Pilot to diagnose student academic shortcomings while still in high school to reduce the need for remediation once they get to college.
- Supporting the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program and the educational institutions as they work to create a more diverse faculty.

The Public Agenda is driving the budget process also. As we build the 2011 higher ed budget, we intend to refine the process to ensure that institutions are making state priorities their campus priorities as well. Even in these times of limitations on state funds, we see the Public Agenda blueprint as providing opportunity in the midst of crisis. What is funded, we want to advance the Public Agenda goals.

And, the Public Agenda is driving the Board of Higher Education meeting agenda and format. For example:

- The Board of Higher Education has changed its agenda and meeting format to reflect a greater concentration on issues related to the Public Agenda
 - In April, the Board invited Pat Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, to speak on ways to connect higher ed funding to the goals of the Public Agenda.
 - In June, the Board heard from Pam Tate, President and CEO of CAEL regarding the need to strengthen programs for adult learners, another key strategy of the Public Agenda.
 - And in August, Stan Jones, founder of the new National Consortium for College Completion, discussed with the Board the ways Illinois must lead the way in increasing higher education attainment, to meet President Obama's challenge that the United States become number 1 again as the most educated country, by 2025.

So . . . We are off to a running start. But the journey really has just begun.

We intend for the Public Agenda to change higher education as we've known it. We expect it will drive the Board's policy, budget, and legislative agenda. We anticipate it will alter in meaningful ways the priorities of our colleges and universities. We believe it will have a significant impact on how the General Assembly regards P-20 policy and the allocation of resources.

In short, the Public Agenda is a call to action for students, parents, educators, labor unions, business executives, civic leaders, philanthropic organizations, state agencies, and elected officials from the local school board to the General Assembly and Governor. This is our roadmap to the future, and the road may be long, and it certainly will be difficult, but the journey is vital to create a prosperous Illinois where all residents can benefit from a vibrant higher education system.

I believe that this thoughtful, deliberative, and collaborative process has yielded an agenda that will affect lives of Illinois residents, and the state's future economic and social well-being, for a generation or more.

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.

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.