

News

from the Illinois Board of Higher Education

Contact: Don Sevens, 217.557.7334
Cell: 217.836.7395
sevens@ibhe.org

September 7, 2006

ILLINOIS GAINS GROUND ON NATIONAL REPORT CARD

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois higher education sustained honor-roll grades and improved significantly in a key measure of the benefits of higher education to the state in the fourth national report card for higher education. Overall, the state improved its “class rank” among the 50 states, moving up to fifth place from eighth in the state-by-state analysis, *Measuring Up 2006*, released today by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

On key college indicators including student preparation, participation, and degree completion, Illinois continued to receive top grades. The National Center noted that Illinois is among the top states in the proportion of 11th and 12th graders who score well on college entrance exams and that the percentage of secondary students taught by a “qualified teacher,” one who majored in the subject matter taught, has risen significantly.

College participation has been a strength of Illinois on the national report card. The state does particularly well in the proportion of working-age adults in college. The National Center also points out, however, that Illinois must work to strengthen high school graduation rates and improve college access for all students.

Illinois has gained ground on degree completion since the initial report card in 2000 gave the state a C+. That grade has now risen to a B+, and the National Center noted that Illinois’ four-year colleges and universities have a strong freshmen retention rate as well as a high percentage of first-time, full-time students who complete bachelor’s degrees within six years. The state also has increased the proportion of students completing certificates and degrees, relative to the number enrolled.

Illinois’ greatest gain in the 2006 report card came in the category of benefits, which measures educational attainment, benefits to the state economy, and civic benefits such as voting, charitable giving, and volunteerism. The report noted that the high proportion of residents with bachelor’s degrees strengthens the state economy.

Illinois was among only nine states to receive a “plus” in the learning category due to the State’s participation in a national pilot to design learning measurements for higher education.

Judy Erwin, Executive Director of the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), noted that unfortunately Illinois was one of 43 states with a low ranking for college affordability. “While Illinois, like the vast majority of states, experienced significant budget problems from 2002-04, Governor Blagojevich and the members of the General Assembly made a significant investment in higher education during last spring’s legislative session, especially in needs-based financial aid for low-income students.”

Illinois’ Monetary Award Program (MAP) provides up to a \$4,968 grant for low-income undergraduate students attending public or private two- and four-year colleges. The Governor and legislature added \$34.4 million to MAP for FY2007 and created a new \$500/per qualified student grant, MAP Plus (also funded at \$34.4 million total), which is geared to middle-income students and their families carrying the heaviest student loan debt load.

In addition, Erwin pointed to a \$1 million increase for the Illinois Incentive for Access program in fiscal 2007, which provides grants of \$500 to students with virtually no family financial support for college. Several years ago the Illinois legislature approved a truth-in-tuition measure to bring greater predictability to college tuition costs.

“We are both gratified and challenged by the results of the national report card,” Erwin said. “The report card demonstrates the high quality of Illinois higher education as well as underscores progress we are making in educational attainment, teacher quality, and other important measures.

“And while MAP funding increased nearly 10 percent this year for scholarships to students in need, our challenge is to try to ensure that students receive the highest quality education for the most reasonable price. That requires everyone in education, from preschool to professional education, working together for a more efficient, better aligned, and accountable educational system serving students, their families, and, importantly, Illinois employers.”

Erwin added: “There is no question that the Governor, General Assembly, the Board of Higher Education, and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission continue to make college affordability their top priority. The report card is a valuable document that will give us guidance to fill the gaps that exist in educational opportunity and attainment, particularly for disadvantaged students.”

#