



Indiana must remain committed to college affordability and rewarding results

By Teresa Lubbers, Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education (May 5, 2011)

In the midst of limited resources and competing priorities, Indiana lawmakers passed a state budget this year that promotes college completion while helping more Hoosiers afford the growing cost of higher education.

While most states have been forced to slash funding for public colleges and universities, Indiana has managed to maintain overall funding for higher education and increase financial aid dollars for students. This accomplishment is even more remarkable given that Indiana has in no way been immune from a national recession that has affected Hoosier families, local businesses and communities across our state.

Indiana needs more college graduates to build a stronger workforce and to promote personal prosperity. Believing that we should pay for what we value, lawmakers reaffirmed a commitment to reward results through a funding formula that bases a small portion (5 percent) of the total dollars colleges receive on improvements in key performance measures.

Indiana's performance formula was carefully designed to reflect the unique mission and contributions of each university by allowing institutions to earn more dollars in a variety of ways: from graduating more students to making advances in research. The performance formula also acknowledges that every college has room for improvement given that even at our most selective public universities fewer than half of Hoosier students graduate within four years.

Recognizing the importance of preserving college access, the General Assembly's higher education budget also dedicated an additional \$23 million in support for student financial aid over the next two years. Despite these efforts, the cost of college is a growing concern for Indiana families and policymakers. Tuition and fees at our state-supported colleges have grown by nearly 300 percent since 1990, and Indiana's student debt load ranks 13th highest in the country. At a time when more Hoosiers are going to college and a greater proportion of our students qualify for financial aid, rising tuition rates threaten to outpace the state's available resources and our students' ability to pay.

The needs of Indiana's individual institutions must be considered in the context of our higher education system and state priorities, but we must act first and foremost with the interests of Hoosier students in mind. The state budget passed by the General Assembly reflects a commitment to college affordability and student success. The Indiana Commission for Higher Education will be working with our colleges and universities to ensure that these goals are paramount when tuition and fees are set for the upcoming 2011 and 2012 academic years.

*This guest column was provided by Higher Education Commissioner Teresa Lubbers for the Indiana news media. Visit www.che.in.gov to read *Reaching Higher*, the Commission's strategic plan for higher education in Indiana.*