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Higher Ed Policy Forum Welcome

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Higher Ed Policy Forum Welcome
"Hitting the Reset Button on Michigan's Education System
Dr. John M. Dunn
Dec. 12, 2011

(Notes:) Our goal is to identify actionable items for the business community to advocate for in Lansing. The event experience will allow attendees to see the harsh reality of where Michigan stands, who the models are for best practices and what changes are necessary to eliminate the barriers to providing the best classroom instruction and learning opportunities for all.

The event will have panel sessions exploring the following topics: Early Childhood | MI Best Practices | Higher Education.)

• Good afternoon and thank you all for being here to talk about this critical topic. My thanks to our sponsors--The West Michigan Policy Forum and the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce.

• This is the perfect location for this forum. There is no region of the state better positioned to talk about and lead policy change aimed at enhancing access and expanding what we all know are best practices. This community, Kalamazoo, has positioned itself as the education community. There really is no community better suited than ours to advocate good policy in Lansing and lead by example to show how best practices will help our state grow and prosper.

• Earlier this month, a business publication asked me to do some "crystal ball" forecasting about our economy and how I thought the economy would impact my industry--education--in the coming year. I replied that we headed into this recession before other states, and I think there are promising signs that we will lead the way out of recession and back to economic strength.

• I also noted that this has been a transformational period for Michigan, and if there is a silver lining to the difficult times we've experienced, it is this. As recently as six years ago, only a quarter of Michigan citizens thought a college degree was
important for their children. There was a perception that a good middle class lifestyle and career is available in Michigan to those with only minimal educational credentials. That has now largely disappeared. That change in perception will affect how we approach and value every level of education for years to come.

• As a state, we're in agreement now. We all know that education, completing school and earning a degree are important. Gov. Snyder reaffirmed that last point two weeks ago with his talk on talent development. We're all on the same page now.

• Now it's time to agree on what our responsibilities as a state are--what we can do to wrap our arms around our students and support them in a way that will ensure they not only have the opportunity to succeed, but also that they are ready to take advantage of the opportunity.

• Thank you for being here and for taking time to lend your voice and thoughtful consideration to what is really the most important ingredient to Michigan's future. (Just under 3 minutes)

Talking points for panel (some of this comes from George Erickcek's advance)

• Some comments from the welcome would be appropriate.

Benefits
• Having a well-educated work force is important for our state as well as for the individual degree holders.
• Top draw for employers is not low taxes. It's an educated work force.
• For the state of Michigan in 2009 and 2010: Source Census PUMS ACS

Unemployment rate
2010
Less than HighSchool 33%
High School 19%
Some College 15%
Associate degree 10%
Bachelor's degree 8%
Graduate degree 4%

• Over the course of a lifetime, a college grad will earn more than $1 million more than a high school grad. That earning will also be a boost to Michigan's tax base.

Financial Support
• Financial stress top reason students don't complete.
• Cannot continue to divert funding from higher ed that then has to be passed on to students
• Major sources of funding for universities are tuition (now 2/3 of total cost) and state appropriation
• In addition to higher tuition to offset loss of state approp., student families have lost state Promise Scholarship
• No longer possible for someone to work their way through school--trying to do so has implications for student success
• As a state, we have to find some way of reversing these trends and funneling support back to students
• Scholarship support could help fill some of the gap, but Michigan's move to remove tax incentives for those who contribute scholarships has added to burden. Could be easily reinstated.

Access
• We have to regard every group of potential students as part of our resource base.
No one is expendable. This is sustainability at its most basic level. Each has special
support needs, but can succeed with support programs tailored to their needs--eg. veterans, foster-care youth.

**Improving graduation rates**

- First, we need to make sure the rates are determined in a way that makes sense. The six-year IPEDS data is deeply flawed, but we still need to use it. We need a reexamination of how those rates are determined, so they are not used inappropriately to penalize institutions that on the cutting edge of providing support for some students who might not be supported by a university intent on preserving its high grad rates.

- Transfer students--in and out of our university--and part-time students are not reflected at all in the data. Someone who transfers away and earns a degree at another school should be counted as an institutional "success" not a dropout. If WMU transfers were counted in a more equitable way, our graduation rate would be 10 percent higher. Many of our students attend part-time and take more than six years to graduate--but they should still be counted as success stories.

- Work in tandem with K-12 schools to make college a given in the minds of early elementary students.

- Expand partnership with middle and high schools for AP courses. Find ways to finance so that AP is a benefit rather than a drag on school district budgets. That will allow students to start their degree programs with a leg up--giving them a shorter path to degree.

- Partner with community colleges--reverse transfer, dual enrollments, etc.