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Pre-College and Youth Outreach Conference Welcome

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“Youth2College: Providing Youth Resources to Navigate the Pipeline.”
Pre-College and Youth Outreach Conference Welcome
Dr. John M. Dunn
Nov. 17, 2014

Good morning. It is wonderful to see you on campus. I think of you all as our partners in reaching out and helping young people take the next positive steps toward a successful future. As an institution, we are honored to be the site of this important gathering. And it is my personal pleasure to welcome you and wish you all a productive day of discussion.

- As I look at your agenda today, I'm pleased to see a focus on academic excellence, access to higher education, and diversity; partnerships between universities and school systems within the State of Michigan; and community outreach initiatives that prepare students for academic excellence in post-secondary education. Those topics are part of the fabric of daily life at this university and, I suspect, the same is true at many of the organizations represented here today.
- One of the things that is so rewarding about a day of thoughtful discussion like this is that it is not about any of the individual organizations gathered here. It is all about students and what we can do, collectively, to help them succeed. So many of the partnerships we take part in are about promoting post-secondary education--the importance of going to college--rather simply extolling the virtues of our own institutions.
- Here in Kalamazoo, we have the wonderful gift of free tuition for the community's students through the Kalamazoo Promise, which you'll hear more about today. That gift came with the communitywide responsibility to make sure Kalamazoo students are prepared to take advantage of that opportunity. As a community and as a University community, we spend a lot of time on initiatives that are aimed at

inculcating the idea of going to college in every K-12 student. Of course I'd like to see them all at WMU, but that's not the goal. What we're all really trying to do is make sure students go to the college that is right for them and that they succeed once they get there.

- The fact that we have a community with this wonderful gift is providing researchers at Western Michigan University with an opportunity to find out what other barriers exist at colleges and universities that prevent students from finding success. We've just received a "First in the World" grant from the U.S. Department of Education to identify those barriers and develop best practices that other colleges and universities can adopt.

About a third of students who go to college through the Kalamazoo Promise are at WMU, so we're able to look at a population for whom the stress of financing college has been removed. Removing that stress, though, does not automatically translate to academic success. We want to know what other hurdles exist and how do we dismantle them and build an institution that is inclusive, welcoming and geared to the success of all students. Again, it's not about us, it's about the students we all serve and the steps we can take to serve them better. What we learn on this campus will be available to colleges and universities across the nation.

While we focus on identifying and removing barriers, we also have to remain cognizant that for the majority of our students, financial stress remains, and it is often its own barrier to students reaching their full potential. It is a challenge for all of higher education, and I would be remiss if I did not alert you to one new way we're addressing it on the Western Michigan University campus. I share this with you to ask for your help in identifying students who can benefit.

This week, we're announcing a renewed commitment to serve talented students who lack sufficient funding to pay for college. Starting with the Fall 2015 incoming first-year class, WMU will offer 10 students a \$50,000, four-year scholarship called the Foundation Scholarship. Nominations for the Foundation Scholarships are open and we're asking for the help of high school counselors, teachers and principals to help us identify high-achieving students with high need. Please let us know if you have a student for whom this opportunity is a good match.

And please do spend a day of thoughtful discussion on how preparing students with the skills they need to navigate the admission process, take full advantage of the every opportunity at the school they choose and find academic success. Their success will play an enormous role in the future success of our state and each of our communities. Thank you for being here and making your own commitment to that success. Enjoy your day on campus and come back to visit any time.