

Legislative Report:

More Cutbacks

By Leo Welch

Selected bills by the 97th General Assembly of Illinois.

The following are bills signed into law by Governor Pat Quinn. The bills, now Public Acts, were sent to him by action of the General Assembly in the Spring of 2011.

The bills are organized under the heading of goals of the Illinois Public Agenda which is the “master plan” for Illinois public higher education.

Illinois Public Agenda Goal 1:

Increase Educational Attainment

House Bill 1710, Pritchard (Maloney) Public Act 97-0289

Establishes the College Planning Program, to be administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), providing that ISAC shall target low-income and potential first-generation college students with programs to promote college awareness and planning.

Senate Bill 122, Sandoval (Carli) Public Act 97-0588

Amends the Board of Higher Education Act concerning the underrepresentation of certain groups in higher education. Requires the Board’s annual report to the General Assembly and the Governor to include admission, retention, and graduation statistics for students who are the first in their immediate family to attend an institution of higher education.

Both the State of Illinois and the Federal Government are interested in promoting educational outcomes by degree completions. Many of the students targeted by these two bills could be considered “at risk.” These students will require institutional services that will assist in their retention and degree completion. This will obviously generate additional costs to the respective institutions. This represents a message from the General Assembly that institutions will do more with less.

Illinois Public Agenda Goal 2:

Ensure College Affordability

House Bill 1256, Colvin (Hutchingson) Public Act 97-0288

Creates the Diversity in Engineering Scholarship Program in the Department of Transportation.

House Bill 1503, Rose (Maloney) Public Act 97-0320

Amends the Board of Higher Education Act, requiring the Illinois Board of Higher Education to incorporate performance-based funding into its annual budget request to the General Assembly, beginning with fiscal 2013, as recommended by the Higher Education Finance Study Commission.

The Public Act 97-0320 establishes performance-based funding for public universities and community colleges. As of this writing how performance will be based, is currently under study. The two most common metrics mentioned are retention rates and graduation rates. If simplistic measurements of this type are adopted they will not reflect the reality of current students. Many students because of current cost of education are required to work at part-time jobs to pay for tuition and other education related expenses. On September 28, 2011 the Council of Public University Presidents and Chancellors presented to the Higher Education Performance Funding Steering Committee a position paper entitled Six Performance Funding Principles for Illinois Higher Education (see sidebar).

The public university presidents and chancellors are concerned, and rightly so, that performance metrics will be “hijacked” by simplistic measures such as those reported on educational attainment in public universities and colleges in Illinois. This organization Complete College America has authored a one-page summary (see attached) of educational

attainment in Illinois. They also apparently view higher education as only providing job skills for a strong economy. Unfortunately this type of message is the only one that resonates with many members of the General Assembly.

Senate Bill 1798, Maloney (Rose) Public Act 97-0290

Permits Eastern Illinois University to establish a pilot program to exceed the Board of Higher Education's institutional tuition waiver limitation for the University over a 4-year period to increase access to college and make college more affordable for undergraduate students.

Senate Bill 1883, Maloney (Jakobsson) Public Act 97-0610

Amends the Board of Higher Education Act, providing that each public university shall report annually to the Board on programs of instruction, research, or public service that have been terminated, dissolved, reduced, or consolidated by the university. Requires each State university to also report to the Board all programs of instruction, research, and public service that exhibit a trend of low performance in enrollments, degree completions, and high expense per degree. Requires the Board to compile and annual report and submit it to the General Assembly. Limits IBHE review and approval of non-instructional capital projects at public universities to those in excess of \$2 million.

Senate Bill 2185, Cullerton (Acevedo) Public Act 97-0233

Requires the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) to establish an Illinois DREAM Fund Commission, appointed by the Governor, to oversee a privately funded scholarship program for children of immigrants.

Illinois Public Agenda Goal 3:

Address Workforce Needs

House Bill 166, Winters (Frerichs) Public Act 97-0241

Creates the Higher Education Green Jobs and Technology Act, providing that State university and community college representatives, in conjunction with research centers that focus on clean or sustainable energy and are located within the same geographic regions, may meet annually to develop collaborative efforts with regard to the green technology industry. Requires the Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board to annually publicize on their websites information concerning efforts made by State universities and community colleges to promote the green technology industry, including the development of new academic degree and certificate programs, courses of instruction, and initiatives made by these State universities and community colleges to align green jobs programs with employer needs.

House Bill 1876, Cross (Holmes) Public Act 97-0196

Creates the Higher Education Technology Entrepreneur Center Act, providing that the board of trustees of each public university and community college district is authorized to create a technology entrepreneur center for each campus.

The intent to move in the direction of clean and sustainable energy and jobs as well is a laudable one, however these bills like so many others can be viewed as an unfunded mandate. If the general assembly has these goals in mind, then they should provide the economic resources to support these initiatives. These concerns also apply to entrepreneur center as well.

Budget

House Bill 116, Madigan (Steans) Public Act 97-0054

Appropriates \$135 million, minus the amount transferred to the State Universities Retirement System pursuant to continuing appropriation authorized by the State Pension Funds Continuing Appropriation Act, from the State Pensions Fund to the Board of Trustees of the State Universities Retirement System. Appropriates \$845,485,000 from the Education Assistance Fund to the Board of Trustees of the State Universities Retirement System for the State's contribution, as provided by law.

House Bill 3700, Madigan (Kotowski) Public Act 97-0069

The higher education budget for FY 12, reduces general funds support for higher education by \$34.7 million, or 1.6 percent, below fiscal 2011 appropriations. Funding for public universities is reduced \$15.0 million or 1.1 percent, and community colleges are held nearly flat. ISAC is cut \$18.2 million or 4.3 percent. The majority of the ISAC cut is the \$17.2 million reduction in MAP funding. IBHE institutional grants are held flat with the exception of a 50 percent reduction in the Quad Cities Graduate Center and the elimination of the \$205,000 P-20 grant. The University Center of Lake County is cut 41.7 percent from \$1.7 million to \$1.0 million. The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy is held flat, but Civil Service System operations are cut 5.6 percent. The IBHE agency budget is reduced \$199,700 or 6.7 percent.

One of the major issues faced by Illinois is the "pension crisis." This crisis can be viewed as a product of the Illinois

General Assembly. For years they have failed to fund their portion of the pension system, and now Illinois has one of the largest unfunded pension systems in the country.

Their solution was to create a new defined benefits system that went into effect January 1, 2011. The pension for public university and community colleges falls under the State University Retirement System (SURS). The new pension benefits are now one of the worst of any state. The next targets are the current employees and those that are currently retired.

At the same time that the General Assembly is requesting more service to be provided by the public higher education system, they continue to cut funding. The high water mark for financial support from the state was FY 2002 and funding has declined every year since. This trend for Illinois represents privatization without a plan.

Bill synopsis source: Illinois Board of Higher Education