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Goal 4 Comment: Within Goal 4, the proposed agenda appropriately targets some of the key elements of the connection between higher education and economic growth. There are some points in the agenda that I would like to single out for particular endorsement, and some points where I believe the agenda could be expanded:

Reinforce Existing Message

A.1 Providing state leveraging of federal funds for research is one of the best things the State of Illinois can do to grow the research activities of colleges and universities within Illinois. The state will get a much greater impact for its resources if it uses state funds to leverage federal funds, rather than to provide "stand alone" grants for research that is not able to attract federal funding.

A.6 NIU is committed to promoting engaged learning for all of our students, and we recognize the particular value this brings in the STEM disciplines. Paid internships make college more affordable; they frequently lead to careers for the students involved; they build positive relationships between colleges and universities on the one hand and employers on the other, which helps to keep the curriculum grounded and relevant. All of these factors make the availability of such internships a powerful tool for recruiting and retention. Creating and sustaining a program of paid internships and cooperative work experiences is a positive step that the State of Illinois could take to encourage students to enter the STEM disciplines, complete degrees in these disciplines, and remain in Illinois after graduation.

Expand Message

A.5 & C.2 "Job training" should be thought of at a high level. In the modern knowledge economy, training for specific job skills is not enough. The modern workforce requires people who can quickly adapt to new technologies and new environments, people who understand a global economy, and people who are capable of lifelong innovation. This requires the kind of comprehensive education that higher education provides. The kind of economic power that the state seeks comes not from workforce training, but from a broadly educated and highly educated population.

B.3 Professional development and student development in STEM disciplines is of vital importance to strengthening our students and our economy. There needs to be a broad engagement in this area, and there are many people in higher education who have been engaged and stand ready to do more. The focus on IMSA for teacher development and student development should therefore be expanded. Colleges and universities have the ability to improve their own STEM education skills and to work with K-12 educators on professional development and improving student success.

Performance Measures

A.1 For real success in higher education as an engine of economic growth, we need to look at more than the lowest levels of employment and educational attainment as indicators of success. The state should look at the creation of high end jobs as well as "living wage" jobs.