



February 15, 2024

Illinois Board of Higher Education
1 North Old State Capitol Plaza
Suite 333
Springfield, IL 62701-1377

Dear Commission;

As a leader in Community Unit School District #428 where over 50% of our students live in poverty, we are keenly aware of the critical need for financial support for state universities. Additionally, many of our district and school leaders are alumni of Northern Illinois University (NIU) and several are current doctoral students. We can attest to the significant positive impact this specific institution has had on our lives, careers, and families.

We are writing to urge the commission to prioritize equity and center student needs in their funding decisions, recognizing the vital role that state universities like NIU play in providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds.

We support the work of the commission because we have personally witnessed the barriers to higher education access faced by many students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The commission's efforts have the potential to address these barriers by ensuring adequate funding for programs and services that support student success." As school leaders, we have experienced firsthand the transformative power of higher education. Furthermore, NIU has been a longstanding partner of our school district, contributing to continuing education opportunities for educators and higher education opportunities for our students. Through initiatives such as free tutoring, STEAM summer camps, internships for high school students, and scholarly research in education, NIU has demonstrated its commitment to supporting our community.

Serving the Cortland, DeKalb and Malta Communities

Dr. Minerva García-Sánchez
Superintendent

Board of Education

Deyci Ramirez, *President* | Steven Byers, *Vice President* | Ariel Owens, *Secretary*
Christopher Boyes | Vanta Bynum | Amanda Harness | Andre Powell



A high-quality and adequate higher education, from our perspective, encompasses access to comprehensive support services such as academic counseling, mental health resources, and retention support. It is crucial to actualize this vision to empower students and communities. The work of the commission can have a profound impact on students and Illinois communities by fostering greater educational attainment and economic opportunity.

When considering the cost of attending college, the state should take into account not only tuition and fees but also other expenses such as room and board, transportation, food, and childcare. Affordability plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to higher education.

In terms of accountability, it is essential for universities to be transparent about how additional funding is spent and its impact on student enrollment and outcomes. Moreover, institutions should be held accountable for prioritizing student-centered and equity-focused initiatives. On behalf of DeKalb CUSD #428, we want to thank the members of the commission for the opportunity to testify and we appreciate the consideration of our recommendations. For the work that we do, it is imperative to keep equity at the forefront of the decision-making processes to ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have equal opportunities for success.

We recommend that institutions prioritize equitable investments in areas such as student support services, financial aid, and faculty diversity to enhance the educational experience for all students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Minerva Garcia-Sanchez', with a small 'E.O.' written below it.

Dr. Minerva Garcia-Sanchez
Superintendent

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