

IL Funding Commission
Technical Workgroup meeting
5/11/2023
Public Comment
Jennifer A. Delaney

Thank you for the opportunity to offer public comment. I want to touch on the two overarching concerns from the discussion today – affordability and complexity.

Affordability

It is not clear how the formula will increase affordability. I think this is immensely important to address.

For me not setting a funding formula to keep college affordable, especially for low-income students, is a missed opportunity of having spent the time working on this funding commission.

In addition, **the affordability issue is directly connected to complexity**. I do not fully understand the model as presented and no high school senior will either (neither will most parents or legislators). I think it is very important to communicate a clear message to potential students about affordability.

To this end it would be helpful to have a handhold that would enable clear communication. I want to suggest that the group work towards a very simple model for affordability.

By way of an example, as part of the funding formula, can Illinois set a goal of offering **free college** to MAP/Pell-eligible students?

- It would clearly address affordability for the lowest income students.
- It would also enable clear, non-complicated messaging.
- Means-tested free college will go a long way towards addressing equity across student groups and is more targeted at vulnerable student populations and less expensive overall than a universal free-college approach.
- My back-of-the-envelope calculations that I shared with Ginger earlier in this process show that the state already has free tuition for MAP/Pell-eligible at all community colleges in the state and most public four-year institutions.
 - As such the lift for the state will be small to fill in gaps (where they exist) for this population of students and to make it a guarantee so that students can count on having free college when they are ready to enroll.
 - If the increase in MAP, which was requested by IBHE and is in the governor's requested budget, is approved by the General Assembly, Illinois might have free college for all low-income students as early as Fall 2023.
 - However, no one knows this and we are not marketing free college.
 - This seems like a missed opportunity that would be particularly impactful for our most vulnerable students.
 - Importantly while free college might be achievable soon, there is no mechanism for sustaining it if this goal is not codified in a funding formula (along with

resources to continue to support free college for low-income students without shortchanging institutions on revenues).

Within the free college space, it is worth considering the no-loan models that some of the four-year publics are operating – Illinois Commitment at UIUC and the Huskie Pledge Grant at NIU. However, I will caution against setting an affordability model that is tied directly to merit (or selective admissions) in a statewide program.

It is also worth considering models that promote debt-free college to specifically tie affordability to student debt. The Institute for College Access and Success has some resources about both the need for debt-free college and ways that it can be achieved that would likely be helpful to review. Thinking about a guarantee of debt-free college as a goal would likely be very impactful to increasing enrollments in the state.

Research supports the idea that clear, simple communication is vital as is a guarantee such that students can plan for college.

- There is research in the promise program literature that when students are offered “free college” they change not only their preparation for college, but also their aspirations.
- Likewise, the aspirations and expectations of teachers and parents shifted after the introduction of promise programs as trusted adults start to see all of their students as being able to go to college.
- Following the introduction of promise programs, communities started tutoring programs, high schools aligned curriculum to be more about college prep, and parents started saving more for college (since there are a lot of other expenses beyond tuition and required fees).

I will argue that there is no benefit to holding on tight to a conceptual model if it does not get to a place that the group hopes to go. In this case, it is not clear that the model will get to a place that would enhance affordability of higher education for the state. I want to amplify Mike Abrahamson’s comment about radically simplifying the model.

I also want to amplify Mike Abrahamson’s question if tuition should be in the model. I think this fundamental issue should be addressed by the group. I remain very concerned that student tuition is still being treated as being equivalent to local property taxes in the state’s K-12 funding model.

Finally, I still think that this model does not appropriately take into account the current voucherized student aid system. More thinking about this is needed and student aid needs to be clearly and purposefully entered into the model. For instance, it is still not clear if Pell and MAP are seen as a student or a state/federal resource.

Additional comments:

High-cost programs treatment

It seems like the proposed treatment of high-cost programs would create incentives for every institution to open high-cost programs to gain these bonuses. This is concerning given IBHE’s role in monitoring program duplication across the state. It also does not seem fair if only those

institutions with these high-cost programs existing today would have access to these weighted funds and no other institution would ever be eligible for these resources.

Access Tiers and Instructional Costs Adjustments

I am concerned that gaps are driving these tiers and not values about equity. What happens if gaps shift overtime? Would the weights shift? If so, then would this serve as a disincentive for institutions to address gaps? Even if all gaps close, are not equity adjustments still needed to address equity concerns and to articulate state values moving forward?

Equity Adjustments

I want to amplify Beth's comment that there should be only one equity adjustment for the whole model. Doing separate equity adjustments is both too complex and inconsistent.

Dual Credit

I am concerned about not counting dual credit (or visiting students, etc.) in some way. They are on campus and use some resources, if not, perhaps, at the same level as a full-time student. The suggestion to only count degree-seeking students will introduce some inequities and provide disincentives for institutions to create certificate programs, badging, stackable degrees, and other flexible program types. These are all areas of growth on most campuses and it may not be in the state's interest to stifle innovation in these areas.