

Feb. 21, 2014

Support Higher Education Funding

By David Eisler, President, Ferris State University

Governor Snyder has proposed increasing higher education funding by 6.1 percent, the largest increase in my eleven years as president of Ferris State University. This will reverse a decade of decline in funding for Michigan's college students.

Today, about 80 percent of the cost of a public university degree in Michigan comes from tuition and just 20 percent from public funding. College graduates are essential to Michigan's future - a fact Gov. Snyder recognizes. For a bright economic future, our state needs more college-educated professionals.

During a time when the loudest voices may seem to be calling for ever-smaller public expenditures, our governor and state legislature have bolstered accountability by linking higher education funding to quantifiable goals. These metrics incent universities to produce graduates in a timely fashion and in critical skill areas. For its part, Ferris State University has embraced these standards and does very well in responding to the state's priorities.

Accessibility also plays a role in the governor's proposed addition of a metric based on the number of Pell Grant students a university is educating. As president of a university founded upon the principle of providing opportunity, I strongly support Gov. Snyder's proposal. My hope is that you see how the governor, legislators and public universities are working together to serve our state.

Former Ann Arbor publisher and University of Michigan regent Phil Power recently described higher education funding in Michigan in his typically direct way, noting that higher education in Michigan has withstood seven straight cuts since 2000, making "our state nearly first in the nation at cutting support for colleges. While it will certainly help if [Gov.] Snyder can get the legislature to add his requested \$76.9 million for higher education, Michigan still should be greatly embarrassed that it spends more on warehousing criminals in state prisons (\$2 billion) than on public universities (\$1.5 billion)."

Declining state support has had a major impact on Ferris State University, which has experienced record enrollments. In 2001, state support was \$6,094 per student. In 2013, that figure had declined to \$3,383. There can be no doubt that this is a major disinvestment in educating our future engineers, health-care providers and innovators.

Over the years many promises have been made to the state's universities. When higher education took the lion's share of reductions in the 2011 budget, Governor Snyder told us he would work to restore that funding, and he is.

This move to restore funding lost during our state's economic downturn is a much-needed investment in our future. Ferris State University shares the Governor's positive vision and looks

forward to continuing to partner with state officials to produce more graduates – especially in critical skill areas – who will be the catalysts for Michigan’s new economy and future opportunity.