Several states are preparing to use *Measuring Up 2000*, the 50-state higher education “report card” published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education last fall, as part of their efforts to press for policy changes, interviews with higher education officials in a dozen states indicate.

“We are rather shamelessly exploiting the report card for our own purposes,” said Gordon K. Davies, president of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. “The performance indicators in the report card are very close to those we are using.”

Davies hopes that *Measuring Up 2000* will help the council devise strategies to increase the number of Kentuckians who pursue education beyond high school, and to begin to think about postsecondary educational opportunities as a whole, not just in terms of traditional two-year and four-year degrees.

In Oklahoma, state officials plan to use *Measuring Up* to further the goals of the state’s “Brain Gain 2010” campaign, an effort to increase Oklahoma’s rather low college participation rate. The report card notes that about 35 percent of Oklahoma high school freshmen are enrolled in college within four years, compared to a national average of 54 percent. This earned the state a C in participation, one of five categories graded in *Measuring Up*.

In late January, the Oklahoma State Regents and the Knight Higher Education Collaborative held a two-day “roundtable” in Oklahoma City that focused on the report card findings and efforts to increase the state’s college-going rate.

“We view the report as an opportunity to get key decision-makers together to work on some of our weak areas,” said Ruth Ann Dreyer, vice president of the National Center, as a participant.

“The National Report Card is only one, rather broad assessment of higher education in Missouri but it is a valuable tool for pointing out areas where we need to improve,” Governor-elect Bob Holden told the conference. “For example, Missouri is below the national average of college-going rates. That must change. Our new-century economy demands that Missourians are ready to compete, and more education and training will give them that edge.”

Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center, said he was gratified by the initial response to *Measuring Up 2000*.

“This is a long-term, challenging agenda for the states,” he said. “We’re pleased to see so many states already using the report card as part of their strategies for improvement.”

Not everyone was happy about this first attempt to evaluate national higher education performance on a state-by-state basis.

Chancellor Stephen Portch of the University System of Georgia, questioned the D+ his state received in affordability, saying it should have been A+ because of Georgia’s much-copied HOPE Scholarship program, which pays full college tuition and fees for all high school graduates with a B average or better.

(For more on this point, see Portch’s article on page 7A of this special supplement to *National CrossTalk*, and the explanation of Georgia’s affordability grades that appears in a “Q and A” on page 2A.)

Several state officials complained that the report used “old data,” and claimed their states had made significant progress since the information was collected that formed the basis for the report card’s grades.

Callan and other Center staff members who worked on *Measuring Up* said most of the information came from 1998, the most recent year for which reliable public data for all 50 states were available.

Another criticism was that the report contained little that was new or surprising.

“If I had to say one thing that sums up what higher education officials in southern states think of the report, it would be, ‘this only confirms what we already know, and we’re already working on it,’” said Mark Musick, president of the Southern Regional Education Board. “So the question now is, ‘How does the Center push the ball downhill?’”

Callan said he did not expect *Measuring Up 2000* to come as startling news to state higher education leaders, who should be well aware of conditions in their states. But he expressed hope that the report card will help states build on their strengths and correct weaknesses.

That is the way Texas is planning to use the report. “We consider the report card to be strong outside verification of what Texas is already doing,” said Don Brown, the state’s commissioner of higher education.

“It points to the areas we need to strengthen.”

James S. Clarke, deputy commissioner for higher education in Louisiana, said *Measuring Up* will be helpful even though the state received F grades in both participation and preparation, and these grades produced what Clarke called “some pretty unfavorable headlines” around the state.

“We think it provides a good entrée for us in the Legislature,” Clarke said. “It will be helpful in persuading legislative committees what must be done to solve some of these problems.”

New Mexico plans a “New Mexico-specific” follow-up to the report card, according to Bruce Hamlett, executive director of the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education. This will be a collaborative effort involving the commission, the New Mexico Business Roundtable for Educational Excellence and the National Center.

Hamlett said the goal of this six-to-nine-month project is to produce a plan that will enable New Mexico to build on the strengths, and improve the weaknesses, that were identified in *Measuring Up*. The state received a B in affordability, a B- in participation, a C in benefits, a D- in completion and a D- in preparation.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education converted the report card’s letter grades to numbers and concluded that Illinois’ 88.8 was the highest score in the nation. (Connecticut was second, at 88.2, and New Jersey third, at 88, according to these calculations.)

Illinois received A’s in preparation, participation and affordability but only a C+ in completion, which means the state has had only mediocre success in making sure students complete their degree programs. The Board of Higher Education is expected to appoint a commission of campus presidents, representing two- and four-year institutions, public and private, to study that problem.

The National Center had hoped to grade states in a sixth category—student learning—but found the data lacking for most states and decided to give each state an “Incomplete” in this area.

“The decision not to award a letter grade in student learning is the right one because there are no common benchmarks that would allow meaningful state-to-state comparisons,” Peter Ewell, a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, wrote in *Measuring Up 2000*.
Questions and Answers about Measuring Up 2000

These are some of the questions that have been asked frequently since publication of Measuring Up 2000:

Doest Measuring Up 2000 only take into account need-based financial aid?

No. In the Affordability category, the indicator called “ability to pay” accounts for all student financial aid (need-based and merit-based) provided by the state, by the federal government (Pell Grants) and by colleges and universities (institutional aid). The total of all three types of student aid are subtracted from college expenses (tuition plus room and board) in calculating the percent of family income required to attend the various types of colleges and universities in the state.

For example, in Georgia, the HOPE scholarships are included in the amount of financial aid subtracted from college expenses. The HOPE program improves Georgia’s performance for some but not all income groups in the state. HOPE scholarships benefit students primarily from middle to higher income levels; lower income families do not benefit and the ability to pay measure looks at the affordability for all families in the state. (Note: Due to a recent change in HOPE, Pell Grant recipients now are eligible to apply. This could change Georgia’s performance on the ability to pay measure in subsequent editions of Measuring Up.)

States also are assessed on strategies to make college affordable, whether the policy focus is on low tuition or state need-based financial aid programs. These indicators are referred to as “strategies for affordability.”

Finally, the extent to which students in the state rely on loans is also considered in the state performance for affordability.

Our state has moderate tuition compared to the rest of the country, why did we get a poor grade in the affordability category?

College expenses (tuition plus room and board) are considered in relation to family income in each state. For instance, if a state has average tuition levels compared to the rest of the country, but the state’s population is generally poorer, even moderate levels of tuition may pose a problem in providing an affordable education for residents of that state, even when all forms of financial aid are included.

Four key factors are considered in determining a state’s performance on the ability to pay measure: 1) college expenses (tuition and room and board); 2) financial aid from the state, the federal government and from colleges and universities; 3) family income in each state; and 4) the type of institutions in which students enroll.

Why does the number of high school graduates going on to college appear to be lower than the number reported in some states?

In assessing participation in college, some states monitor how many high school graduates in a given year enroll in college the following fall. Measuring Up 2000, however, looks at ninth graders and whether or not they are enrolled in college four years later. This measure was chosen because it provides a broader picture of college participation of the young population of each state.

Why report only on five-year graduation rates? Many students enroll part-time or have good reasons for taking longer to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Five-year bachelor degree completion is reported for first-time, full-time students. This measure is fair when comparing bachelor’s degree completion for these students across the states. Some argue that colleges and universities can and should be doing a better job for these students.

The National Center also advocates the use of six-year and ten-year bachelor’s degree completion rates. A clearer picture of the completion category would result if these measures were added. However, the only available five-year bachelor’s degree attainment data considers just first-time, full-time students.

Some states have recently enacted measures intended to improve some of the very problems that Measuring Up 2000 revealed. Is this taken into account in the grading?

Only if these measures have resulted in improved performance. Measuring Up 2000 evaluates and compares results, not particular policies or efforts. However, if recent policy changes do improve state performance, this progress will be reflected in future editions of Measuring Up. The National Center recognizes that many states have taken important and promising steps towards improvement that are expected to raise performance. Several examples are cited in the Measuring Up 2000 article, “Some States to Watch: Recent Higher Education Initiatives” (pages 162-165).

Several states have more recent information on some of the indicators that was not reflected in Measuring Up 2000. Why?

While individual states sometimes have more current data, only information that is collected on a national basis can be used if states are to be fairly compared, evaluated and graded. That is, the information must be collected at the same time with the same methodology by a nationally credible agency or organization. Measuring Up 2000 uses the most recent national data available, mostly from 1998. However, the National Center encourages states to augment Measuring Up 2000 with the best state specific information available and to press the appropriate agencies, particularly the US Department of Education, for more timely collection and publication of national higher education data.

The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education

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Source: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. For information about grading, performance measures, and sources, please refer to the full report or visit www.highereducation.org.

How We Grade

Step 1: Identify the indicators

Indicators, or measures, are selected for each performance category—preparation, participation, affordability, completion and benefits. All indicators used in Measuring Up 2000:

• are important in assessing performance in the category,
• are collected regularly by reliable, public sources that follow accepted practices for data collection,
• are comparable across the 50 states, and,
• measure performance results.

Step 2: Weight indicators

Each indicator is assigned a weight based on its importance to the performance category.

Step 3: Identify top states for each indicator

State results on each indicator are converted to a scale of 0 to 100, using the top five states as the benchmark. This establishes a high, but achievable, standard of performance.

Step 4: Identify best state for each category

State scores for each category are calculated from the state’s results on the indicators and the indicators’ weights. These category scores are converted to a scale of 0 to 100 based on the performance of the top state in the category.

Step 5: Assign grades

Grades are assigned based on the category scores, using a grading scale common in many high school and college classes:

A = 90–100; B = 80–89; C = 70–79; D = 60–69; F = below 60

For additional grading information, please visit the web site www.highereducation.org.
Measuring Up 2000 is Released at the National Press Club

The event, held on November 30 in Washington, D.C., was attended by educators, politicians, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s board of directors and news media representatives. Some of their comments:

“Measuring Up 2000 shows that the benefits from higher education in America are unevenly, and often unfairly, distributed, and they do not reflect the distribution of talent in American society. And, in particular, they have not been made available to people of color, and from different nations, and people in poor circumstances. So, although we have done well, we are not doing nearly well enough.”
—North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt

“It is important to read this report. It is important to study it and to use it as a guide for improvement. Use it to develop an agenda that makes sense for your particular state. As a former governor and state senator I can tell you it contains exactly the kind of information that can help states to mobilize in order to improve higher education and expand educational opportunities.”

“I firmly believe that in this information age, every single American should get at least two years of postsecondary education. In my view, we must replace the old idea of K–12 of the 20th century with a K–14, K–16 model in the 21st century.”
—U.S. Secretary of Education Dick Riley

“I know there will be some who will say, ‘Why did you give grades? Is that showmanship?’ Well, it is. One of the things I learned in public policy is that you have to get the public’s attention. And I suspect that when people see grades for their states, that is going to make them stop and think.”
—Governor Jim Edgar of Illinois

“Over the last few decades, the gap between rich and poor, if you will, is growing wider and wider, and we can certainly see that it is highly related to education and advanced education.”
—Roger Enrico, president and CEO of PepsiCo

“This report, for the first time in history, really demystifies higher education. It is going to help legislatures to focus on performance issues and compare their state’s results with other states, knowing that it can be done. I would recommend this to every legislator in the country, especially those who deal with higher education issues.”
—Howard “Pete” Rawlings, member, Maryland House of Delegates

“It is true that there is a gap (between races), and that remains a national embarrassment and a challenge for us, but the fact that gap differs so much across states is what tells us that policymaking matters.”
—Uri Treisman, director of the Charles A. Dana Center, and professor of mathematics, at The University of Texas

“I certainly hope that these findings integrated into Measuring Up 2000 will begin to erode the prevailing stereotype throughout much of America today that both lack of preparation for college and participation in college can be traced directly to parents who do not sufficiently value higher education. That is simply not the case.”
—Debra Wadsworth, executive director of Public Agenda

“The National Center is in the business of improvement, and I want to stress, this is just a means to an end, one big step along the way, and we are committed not only to doing Measuring Up in 2002 and 2004, but working with states and policy leaders around the country for improvement... It is improvement in higher education that makes it more accessible and more effective for the American public in all of our states.”
—Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Debra Wadsworth, executive director of Public Agenda.
The admission that we in higher education cannot provide sound information about whether or not students are learning was staggering.

How Does Measuring Up 2000 Measure Up?

New state-by-state report card for higher education is a cause for celebration

By William T. Gormley, Jr.

William T. Gormley, Jr. is a professor of government and political science at Georgetown University.

In recent years, we have witnessed an explosion of organizational report cards measuring the performance of public schools, hospitals, HMOs, airlines and other organizations that deliver public services to consumers. Report cards that assess the performance of state and local governments also have begun to appear. Most of these focus on an area of special interest to the raters, such as economic development or the wellbeing of children.

The release of a new state-by-state report card for higher education by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is a cause for celebration. With excellent graphics and thorough documentation, Measuring Up 2000 highlights the strengths and weaknesses of individual states.

A common weakness, highlighted by the report, is the absence of good data on how successful colleges and universities are in educating their students. More striking than this commonality, however, is the extraordinary variety of state responses to the challenges of higher education. For example, California, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina and Utah have taken significant steps to make higher education affordable to their residents, while Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island have lagged far behind. Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont can boast of high completion rates for their college and university students, while Alaska and Nevada have struggled in this area.

The best organizational report cards meet six criteria: validity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, relevance, reasonableness and functionality. Measuring Up 2000 is highly relevant, as it addresses issues of undeniable importance, such as the capacity of all citizens to share in the economic benefits that flow from higher education. It is eminently reasonable in terms of cost, because it...
I applaud the efforts of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education with their recently released Measuring Up 2000 report. This first state-by-state report card on higher education will assist the nation and states with assessing and addressing critical areas of providing students the preparation needed to achieve, succeed and graduate from colleges that are affordable and effective in producing an educated citizenry.

A bright future for the nation requires a well-educated workforce, particularly one with postsecondary education. Our continued transformation into a wired global economy demands that we educate our students to succeed in a highly competitive market. As such, the economic climate of our states will be the beneficiaries of our investment.

As the Commissioner for Higher Education in Indiana, I have been intent on maintaining a high level of collaboration with our state’s K–12 education system. Such coordination is vital for establishing high academic standards that not only prepare students for successful completion of high school, but also provide students with the necessary preparation for college acceptance and the rigors of college academic work.

Another vital component for educational improvement on a system-wide level is through a state’s legislation. In Indiana, our governor and state legislators have been deeply involved in the development of higher education initiatives. Such initiatives set high standards and assessments, provide the foundation for a more accountable education system where all of the state’s education policies and programs are coordinated, and articulate a clear set of performance goals, measures and expectations.

For several states, including Indiana, the report card has been timely in relation to these recent educational reform policies. The basic dialogue within our state has revolved around the six areas addressed within the Measuring Up 2000 report. The report verifies that we are on the right track. It also provides an additional indicator of progress to a state’s current or developing assessment and accountability system.

Although there will be dissent concerning the types of indicators used within each core area, and the interpretation of the supporting statistics, one important aspect of the report cannot be overlooked: It has provided a national as well as a state-level context for discussing higher education. People now are talking more and more about the success and challenges within our colleges and universities.

A heightened public awareness will provide increased opportunities to pursue improvement in areas vital to the success of our students. Measuring Up 2000 provides a unique opportunity to assess our current state of higher education, indicating areas of success as well as areas needing improvement.

Looking toward the next report cards (to be released in 2002 and 2004), I offer the following recommendations to assist states in achieving successful progress. First, the current release effectively set the goal high in terms of the expectations for earning an A grade. I recommend maintaining continued next page
The national center for Public Policy and Higher Education has offered the leadership of our nation and our states a great service in its new report, Measuring Up 2000. The report is timely, appropriate, stimulating, alarming, targeted, balanced and perhaps too polite.

The central point of the report is that the complex system of American higher education is not performing up to its claims, nor to the level of excellence that will be required to maintain a competitive place in a rapidly changing world economy, or to maintain a stable society at home. We must cease to be so self-protective in addressing this challenge.

In spite of its sobering and challenging messages, the report has received muted coverage in the media. In many nations of the world, such a report would result in a national uproar and the loss of face for political leadership. If we continue to ignore recent signals, including those in this report, we will do so at our own political, economic and social peril.

For a number of decades the United States has been comforted in the blind confidence that we have the finest higher education “system” in the world. Unless we truly believe that all of our institutions perform as well as Harvard, Stanford, Michigan and Berkeley, then we must ask whether we consciously resist working hard enough to make it so. The measures in Measuring Up 2000 strongly indicate that the patterns of higher education success vary greatly from state to state, probably from institution to institution, and that there is great resistance to assessing them.

Our competition worldwide is energized, organized and committed. The announcement last year that the United States now ranks behind Norway, Great Britain and the Netherlands in the production of undergraduate degrees per capita should be an alarm for those who do not believe that the United States has competition in higher education.

Measuring Up 2000 is an important wakeup call to the leadership of our states and nation. If we are to successfully compete in the future, we will need an honest national discussion and a realignment of state and federal priorities to make all of our institutions more competitive and aligned to economic and social needs.

The conclusion in this report that the benefits of higher education are “unevenly and often unfairly distributed” is at odds with the political rhetoric of the last 30 years. We must address the fact that we are mortgaging the future of our children through government, consumer and student debt that together will create its own future economic pressures.

While the individual benefits of a higher education are indeed both real and significant, we are requiring our young people to borrow more from their future income than any other generation in our history. Our resistance to financial planning for college, especially among the affluent, and our continuing demands for additional subsidies for higher income families, will be self-defeating if the result is to significantly expand the gulf between those who succeed and those who do not in our economy and our society.

As the consistent “Incomplete” for all states in the report card surely suggests, it is time to place a new emphasis on measuring the results of both individuals and institutions. And, they must be measured against rigorous, qualitative standards reflecting our global competition and the ever-changing needs of both our society and our economy.

We have much work to do together. Let us spend our efforts trying to meet our challenges rather than arguing about the validity of the judgments that this report contains.

I love the report card. I am taken with its simplicity, the fact that it focuses on six universally agreed upon goals for higher education. There is no state that doesn’t wish for its young people to be well prepared for college, to attend college in significant numbers, to be able to afford college, to learn in college, to graduate from college, and to benefit from their education. The report card has managed to quantify these goals with indicators that cross all fifty state boundaries. In this sense, the report card is also comprehensive.

It is additionally easy to understand. Each state is compared in the six areas and given a grade. The grades are on the same scale we use for our students, A–F. This allows anyone—governor, legislator, student, parent, college administrator, faculty member or reporter—to examine and understand how well his or her state is doing.

The report card is useful as well. Any state can now compare how well it is doing in contrast to both its own goals and the other 49 states. This means a state can target areas for improvement and locate models, states with A’s in the area, to look to for direction.

I suppose the biggest surprise is that a comprehensive, systematic, data based, state by state report card has not existed before. (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education makes it look so easy.) Each year this nation invests hundreds of billions of dollars in colleges and universities. It is about time we stop and ask how well each state is doing.

The other surprise in the report card is the “Incomplete” given in the area of learning. This is a powerful warning. With all the money and effort we are investing in postsecondary education, we have no idea what students are learning. This needs to be a priority for the states, perhaps a project to be undertaken by the U.S. Department of Education or by the states jointly through an organization like the Education Commission of the States.

I am pleased that the report card will be issued every two years so that it will be a part of most governors’ cases for election or reelection.

There are a few items I would suggest for future versions of the report card. The six criteria by which states were measured do not seem to be discreet. For instance, there would seem to be a close connection between affordability and participation, though this is not obvious in the ratings given different states. How is it possible for a high-cost state to have a high participation rate? The real question is: Does each of the six variables really measure a different thing?

The variable called “benefits” seems soft. It measures things like voting rates, which may have more to do with the salience of issues and the positions of candidates in a given state than education levels. The “benefits” indicators—civic, economic, achievement levels and adult skills—seem a hodgepodge of stuff, and are less convincing than the others. I would like to see “benefits” strengthened.

The report card also looked, where possible, at race and income gaps in attendance and graduation. It would be very useful to expand this and perhaps consider creating a seventh variable dealing with “equity.”

As for the immediate future, my greatest fear is that the report card, like much of the education news, could be a story that lasts only a few days. The measure of the report card’s success is in the action taken by states, the degree to which improvement is made in postsecondary education. This requires that the report card be kept before the public and the policymakers in each state.

In any case, I offer my thanks to the National Center for giving our nation a wonderful gift.
A Herculean Effort

Though thoughtfully done, the report tends to be a tad deceptive

By Stephen R. Portch
Stephen R. Portch is chancellor of the University System of Georgia.

A major challenge for the study’s architects will be to respond thoughtfully and energetically to the critiques that their findings are sure to provoke.

That having been said, however, the report tends to be a tad deceptive. Let’s start with the title (or, to be more precise, the subtitle). As with any good romance novel, it captures attention. But this really was not a “Report Card for Higher Education.” First, it included all postsecondary education (two-year colleges, technical schools, public colleges and universities, and independent colleges and universities). Second (having split that semantic hair), it really and truly was a report card on comprehensive education conditions in a state (and, arguably, social conditions). If students in a state were poorly “prepared,” then “participation,” “completion” and “benefits” were likely to suffer. While this reinforces a critical message about the importance of preparation, it almost inevitably dooms and compounds the rest of the grades.

Another deceptive element is the apparent objectivity. Lots of numbers, colored bar charts, and multiple categories lend credence to objectivity. Yet, as anyone who has graded anything knows, subjectivity lurks just below the surface. For example, the decision to grade against the “top states” rather than the average makes a difference, especially in underscoring the gap between the top and the bottom. While perfectly legitimate, this is a value judgement that makes a difference.

A value judgement that completely undermined the report’s credibility in Georgia—the state that birthed the merit-based HOPE program—was the decision to base “affordability” largely on needs-based aid. In the state that birthed HOPE (a merit-based program), the decision resulted in a D+ for affordability. That simply didn’t ring true for the over 100,000 students this year (and their parents) who are paying no tuition or mandatory fees. A simple cross-referencing with the report’s own very useful public opinion poll should have raised doubts with the authors about the validity of the grade. A mere 15 percent of Georgians said the price of college was out of reach, versus 24 percent nationally. The five states that got A’s on affordability from the authors didn’t necessarily get them from their citizens: California (24 percent), Illinois (26 percent), Minnesota (17 percent), North Carolina (25 percent) and Utah (23 percent). Such inconsistencies deserve further study and should result in changes—or a more explicit declaration of values.

So, what grade would I give the report card? Its own favorite grade: “Incomplete,” with the full understanding that most of us would trade our first grade in college for an I.

A Useful Tool

Higher education is well-served by national report card

By Philip J. Rock
Philip J. Rock is chairman of the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

T HE NATIONAL CENTER for Public Policy and Higher Education has performed a valuable service in devising the first-ever report card evaluating higher education on a state-by-state basis. The national report card will prove to be a useful tool for accountability, for policymaking and for advocacy. The virtues of the report card are many, but three stand out:

1) It measures performance based on variables that are relevant to the public’s perception of the purposes of higher education—the affordability of a college degree, participation in postsecondary education, college completion rates and such.

2) It gives states realistic benchmarks to shoot for—the top grades go to the top-performing states in each category, and other states are judged against the top performers, thereby creating achievable standards.

3) It is presented in a format familiar to the public, public officials and press, thus ensuring it will gain widespread attention and be readily understood.

The report card has been thoughtfully prepared and skillfully crafted, but like the first version of anything, it is not without flaws. Perhaps the most glaring of those deficiencies is the absence of critical data from many states—Illinois included—on some of the key indicators of performance. The National Center and states should work together to ensure that gaps in data will be plugged by the time the next report card on higher education, due in 2002, is prepared.

In addition, although it is generally true that the National Center chose valid performance measures, at least in some categories the variables used for making judgments were not uniformly informative. For example, the weakest of the five graded categories was the benefits of higher education, particularly in calculating the economic and civic advantages resulting from higher education. Recently, an in-depth continued next page
higher education funding at the state level are at risk. Although higher education has the option of raising tuition to fill the gap, much needed increases in keep up with peer institutions. Higher education is competing with corrections, K–12 education, and are working two or more jobs to make ends meet. For them, what counts is bringing new and better jobs to their home town. Connecting that need to higher education tax expenditures is a stretch. So how do I read Measuring Up 2000 in this context? First of all, I want to know how we did in comparison. How do we rate with our surrounding states? I don’t care so much about the costs, but I care a lot about North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho, because they are a fair comparison. Who is paying for what part of higher education? How is the state benefiting economically from its higher education institutions? What does the cost of higher education mean to Montana families? Are we keeping up technologically and academically in our global environment? And finally, how can I use this information to convince legislators that higher education spending is our best investment in a stronger economic future in Montana?

As a legislator, I can’t point to direct returns to Montana’s economy from higher education indicated in this report. I’m not sure what the criteria mean in measuring this factor. And with regard to maybe the biggest piece—whether students are learning anything—there are no data and no conclusion.

How can I use this report? As a legislator who supports higher education, in a rural state where its value is questioned by many, I’d like to use this report to encourage my colleagues to fund higher education at a greater level of state dollars. But what is my case? How do I tie affordability to economic benefit in the form of better jobs in our state, to the state’s need for increased levels of funding? Has the report been widely circulated? Will it be part of our legislative discussions around higher education? I need to know more.

There is potential here for benchmarks that will help Montana with difficult decisions around higher education. We need to know how we measure up regionally and nationally. But now the real work begins. Educators, policymakers, students and parents all must bring this report into discussions about where we go from here. We must question the criteria and flesh out the data we have received here. We need to ask ourselves what we want from higher education and what we’re willing to pay to receive it. I look forward to using this report to stimulate such discussions. And when our legislature convenes I will hope the report is in every legislator’s desk.

As a legislator who supports higher education, can I use this report to encourage my colleagues to fund higher education at a greater level of state dollars?

A Fair Comparison
We need to know how we measure up regionally and nationally
By Emily Stonington
Emily Stonington is a state senator from Bozeman, Montana.

MONTANA, a vast geographic area with less than a million people, and an economy that is transitioning from natural resource based to service based. More than half of Montana’s legislators never have served before, due to term limits.

The Montana University System is requesting an increased appropriation of $500 per student to keep up with peer institutions. Higher education is competing with corrections, K–12 education, Medicaid providers, foster families, public health departments and local governments for these dollars. Although higher education has the option of raising tuition to fill the gap, much needed increases in higher education funding at the state level are at risk.

Montana’s economy is struggling to keep up with national trends in new jobs, better wages and stronger infrastructure. I believe that education and training beyond high school are prerequisites for employment in the new economy. I believe our university system is among the bright lights to guide us toward the technological world of the future.

But many Montanans view the world from a more rural, less global perspective. Many Montanans are suffering from lost jobs in resource extraction, and are working two or more jobs to make ends meet. For them, what counts is bringing new and better jobs to their home town. Connecting that need to higher education tax expenditures is a stretch.

so how do I read Measuring Up 2000 in this context? First of all, I want to know how we did in comparison. How do we rate with our surrounding states? I don’t care so much about the costs, but I care a lot about North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho, because they are a fair comparison. Who is paying for what part of higher education? How is the state benefiting economically from its higher education institutions? What does the cost of higher education mean to Montana families? Are we keeping up technologically and academically in our global environment? And finally, how can I use this information to convince legislators that higher education spending is our best investment in a stronger economic future in Montana?

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