

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Board of Regents  
**From:** Board Office  
**Subject:** Report of the Public Policy Task Force  
**Date:** September 1, 2004

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**Recommended Actions:**

1. Receive the report and accept it as the final report of the task force, as outlined in the original Board charge to the group.
2. Endorse the recommended priorities for the Regents 2005 public policy agenda.
3. Endorse the recommended approach to seeking further improvements in communications and outreach activities.

**Executive Summary:**

The task force held additional meetings in August after preparation of its initial report to the Board on public affairs and state relations. Several topics beyond those in the earlier report, including the broad outline of a proposed Regents 2005 public policy agenda, and communications and outreach efforts, emerged at those meetings. This report describes those recommendations.

The task force had lengthy discussions regarding a proposed Regents 2005 public policy agenda, with a clear preference for an ambitious but highly focused agenda. As a result of such discussions and in light of the Regents' strategic priorities of educational quality and public accountability, a consensus emerged around the following priorities for legislation and incremental increases in state appropriations.

**Priorities:**

1. A four-year plan for institutional transformation, educational excellence, and moderating student tuition increases at the universities. This plan would have three key elements, consistent with the Board's proposed policy changes on tuition.
  - a. A request of the state for a Regent program of matching funds at a rate of \$2 state matched to \$1 university reallocation to a maximum state incremental investment of \$40 million annually and \$20 million reallocation maximum. The purpose of these funds is to begin public reinvestment in the operations budgets for enhancing quality of the public higher education enterprise and to provide incentive for university reprioritization and reallocation to areas of most strategic importance.

- b. Adoption of clear and consistent definitions by the Board in policy of reallocation for this purpose and acceptance by the state of those definitions.
  - c. An understanding with state officials that if the program is adopted and appropriations are funded at the requested level, there would be no intention to adopt supplemental tuition requests beyond base inflationary factor increases for resident undergraduates during the years of program operation.
  - d. While the special schools, with their smaller budgets and specialized functions, would not participate in the "transformational" program, the Board would continue to ask their educational excellence needs be met through state funding growth at a level comparable to that provided local K-12 schools through the foundation formula in the coming year.
2. A five-year plan to address the most significant deferred maintenance and fire safety needs of facilities on the campuses that impact the quality of the education and research activities and the safety of participants. This program would require a \$15 million state commitment for five years and a match of at least \$7.5 million annually from institutional operating funds for building repair and deferred maintenance in order to meet the most critical needs in this area. This would be the only state capitals funding request anticipated from the Regents in the upcoming legislative session for FY 2006.
  3. A non-appropriations request for relief from numerous statutory and administrative state mandates that impede the Regents flexibility in governance, require unnecessary extra staff work or reporting that results in inefficiencies, and which are obsolete or currently serve no critical strategic purpose. Such items hamper the ability of the Regents and the institutions to take actions deemed advisable to focus on key priorities.

Additionally, task force members agreed that beyond the three initiatives recommended above, the Board had a strategic interest in supporting three other anticipated proposals that will originate from other agencies. The first is the recommendation from the Iowa Department of Economic Development to fund the Battelle recommendations related to the biosciences. The others are recommendations from the Iowa College Student Aid Commission to fund the state College Work Study program and the Iowa Grant program.

The task force directed staff to detail and refine these priorities and present them as appropriate to the Board for action. (The operations budget and capitals requests as directed by the task force are included in agenda items 4 and 5 -- State Appropriations Requests for FY 2006 and 5-year Capital Plans -- since they are required to be submitted to the state by October 1. Agenda item 7 contains policy recommendations on reallocations definitions per 1b above. The additional items will be part of an overall 2005 legislative agenda item at the next Board meeting.)

**Communications and Outreach:**

Relative to the issue of improving the overall external communications of the Regent enterprise, the task force determined the management of the multiple communications activities on the campuses was a complex area and one that the institution heads should be encouraged by the Board to look at aggressively in terms of potential process improvements in the coming year.

The task force also believes that Board leadership and key staff, and the institution heads should give more attention to refinement of a clear and simple Regent enterprise-wide message to be reinforced in existing communications opportunities.

Relative to questions about “outreach” programs conducted by the institutions, the task force determined that some positive steps have been taken in recent years but the level of activity, participation, and coordination still fell short of expectations. The Board, through the new Director of Public Affairs, should continue to work with institutional officials on improvements consistent with those goals in the coming year.

**Background:**

In May 2004, the Board approved appointment of a public policy task force consisting of Regents Forsyth, Downer, and Neil, and the Executive Director. The Task Force was charged with examination of the Board’s structure, policy, and procedures, as well as the role of Board members, staff, and institutional officials in government relations, public outreach, and related matters. The task force was also asked to consider initiatives for the Board to pursue with state and federal officials in the coming year. The task force was to complete its work and make recommendations to the Board no later than September 2004.

An initial set of recommendations, largely related to structure and staffing of public affairs and state relations, was presented to the Board and approved at a special telephonic meeting on August 24, 2004.

**Analysis:**

The three outlined priorities make up the final set of recommendations:

- Relative to the substance of public policy priorities for 2005, the task force was clear that the top budget priority was for educational quality and that the top non-budget priority was for relief from unnecessary state mandates.
- Task force members also were clear that the enterprise would fully participate in being a part of necessary change through aggressive internal reallocations matched to increased state support.
- Third, the task force recommendations indicate a willingness to limit student price increases if additional state support is forthcoming.

Initial task force discussions led to a conclusion that an overall review of the Board policies, procedures, and structures was in order, beyond the scope of public policy. The members agreed that in some areas of Board operations, a greater delegation of authority to institutions might be in order, whereas in others, greater centralization made sense. In consideration of the Board strategic priorities, particularly the goal of public accountability, the area of public policy and public affairs was one where a greater degree of centralized authority appeared to the task force to make more sense.

In terms of the issue of communications management — e.g., the oversight of staff producing publications — greater coordination did not imply more centralization at the Board or Board Office level. The task force was of the opinion, however, that more coordination within the institutions was an issue that institution heads should actively explore in the coming months.

On the other hand, the task force determined there should be an enhanced role for the Board leadership, working with institution heads and key Board staff, in defining a more crisp and clear enterprise-wide “message”, and with those individuals and the full Board, in disseminating it.

In terms of outreach efforts, the task force agreed such communications should remain institutionally-based. These efforts could benefit from synergies of greater coordination as to be provided through the new Director of Public Affairs working with the institution heads, the Board and the executive director.

  
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