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OHIO BOARD OF REGENTS OFFERS BOLD LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Ohio Board of Regents offered state policymakers several bold ideas which Regents believe will improve affordability, accountability and efficiency of higher education. The Regents welcome an open and thorough public discussion of these ideas for the benefit of current and future generations of Ohioans.

The draft language includes proposed changes to the general powers and duties of the Board of Regents for additional authority such as setting tuition policy, withdrawing degree/program approval and consolidating academic programs; proposed changes to the appointment of the Chancellor to allow the Governor to make the selection; and proposed changes in the schedule of appointments for Board members to allow the Governor more say, more quickly in who serves on the Board.

“These proposed changes are intended to address concerns about Ohio higher education, especially in the areas of affordability, accountability and efficiency,” said Donna M. Alvarado, chair of the Board of Regents. “It has become clear during our deliberations that the current higher education structure and authority granted to the Board are no longer adequate to achieve desired outcomes for Ohio.”

“The vision of the Ohio Board of Regents is a higher education system which affords opportunities for all Ohioans who aspire to an education beyond a high school diploma and which contributes to a vibrant economic future for our state.”

“We believe this important statewide responsibility requires an independent citizen board which can span the individual interests of Ohio’s institutions and which has the necessary operational authority to achieve both immediate and long-term goals.

“We welcome a strong partnership with the Ohio General Assembly and Governor Ted Strickland and will work together to make this vision a reality for our people.”

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The Ohio Board of Regents is the coordinating body for higher education in the state. Created in 1963 by the General Assembly, the 11-member public board has a direct, non-governing relationship with all of Ohio’s colleges and universities.

A Guide to Proposed Legislative Language on the Responsibilities of the Ohio Board of Regents

Revised: February 8, 2007

Introduction

The vision of the Ohio Board of Regents is a higher education system that provides opportunities for all Ohioans who aspire to an education beyond a high school diploma while also contributing to a strong state economy. This long-term statewide responsibility requires an independent citizen board which can span the individual interests of Ohio's institutions and which has the operational authority necessary to achieve both immediate and long-term goals. In our conversations with the Governor, Speaker, Senate President, and other statewide policymakers regarding desired outcomes for our state, it has become clear to us that the current higher education structure and authority granted to the Board of Regents are no longer adequate for the task at hand. For these reasons, we propose the following changes to the Ohio Revised Code, whose purposes are summarized below.

General Comments

The draft language attached is presented in response to challenges from state leaders to present bold ideas to restrain tuition, increase accountability, and improve the delivery of services. The draft also includes ideas for change that Regents have clearly articulated in the past to address issues that limit the quality and efficiency of Ohio higher education. Although the Regents will continue to operate in a consultative and collaborative manner with the leaders of Ohio's colleges and universities, the draft language proposes additional authority in several areas to effect change and find solutions to the issues that so urgently face our state. The draft legislation covering the composition of the Board of Regents and its roles and responsibilities affects many different sections of the Ohio Revised Code making proposed changes technically complex. The staff of the Board of Regents will seek the advice of the Legislative Service Commission.

I. Appointment of Chancellor

The Regents recognize that the Governor has a strong interest in finding a Chancellor who could assist in aligning the resources of higher education to the needs of the state, and the Regents agree that the Governor should have an important role in the selection of a Chancellor. Whatever the nature of the appointing authority, the Regents think it imperative that the Chancellor serve at the direction of the Board. This arrangement ensures that critical functions such as program approval, institutional authorization, and analysis of higher education performance are isolated from the political process and remain the operational responsibility of an independent citizen board.

II. Setting Tuition Ranges for Public Colleges and Universities

Affordability is the issue most on the minds of students, families and legislators. In order to offer elected leaders a greater level of accountability on this issue and families more predictability to plan their finances, the Regents are requesting the responsibility and authority to set tuition ranges for public colleges and universities. In setting ranges, the Regents would take into account the different financial needs and missions of each public institution, including the level of state support provided.

III. Appointments to the Board of Regents

The Regents propose that appointments to the Board be restructured in a way that ensures a new Governor has the opportunity to name a member shortly after taking office. The existing arrangement leaves a long period before a first appointment can be made—in the case of

Governor Strickland, not until September of 2008. A remedy to this situation was proposed by the Commission on Higher Education and the Economy in 2004 but did not make its way into legislation. The proposal takes up that issue and mirrors the appointment process for public university and state community college trustees.

IV. Authority to Withdraw Degree Programs

In the early 1990s, the legislature granted the Regents the authority to withdraw funding from degree programs that the Board found to be unnecessarily duplicative. Following a thorough consultation with the universities on process, the Board made major changes in doctoral education in the state (13 programs had their state subsidy withdrawn, 51 others were restructured, and more than \$80 million has been redirected to other priorities). Experience since has shown that without the ability to withdraw an institution's authority to offer a degree, unnecessary duplication continues. To illustrate, the Regents recommended withdrawing funding from six of the eight doctoral programs in History offered in the state. That was done, but those six programs continue to operate with money drawn from other areas. To address this concern, on a number of occasions and as recently as last year, the Regents proposed extending their authority to include the right to close programs deemed unnecessarily duplicative.

V. Creating a Community College System

Ohio and national data demonstrate that community colleges are highly successful in increasing participation in higher education. Every community in the state should have access to the core components of a community college—low cost general/transfer education, an appropriate array of technical programs, and a strong workforce training effort. There are a variety of approaches that can be used to achieve this goal, employing the resources presently available in the system. The Regents would consult extensively in implementing needed changes, with an emphasis on thorough understanding of local conditions.

VI. Strengthening Statewide Consortia

Ohio has had tremendous success with statewide consortia that improve quality and save money. Examples are OhioLINK, the Ohio Supercomputer Center (OSC), the Ohio Learning Network (OLN), and the path-breaking fiber optic telecommunications network that is administered by OARnet. The Regents believe that additional synergies are possible in several areas, including healthcare benefits. These benefits represent one of the highest cost items at our institutions. If the purchasing power of the entire state system of public education institutions is combined, meaningful savings should be realizable. The important difference provided by a change in law is that an effort would not fail if a few institutions were unwilling to agree; instead, the Regents would have the authority to implement a solution. As with previous efforts of this kind, consortia would not be administered by Regents staff but would be managed by the users and employ a college or university as fiscal agent.

VII. Program Collaboration and Combinations

Additional authority is required to bring about regional combinations and collaborations for degree program content and shared use of facilities and personnel. More concentration of degree programs – particularly at the graduate level – is required to achieve distinction on a regional and national level. Funding constraints require that our public institutions develop more focused missions to assist the economy of their particular regions. The best solutions will come from the talented leaders within our institutions who are closest to these problems, but the impetus for change must come from outside. The Regents can be the catalyst for substantial improvements that are directed to the benefit of the state of Ohio and its people.