2017 State of Higher Education Address

Thank you, Dan, for your kind introduction and your service to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education—both as a valued member and as our current chairman.

It’s been my privilege to work alongside you and to benefit from your leadership and counsel. Your contributions to many organizations and your career with Cook Group have made Indiana a better place.

Cook Group has accepted the mantle of leadership, too... partnering with Ivy Tech Community College and local school districts to skill-up adults in the community. Faced with the challenge of filling middle-skill jobs, Cook created a program that addresses the mismatch between employee preparation and job demands by funding education and workforce training.

In some cases, Cook hires adults who lack a high school diploma, helps them earn their High School Equivalency, and then pays for them to get the certificates or degrees they need to advance and fill high-need positions within the company.

It’s a great example of a triple-win strategy: education for the employee, a skilled workforce for the employer, and a stronger economy for the state.

Much of what I will share with you today echoes these themes of adapting to changing times and strengthening connections between educators and employers for the benefit of our students and our state.

It is with that mission in mind that I’m pleased to welcome you, on behalf of our Commission, to the fifth annual State of Higher Education Address. Several of our Commission members are here with us today, and I’d like to ask them to stand and be recognized.

We know that Indiana’s path to success leads through higher education—whether that is a certificate, a degree or other workforce credential. Six years ago Indiana established the Big Goal of 60% of Hoosiers completing education beyond high school by 2025.

Raising our educational attainment level is hard work, but it must remain at the very top of our state’s agenda, a point Governor Holcomb highlighted in his recent State of the State Address.
Too many Hoosiers today lack these requisite skills, but we’re making progress. Indiana’s attainment needle has moved to 41% of Hoosiers with education beyond high school—that’s over 100,000 more adults with a postsecondary credential today.

While we still lag behind the national average, degree and certificate completion is improving. Indiana is tied for the fifth highest increase in associate degrees or higher since 2013.

There are other signs of progress, too.

Graduation rates and on-time completion are at an all-time high. More college students are on track to graduate by taking and completing at least 30 credits per year. And, more low-income and first-generation students are completing college than ever before.

These are encouraging results, but there’s still much work to do.

Over the next 10 years, Indiana will need roughly one million new skilled employees to replace retiring baby boomers and to fill the jobs we’re creating each year. Our answers to a few key questions will decide Indiana’s future as we move into our state’s third century.

Are we doing enough to cultivate and develop the talent that resides within our state?

How do we attract and retain talented individuals and innovative companies?

And...

Is our future more promising than our past?

It’s not a stretch to say that Indiana’s success and the well-being of our citizens depend on getting this right—preparing more people for the jobs of today and of the future.

Later on, I’ll introduce you to a few Hoosier successes, stories of personal resolve that must become a statewide movement that ensures students don’t just go to college—they graduate—while also bringing more adults back for further education and training.

Let me be clear: students aren’t in this alone. Our state leaders, including Governor Holcomb, Superintendent McCormick, Commissioner Braun and the members of the Indiana General Assembly are committed to advancing policies and practices that work for everyone.
In this dynamic economy, your first credential—whether that is a certificate or degree—will likely not be your last. The worker who needs a short-term certificate today may need a degree or other training tomorrow to keep up with ever-changing technologies.

A recent report by McKinsey & Company noted the increasing potential of automation and artificial intelligence to perform many tasks once reserved for humans. Their findings: Nearly half of work activities today could be automated using available technology... and the scales will continue to tilt as more jobs and business processes are redefined.

More evidence of the changes to come... an article last week in Chief Executive indicated that tasks performed by robots will rise from an average of 10% across manufacturing industries to nearly 25% by 2025.

We must prepare for these inevitable shifts that reduce the need for less educated employees by skilling up our workforce with high-demand certificates and degrees. All the evidence suggests that we need many more of both to sustain an economy that works for all Hoosiers. For many, success will require stacking several of these credentials over the course of their careers.

Our students—especially low-income and first-generation students—often lack even a basic understanding of the full range of career options, or they have outdated notions of what jobs look like today.

In *Reaching Higher, Delivering Value*, Indiana’s strategic plan for higher education, we call for more intentional career planning—starting early in elementary school and continuing through college completion.

Too many students, for instance, believe that a career in manufacturing means working in a hot, dirty and dangerous environment. The reality: Today advanced manufacturing employees are as likely to wear white lab coats as blue coveralls.

Similarly, many think a career in the tech sector is limited to computer programmers. The reality: Tech companies need managers and marketers as well as coders.

Addressing these gaps between student perception and reality requires more structured career exploration, work-based learning and candid discussions about individual strengths, aspirations and real-world expectations.

That’s why, in 2012, the Commission strengthened Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars program with new expectations for career exploration and workplace experience right alongside standards for academic preparation and college planning.
This year’s graduating Scholars will be the first high school class required to complete the Scholar Success Program. The result: More Scholars are on track to earn their Scholarship, putting us on track to outpace the historical average of students earning the 21st Century Scholarship.

Some schools are already taking steps to ensure that all their students—regardless of family income—complete these same expectations.

The strength of the 21st Century Scholars program today—and the many thousands of Hoosiers whose lives have been changed by the program over the past 26 years—are a fitting tribute to its architect, Stan Jones. As many of you know, Stan passed away this week after a long, hard-fought illness.

Stan was a great friend, a national thought leader and a tenacious champion for all students, especially low-income and first-generation students. I know that if Stan were with us today, he would want to steer our attention away from him and keep it squarely focused on the students.

In his honor, Stan’s family has created the Stan Jones Memorial Scholarship in support of 21st Century Scholars. Donations can be made online at CompleteCollege.org.

And so, I’m particularly pleased that we have with us Liya Ghiday, a 21st Century Scholar, a senior at North Central High School, and a mentee with Starfish Initiative—a local nonprofit that pairs Scholars with mentors in the community.

Liya has finished her Scholar Success Program requirements five months ahead of graduation, an experience that she found useful, especially in helping her understand the financial aid process and keeping her focused and organized. This coming fall, she will be attending Indiana University where she will major in neuroscience. She hopes to attend med school after she graduates. As a first-generation college student, she said that being a Scholar has meant everything to her ability to attend college.

Liya’s success—and the thousands of students like her across the state—mean everything to our state’s future.

Liya, we know you and so many other Scholars are going to do great things. Thank you for your hard work and for joining us today with your family—who couldn’t be prouder of you.

Clearly, more Hoosier students would benefit from these same experiences and expectations. That’s why, in 2017, the Commission will advocate that the Scholar Success Program be extended to all high school students.

Just this week we launched a new-and-improved version of our ScholarTrack system that seamlessly integrates all state financial aid programs and tracks student completion of the Scholar Success Program.
This fall, we intend to open the Scholar Success Program to all Hoosier students and connect ScholarTrack to other state resources like the Indiana Career Explorer. These upgrades will make it easier for more families and schools to keep their students on track.

Our students need academic preparation that’s closely aligned with their college and career plans. But, too often, students aren’t completing the right courses to be on target for college-level work or a good job.

I look forward to working with Superintendent McCormick and the State Board of Education to revisit Indiana’s high school diploma standards and their alignment with the expectations of employers and higher education.

Strengthening our diplomas means completing four years of high school math aligned with a meaningful career plan that provides students with both purpose and preparation.

Over the past five years, we’ve seen a 10 percentage-point improvement in the number of high school graduates who are college-ready. But, nearly 1 in 5 students still need remediation. And, we know that students who enter college needing remediation are far less likely to graduate.

We cannot afford to play those odds.

To some degree, it’s not surprising that students often aren’t equipped to meet employer expectations... many have never held a job at all, either in high school or college. Youth employment today is at an all-time low nationwide, and less than one-third of students have completed an internship or had a job during college.

It’s tempting to bemoan the state of affairs today or blame generational differences, but it’s more productive to take action. Educators and employers must join together to provide students with meaningful work experiences that complement their classroom learning.

Fortunately, there are signs of progress across Indiana....

Four years ago, Noblesville High School launched an internship program that has grown to include more than 100 local employers—many of which had been largely unknown to their students prior to this program.

On the postsecondary side, Ball State University offers numerous experiential learning opportunities—30 this semester alone. Recently, their Telecommunications department was honored by the General Assembly for a meth-prevention project in Delaware County.

We commend companies for making these opportunities possible, but the truth is that employers have as much to gain—if not more—than students.
Employers not only gain valuable help and first-class products and services from students, they’re building the next generation of employees at a fraction of the cost that comes with traditional recruitment, training and retention.

Nick Hoagland, Chief Operating Officer with Backhaul Direct—an Indianapolis-based logistics firm—knows this first hand.

Nick says, “For a long time, our perspective was—shouldn’t the schools be reaching out to us? Don’t they need internships? Really, that was the wrong perspective. We had to start taking ownership of this process.” Backhaul Direct now hosts interns year round, and several of their employees are former interns. Indiana must match more students and employers if we’re going to meet workforce needs.

We also know that the sooner students identify a career aspiration, the more likely they are to succeed in school.

With that in mind, I’m excited to announce a new partnership we’re launching this spring: Roadtrip Indiana.

Based on Roadtrip Nation, which has appeared nationally on PBS for more than a decade, Roadtrip Indiana is a first-of-its-kind partnership focused on a specific state. Roadtrip Indiana will... showcase the ever-evolving nature of our workforce, provide Indiana schools with career-focused curriculum and classroom resources, and highlight what our state has to offer to 70 million households nationwide.

We talk a lot about traditional college students—students who go straight to college after graduating high school and live on campus. But, the truth is, the term “traditional student” is outdated. In fact, only about one quarter of students fit that description. We must not forget about the million-plus adults in Indiana who need more education and training.

Our You Can. Go Back. program was launched a year ago to better support returning adults—the 750,000 Hoosiers with some college but no degree. That’s one-fifth of our working-age population.

In only one year, we’ve seen impressive results. With the help of direct outreach from the Commission, support from our colleges and the assistance of Indiana’s Adult Student Grant, more than 9,000 Hoosier adults have already re-enrolled in school.

It’s clearly working, and we must keep this momentum going to meet Indiana’s Big Goal.
But more than that, it’s about students—like Marc Brewer—who are working hard to better their lives. Marc, who joins us today, decided to return to school at Ivy Tech where he’ll graduate this May with a degree in Advanced Automation and Robotics Technology.

Working full time, being married, caring for a toddler and two teenagers, and beginning to teach introductory classes in his department at Ivy Tech, Marc said it’s been stressful at times. He’s stayed motivated throughout the process, however, taking three or four classes each semester. His nieces and nephews, along with other members of his family, now look to him for homework help and college advice.

Marc, helping more hardworking Hoosiers like you return to school will be essential to Indiana’s long-term success.

We understand that a two or four-year degree is not the best fit for everyone. Many Hoosiers need a shorter-term credential to get ahead.

In the past five years alone, Indiana has seen the number of certificates awarded increase by nearly one-third. But, there are thousands more Hoosiers whose fortunes would change with added education and training.

With that in mind, the Commission is pleased to be partnering with Governor Holcomb, the Department of Workforce Development and the legislature on a new program—the Workforce Ready Grant. It’s designed for the 1.4 million working-age Hoosiers who have a high school education or less and the thousands more who have some college credit but no degree or certificate.

On average, these Hoosiers have seen their wages and employment prospects shrink over the last 35 years, and their situation is more dire than ever.

They have bills to pay. They have people depending on them. They don’t have the luxury of time.

They need to complete a credential as quickly as possible for the increased earning potential that can change their lives and that of their loved ones.

Indiana is among the most generous states in need-based financial aid—5th nationally—but most of these programs were designed for full-time students and students who are pursuing an associate or bachelor’s degree.

The Workforce Ready Grant, currently under consideration by the General Assembly, will be a first-of-its kind opportunity in Indiana with a clear message for working-age adults.

If you enroll in a high-demand certificate program from Ivy Tech or Vincennes University, Indiana will make sure your costs are covered.
A parallel program by the Department of Workforce Development would also cover the cost of high-value non-credit certificates.

We must embrace more opportunities—like the Workforce Ready Grant—to adapt our approaches to the needs of working Hoosiers and employers.

Today I’m not here to make any fanciful predictions, but I can draw a few conclusions with absolute confidence and certainty.

#1...Hoosiers who complete higher levels of education will be far better off than those without it—especially when strong academics are complemented by relevant workplace learning.

#2... Employers who focus on creating—not waiting for—the talent they need by partnering with educators to provide work-and-learn experiences for students and continuing education for their employees will prosper. More employers must recognize these efforts for what they are... not simply community service or employee benefits, but deliberate investments in their own talent pipeline.

And #3...Higher education institutions that partner with employers to integrate academic and applied learning will offer the most relevant education. These institutions will reap the reward of increased enrollment in a new era where competency is king and value is the true currency.

Several years ago, the father of the theory of Disruptive Innovation, Professor Clayton Christiansen, included Higher Education on his list of industries that have resisted the forces of disruption... for more than 100 years!

But, now, he sees that technology has enabled a new cycle of disruptive innovation. Most enterprises have accepted that they must adapt to remain relevant. Higher education must, too.

The relative orderliness of “disruptive innovation” is going to be supercharged over the next decade as disruption and innovation are compounded by accelerating economic, social and technological change.

The world of education beyond high school has been a tranquil sea compared to what lies ahead. All around us are signs of change.

Like the half hour before a big summer storm, the air smells different, the wind feels different, the sky looks different. You can feel the creeping edges, explosive changes, tensions, and big opportunities.

What is the most important thing we can do to come out on top as we confront this watershed period of change?
Remain adaptable.

Each of us must be open to change, have a keen eye for opportunities that might advance our goals, be wary of that which seems too good to be true, but be enthusiastic about things that have never been done.

This future will mean different things to different players in the game.

For faculty, adapting means embracing technology and leading efforts to align what students learn in school with what they do in life. For institutions, it means breaking down barriers to innovation and new delivery models. For employers, it means developing not only the talent for today but preparing the workforce for the future. And, for students, it means planning for an ever-changing career—not just a first job.

So, here is my final prediction...

Those who grasp the importance of adaptability in uncertain times will thrive. Those who do not will be left behind.

Today we stand on the threshold of deciding our future as a state, depending on how we answer the questions I raised earlier.

Are we doing enough to cultivate and develop the talent that resides within our state? As long as we remain steadfast in our efforts to provide opportunities for all Hoosiers in a dynamic economy.

How do we retain and attract talented individuals and innovative companies? By developing a culture that values adaptability, educational attainment, and workforce preparation.

Is our future more promising than our past? Only if Indiana’s celebrated work ethic is matched by an equal commitment to quality education and job creation.

The only remaining question is whether we have the will, the sense of urgency and the commitment to take Indiana to the next level.

Our best hope—and our obligation—is to build the human capital for 21st Century demands.

I remain optimistic about our future, and on behalf of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, we stand ready to help all Hoosiers realize that promise.

Thank you.