



Solutions for Maryland's Future

By William E. Kirwan

Among the major elements needed for Solutions for Our Future to succeed are strong and sustained statewide efforts in support of the campaign. Imagine the power of 50 campaigns, all focused on advancing the goals of the national Solutions project.

This tremendous potential is what's driving our work in Maryland. The Solutions project has presented an opportunity for Maryland's community colleges, four-year public institutions, and four-year independent institutions to collaborate for the public good. During the past year, Maryland higher education has seized this opportunity to develop initiatives and raise our collective voice in support of Solutions for Our Future.

We have dubbed our statewide campaign Solutions for Maryland's Future. Leading the charge is a steering committee made up of Tina Bjarekull, president of the Maryland Independent College and University Association; Calvin Burnett, secretary of higher education; Jane O'Brien, president of St. Mary's College of Maryland; Earl Richardson, president of Morgan State University; H. Clay Whitlow, executive director of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges; and me as chancellor of the University System of Maryland (USM). (St. Mary's and Morgan State are the two public four-year institutions in the state that are not part of USM). Working with us is a committee of talented communications and government relations professionals from various sectors of Maryland higher education.

Currently, Solutions for Maryland's Future is focused on two major initiatives: a survey of Marylanders' attitudes and perceptions about higher education in the

state, and a listening tour. Both initiatives are designed to bring higher education—and the value it adds to quality of life across the board—to the forefront.

We are scheduled to have a final report on the survey results by mid-September. Thanks to the cooperative spirit generated by our campaign work, members of the Maryland higher education community

agreed, without hesitation, to pool resources to fund this vital research project. The results will provide a better understanding of the public perceptions that we must address in Maryland.

Our fall 2006 Solutions for Maryland's Future listening tour focuses on outreach to the business community. Maryland higher education has partnered with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation and the Governor's Workforce Investment Board to hold a series of events at campuses around the state. At each event, business leaders will offer their assessments of how higher education is meeting statewide workforce and economic development needs. At the same time, the tour will give higher education an extraordinary opportunity to communicate its role not only in workforce development, but also as a source of innovation and new ideas and as a key to global competitiveness.

Also in support of the campaign, we are maintaining a password-protected web site to provide information to our colleges and universities. As further evidence of the cooperation engendered by our statewide efforts, Prince George's Community College offered its web master to the project to develop and maintain the site. The site includes general campaign information, campus-specific information on how higher education benefits all of society, reports and statistics that support the campaign messages, and information about our statewide activities. We are promoting the site internally as a resource for speeches, presentations, and other communications.

Solutions for Maryland's Future has brought together the state's various higher education sectors to rally around a common goal: to reestablish higher education as a top public policy and public-funding priority. From the very beginning, we involved the various segments of the higher education community. During the past year, our work has engendered a productive level of cooperation among all sectors. Furthermore, we created and are maintaining a formal organizational structure. We communicate frequently about the campaign activities and progress. And, based on the findings of our survey and listening tour, we plan to develop even more initiatives.

In Maryland, we have structure, a willingness to cooperate and collaborate, and a deep commitment to Solutions for Our Future. The experience in Maryland reinforces my belief in the importance of each state implementing its own collective activities in support of this important national project. ■

The general public (40 percent) and opinion leaders (61 percent) identify **math, science, and technology skills** as the most important ingredients in **America's ability to compete** in the global economy.

—From *Keeping Our Edge: Americans Speak on Education & Competitiveness*, Educational Testing Service, 2006.

WILLIAM E. KIRWAN is chancellor of the University System of Maryland.