GRCC Environmental Scanning Report

By Institutional Research and Planning

This quarter’s report will cover topics that serve as a brief legislative update based upon a webinar presented by the AACC on October 9, 2013. The second part of the report will discuss an instrument called the Opportunity Index and an interesting trend revealed in its recent release.

Every article summary has a link to the actual article so that you may read in its entirety. If by chance the link leads to a locked article, the article is available upon request. Each section will contain article summaries as well as Possible Implications based upon the materials scanned.

Obama College Affordability Proposals

Summary: Probably the most radical ideas impacting community colleges comes from President Obama’s plan to link financial aid to college performance ratings. The ideas in the plan some new, some from earlier documents, would also promote innovation in higher education. Below are some excerpts from this article.

President Obama proposes to link student aid to new ratings of colleges | Inside High

WASHINGTON -- President Obama appears to be making good on his vow to propose a "shake-up" for higher education.

Early Thursday, he released a plan that would:

- Create a new rating system for colleges in which they would be evaluated based on various outcomes (such as graduation rates and graduate earnings), on affordability and on access (measures such as the percentage of students receiving Pell Grants).

- Link student aid to these ratings, such that students who enroll at high performing colleges would receive larger Pell Grants and more favorable rates on student loans.

- Create a new program that would give colleges a “bonus” if they enroll large numbers of students eligible for Pell Grants.

- Toughen requirements on students receiving aid. For example, the president said that these rules might require completion of a certain percentage of classes to continue receiving aid.
The president's proposal -- mentioning such ideas as MOOCs, competency-based learning and others -- identifies the administration firmly with a series of reforms that have been building in recent years, reforms that have attracted considerable attention and also considerable skepticism from some in academe.

The ideas in the plan are a mix of actions that the administration could take by itself and those that would require legislation.


**Possible Implications:** The plan reflects growing scrutiny of “value” of higher education and public frustration over price. Much of the debate will take place within context of the Higher Education Act reauthorization. So far there are mixed reactions from higher education community.

**Other Political Issues Affecting the Community College**

**Summary:** The AACC presentation occurred during the government shutdown. The shutdown itself had various effects on community colleges including a delay in Federal Reporting and the inability to get information from government web sites. Since the shutdown has now passed, this section will briefly highlight other upcoming legislation and rulemaking now currently being worked on in our Nation’s capital. These include:

- **Federal Pell Grants** - Funded through 2015. Will likely be an ongoing topic during the reauthorization of the HEA.
- **Student Loan Default Rates** - Dept. of Ed recent releases cohort rates. Penalties proposed for institutions with high default rates.
- **Higher Education Act (HEA) Reauthorization** - Expires in 2014. Both House and Senate will conduct hearings.
- **Affordable Care Act** - ACA requires certain employers to offer full-time employees (30 or more hours/week) health insurance.
- **Gainful Employment** - Negotiated Rulemaking- Rulemaking Sessions are now taking place. In all likelihood Gainful Employment Reporting will be re-introduced in 2014.
- **Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Reauthorization** - Both the Senate and House have versions of Bills addressing Reauthorization.
- **Perkins Reauthorization** - Talks started in September. Action unlikely until next year.

The slides for the AACC webinar in its entirety are available on request.

**Opportunity Index spots “at-risk” population**

**Summary:** The Opportunity Index is the focus of the article below. The index created by [Opportunity Nation] in conjunction with Measure of America, an arm of the Social Research
Council,“ aims to show communities how they stack up in offering the kinds of services and opportunities necessary to help poor or unemployed people get ahead.” The Opportunity Index not only shows national and statewide trends, but can reveal the score at the county level. The link to Kent County is made available after excerpts from the original article.

‘Opportunity Index' Spots a Failure in Education - Administration - The Chronicle of Hi

- According to data from the 2013 Opportunity Index, released this week, overall opportunity in the United States has increased by 2.6 percent since 2011, the first year the index was produced.

- One of the drivers of that uptick: increasing rates of students graduating on time from high school (from 74.7 percent in the 2011 Opportunity Index to 78.2 percent in the latest one) and rising proportions of adults ages 25 and older with an associate or more advanced degree (from 35.4 percent to 36.3 percent).

- Three of the 16 indicators that make up the index relate to education, but the one indicator of those 16 that most closely correlates with a state's or community's overall Opportunity Index score is the one that measures the proportion of what the index calls "disconnected youth"—people ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor employed. For the 2013 index, the researchers found 5.8 million "disconnected" 16- to 24-year-olds, out of a total number of 39.7 million. That's 14.6 percent, a slight increase from the 14.5 percent reported in the 2011 index. In 10 of the country's 25 largest metropolitan areas, the proportion of young people considered "disconnected youth" exceeded the national average.

- Some of the disconnected youth have dropped out of high school, some are unemployed high-school graduates, and some are victims of a dysfunctional foster-care situation, says Mr. Edwards.

- During the Great Recession, unemployment has been lower among people with more education. But Mr. Edwards says other information makes clear that the high incidence of "disconnected youth" was not a product of the recession but rather part of a longer trend. "The post-2001 recovery worked for just about everybody except disconnected youth," he says.

- The index is in only its third year, but Mr. Edwards says he's encouraged by the way it's been used. In Iowa, for example, a coalition that includes local foundations, businesses. and Des Moines Area Community College is using the index, and its scores for Polk County, to track the county's progress in expanding job training and improving other factors that could raise the score. (The county's B-minus grade on the index stayed the same between 2013 and 2011, although its actual score inched up to 55.55 from 55.54.)

- Rob Denson, president of the college, says it's because of that score, and more particularly Opportunity Nation's findings on rates of disconnected youth in his region (10.3 percent in the 2013 index, up from 9.2 in 2011), that the college is spearheading a new employment program for inner-city teenagers starting next summer that will combine job experience with educational programs, including information on how to navigate college. Without that, "I would be focusing on 18-year-olds" and older prospective students, says Mr. Denson, and not a program aimed at younger people.
Opportunity Index, Kent County, MI

Summary: To bring the Opportunity Index closer to home, let’s explore the instrument using Kent County as an example. You can get to the chart below by control clicking on Kent County. The colored chart shows Kent’s overall Opportunity Score compared to State and National Averages. Kent County is above the State average and about on par with the National average. The chart also shows the three major categories measured by the Index.

To understand the categories take a look at the indicators below which make up each category. I have changed the settings to show the value of each indicator in 2011 compared to 2013. Specifically the indicators have gone down in the Education and Community categories.
Possible Implications: The above table shows all of the indicators which make up the index. GRCC can impact some of them; others may be beyond our reach. However, returning to the article, the percentage of “disconnected youth” is one of the most significant factors affecting the opportunities available in a community. That indicator, (#2 under Community Health & Civic Life) has risen to 10.92% in 2013 from 10.48% in 2011. At a glance this may not seem like a great jump, but it is the trend which is most important. That trend says the number of “disconnected youth” in Kent County is rising. In fact, a quick estimate of “youth not in school and not working (ages 16-24)” accounts for approximately 8-9,000 youth just in Kent County alone according to figures found in the American Community Survey. This would seem to present a challenge as well as an opportunity for GRCC to serve this sector of the population. As seen in the article above, a community college in Iowa has taken that challenge and is trying to reverse the trend in their community.