

## Illinois, Simon selected as Lumina Foundation Partners

Written by Kathryn Phillips

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Top education network aids Illinois college completion reforms

SPRINGFIELD – March 19, 2012. Illinois is moving toward its college completion goal thanks to a new partnership between Lt. Governor Sheila Simon and a leading education foundation, the lieutenant governor's office announced today.

Lumina Foundation has selected Lt. Governor Simon to represent Illinois in its Postsecondary Productivity Strategy Lab sites. The Strategy Labs provide policymakers in 22 states technical assistance on Lumina Foundation's "Four Steps to Finishing First" reform agenda. The steps include performance funding, student incentives, new learning models and business efficiencies.

"This partnership with Lumina Foundation will help move toward more college completers and a stronger state workforce," Simon said. "Together, we will work to get more students across the stage at graduation and into good jobs."

Simon, who serves as Governor Quinn's point person on education reform, conducted a statewide tour of all 48 community colleges last year to focus attention on the state's college completion goal and recommend steps to achieve it. The Strategy Labs will help the state's higher education system implement the reforms needed to strengthen completion rates and move students into good-paying jobs in Illinois.

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“Lumina Foundation is excited to work with Illinois Lt. Governor Sheila Simon because she understands that our nation’s economic health is best addressed by educating more students beyond high school,” said Jamie Merisotis, president and CEO of Lumina Foundation. “Her unique ability as a statewide elected leader to convene and collaborate with stakeholders from preschool to graduate school is critical to boosting the college completion effort.”

Simon shared Illinois’ new higher education performance funding model with Lumina and asked it to compare it to other states. The model, developed by the community college and university communities with input from Simon and other stakeholders, ties up to 2 percent of state funding to performance outcomes, such as certificate and degree completion.

About 41 percent of the state’s working-age population holds at least a two-year degree, according to Lumina. Simon and Governor Quinn want 60 percent of workers to hold a degree or credential by 2025 to keep pace with employer demands for skilled workers. The completion goal will require higher education institutions in Illinois to produce nearly 9,400 additional completers each year.

Simon is pursuing three pieces of legislation this session which will help more students complete college on time and with less debt. Her reform package aims to improve college readiness in math, smooth transfers from community colleges to universities and make it easier for parents and students to compare higher education institutions.

In early March, staff from the lieutenant governor’s office and the City Colleges of Chicago attended a Lumina lab to study innovative college completion strategies at the City University of New York. The strategies were shared with the Joint Education Leadership Committee, chaired by Simon, which will consider their potential to serve as models for accelerated learning on Illinois campuses.

Lumina Foundation is a private, independent foundation committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college. It will release a new report, *A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education*, in late March that will include updated higher education attainment rates for every state and county in the U.S., along with the top 100 metro regions. *A Stronger Nation* also describes higher education attainment in the context of current economic trends, and shows how the U.S. can move more aggressively to increase it to the levels the nation needs.

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