



# News Release

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## **Regents Applaud Spellings Commission Report**

PIERRE, S.D. – U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings says higher education needs to do more to ensure that students are prepared for college, able to get the financial aid they need, and assessed on what they learn in the college classroom. Speaking today at the National Press Club in Washington, Spellings threw her support behind several recommendations from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, a panel she created a year ago.

Robert T. Tad Perry, the executive director of the South Dakota Board of Regents, said the panel's findings are right in line with efforts already under way in South Dakota, and commended the commission for its work to highlight these important initiatives.

“We stand ready to join Secretary Spellings in this action plan for higher education,” Perry said. “In South Dakota, our goals are to provide better access to students, ensure a quality educational experience, leverage higher education to improve the state's economy, and create more efficient delivery models. The secretary's initiatives fit very well with the work we are doing.”

Among the highlights of Spellings' remarks today:

- The secretary supports creation of a privacy-protected student-level data system to track college students' progress nationwide. The data system would generate better information about retention and graduation rates and enable college officials, for the first time, to measure transfer students' academic progress. Perry says South Dakota public universities took the leap to create a unified student database several years ago with the STUDENT project. STUDENT is a consolidated database for all six public universities that allows students to receive one bill and one transcript, even if they are taking courses from more than one university. Talks are under way between the regents' system and the state Education Department on how this system can be linked with K-12 education.
- Spellings noted that lack of adequate preparation for college while still in high school handicaps many students. She reiterated the department's interest in holding high schools accountable for results, and better aligning high school standards with college work. Perry said South Dakota made major strides when the state Board of Education adopted more stringent high school graduation requirements, effective this fall, and required students to take advanced courses in order to graduate from high school. In addition, the regents' South Dakota College Prep project mails information to parents of students grades 7-12 about

the importance of advance planning for postsecondary education. Perry said the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship also offers a significant financial incentive—\$5,000 over four years—for students to take college-prep coursework.

- Spellings said the process to qualify for federal financial aid needs to be streamlined and students should know earlier what kind of aid they will receive. Perry concurred with that suggestion. While the financial aid system is primarily driven by federal regulations, Perry pointed out that South Dakota public universities and their foundations have stepped up to the plate to raise significant dollars for student scholarships. He noted that the cost of a public university education is still a bargain—South Dakota’s total cost of \$9,131 last year was the lowest in the region.
- Measuring and reporting what college students have learned should be an important part of what higher education does, Spellings said. Spellings supports the commission’s findings that call for additional support to colleges, universities, and states that publicly report student learning outcomes. In South Dakota, the Board of Regents’ system has required all students since 1998 to take and pass an examination that measures their writing skills, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. “This proficiency exam, administered to all second-semester sophomores, has become an excellent state accountability tool for us,” Perry said. “It identifies areas where students do well, but even more importantly those areas that can be improved upon.”