State System takes next steps toward ‘redesign’

Harrisburg – Ensuring student success. Leveraging the strengths of each university. Transforming the governance and leadership structure. Those are the main themes that have emerged from the strategic system review conducted earlier this year by Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education and from the additional stakeholder input that has been received since then.

The System’s Board of Governors and Interim Chancellor Karen M. Whitney—working in collaboration with the universities and other stakeholders—have begun discussions regarding how to shift from “system review” to “system redesign” in order to achieve the most positive results on behalf of students, the individual universities and the entire System.

The Board and system leaders have been reviewing the recommendations and feedback generated from the strategic review in order to define the next steps in redesigning the State System for the future.

“What matters most is that we take all of that information and put it into action—to redesign our system in a way that will have the greatest positive impact for our students and ensure each of our universities is on a path toward long-term success,” said Board of Governors Chair Cynthia D. Shapira.

“As a system, we want to focus on student success; we will define what that means and measure progress toward achieving that goal,” Ms. Shapira said. “As a board, we will remain focused on the big picture by setting sound policy and by providing our university and system leaders the flexibility to lead. We have talented leaders at our universities and at the system level who are more than capable of making great things happen, and this board will support their efforts with policies that empower them to put students first every day.”

Dr. Whitney already has begun visiting with students, faculty, staff, university presidents and others to gather ideas and suggestions about how the System should operate in the future. She spent her first two days on the job at Slippery Rock and Indiana universities of Pennsylvania meeting with various groups and will continue visiting the campuses next week with trips planned to Edinboro, Mansfield, Lock Haven and California universities of Pennsylvania.

“We all have a stake in helping to shape the future of our 14 universities and our System,” Dr. Whitney said. Her meetings have included asking people to share what they love about their university and the system, what should change and what should remain the same.

“I want to visit with as many different groups as possible before our October board meeting so we have that important feedback to consider as part of our conversation,” she said. Dr. Whitney also has been meeting with union leaders, legislators, trustees and community leaders as part of her effort to gather input.

“The recommendations that came out of the strategic system review will help guide our decisions for the future, but so will the voices of everyone who cares about our universities,” Dr. Whitney said. “The No. 1 objective is clear: making certain every student who enrolls at a State
System university succeeds. For that to happen, we need to be sure our System is optimally organized to support our universities."

Dr. Whitney noted that, while the 14 universities share many similarities, they also have many differences, and their special missions and unique strengths should be highlighted. At the same time, greater collaboration among the universities will lead to greater opportunities for students in every part of the state.

“This is our opportunity to design a system that empowers our universities to focus on student success—helping students to prepare to take their place as productive members of the Commonwealth,” Ms. Shapira said.

Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 100,000 degree-seeking students and thousands more in certificate and other career-development programs. Collectively, the 14 universities that comprise the State System offer more than 2,300 degree and certificate programs in more than 530 academic areas. Nearly 520,000 State System university alumni live in Pennsylvania.

The State System universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. The universities also operate branch campuses in Oil City (Clarion), Freeport and Punxsutawney (IUP), and Clearfield (Lock Haven), and offer classes and programs at several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and in Center City in Philadelphia.