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August 18, 2026

Dear Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida:

On August 3rd, U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon (Secretary) issued a National Call to Action to the presidents and governing boards of the nation's postsecondary educational institutions, a copy of which is attached. She asked every postsecondary institution in America to publish, by the end of 2026, a clear public statement on its institutional website outlining concrete commitments to rigorous teaching, pathbreaking research where applicable, and national service. These are commitments designed to begin restoring the public trust that higher education has squandered.

Secretary McMahon posed seven-pointed questions covering admissions transparency and merit; free speech and the protection of campus operations from disruption; intellectual pluralism and faculty hiring; affordability, cost containment, and student outcomes; academic standards and rigor in the age of artificial intelligence (AI); safeguarding research and programs from malign foreign influence; and prioritizing American students, American interests, and urgent workforce needs.

Not every question applies with equal force to every institution under the Florida Department of Education's (FDOE) purview. State colleges and many independent institutions are primarily teaching and workforce-focused rather than research-intensive, for example. That does not justify inaction. Several of the questions strike at the heart of Florida's higher-education priorities and the obligations of institutions that receive public support, such as, but not limited to: Federal Title IV funding, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act title funding, federal grants, Effective Access to Student Education (EASE) Grants, or state appropriations.

Florida has already done the hard work of reclaiming higher education's proper ends. As I have said before, American higher education's principal purpose is "to help students acquire the habits of mind and heart necessary to live as informed, virtuous citizens" and to educate in view of the common good—not private advantage or ideological fashion. For example, general education must aim at universal knowledge and an understanding of our democracy, not the larding of "diversity" ideology or postmodernism that had displaced the Western intellectual tradition. American higher education exists, first and foremost, to form citizens capable of self-government through serious engagement with the traditional liberal arts and the principles that sustain a free society.

Secretary McMahon's call is therefore not a federal imposition foreign to Florida's direction. **It is an invitation to codify and publicize the reforms we have already begun and the standards we expect.**

I encourage every president of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida member institution to comply.

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By December 31, 2026, I ask that you publish on the institution's primary website a clear public statement addressing the relevant questions in Secretary McMahon's letter and submit a copy to my office by the same date.

At minimum, your statements must speak with specificity to:

- Transparent, merit-based admissions free of illegal preferences;
- Robust protection of free inquiry and viewpoint diversity, together with firm policies against disruption, harassment, and the shutdown of campus operations;
- Intellectual pluralism in curriculum and hiring;
- Affordability, cost discipline, pricing transparency, and measurable student outcomes that equip graduates to repay loans and enter the workforce;
- Academic rigor, the rejection of grade inflation, and honest assessment in an AI environment; and
- The prioritization of American students and Florida's workforce needs.

As you know, the Legislature and the people of this state have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to insist on accountability, transparency, and fidelity to the educational mission of democratic citizenship and economic opportunity.

Public trust is not restored by silence or deflection. Florida's independent institutions have an opportunity to reinforce and amplify the educational renewal the nation needs. Let's seize it.

Sincerely,



Henry Mack, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Education

cc/ Kevin O'Farrell, Senior Chancellor
Bob Boyd, President, Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida