

Ohio Community Colleges Policy Agenda

133rd General Assembly

Provide Pathways to Prosperity for Medicaid Recipients

Ohio community colleges are well-positioned to help reduce the number of individuals who rely on Medicaid and other public benefits by offering workforce training programs that are developed for the in-demand jobs in their region. Our colleges have prioritized developing local and county-level partnerships that show promise; however, the state should explore policy changes to help bring these collaborations to scale quicker while examining ways to incentivize using public benefits to help low and moderate-income adults gain the skills they need to move into a self-sustaining career. Better data sharing between our systems, a better coordination of public benefits already available to working adults while in college, and easing some traditional eligibility restrictions if the individual is continuously progressing towards a certificate or degree all are areas worth exploring.

Reimagine Ohio's Financial Aid Policy for Low-income Individuals

The Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) was established in 2007 and hasn't been changed in any significant way since. Ohio should rethink its financial aid program to spend the state's investment smarter and more strategically to allow low-income students and working adults to receive aid without penalizing them for attending the most affordable postsecondary options, while also incorporating best practices in financial aid to improve certificate, industry-recognized credential or degree completion.

Fund Short-Term Certificates

Invest heavily in short term certificates both by helping colleges offer more certificate programs to respond to workforce demands and by helping students gain access to financial aid to pursue a certificate in an in-demand job. Any effort to move more Ohioans towards having a college credential should start by fixing the lack of funding available to students and institutions who offer more career-oriented, credit or noncredit certificate programs.

Work-Based Learning Tax Credits

With Ohio facing a looming workforce crisis, some of the most promising student success models emerging in community colleges are ones where a student is quickly connected with a relevant job soon after enrollment. Many emerging industries are beginning to embrace apprenticeships and other work-based learning models as a way to meet their workforce needs. However, while most states offer some sort of tax credit to businesses as they support these student/employees on their way to graduation and full-time employment with the business, Ohio does very little to help businesses invest in training for prospective or incumbent workers. The state should establish a tax incentive to help defray the educational and training expenses of our business and industry partners.

State Support of Community Colleges

Since voluntarily creating and adopting a 100% performance-based funding formula in 2011, Ohio community colleges have increased the number of individuals earning associate degrees and long-term certificates by 8.5%. The state of Ohio should support a strategy that is improving outcomes by increasing state support to colleges by 8.5% to match performance gains in the number of credentials awarded under our funding formula. In order to help close the increasing middle skills-gap, Ohio should re-establish the Jobs Challenge line-item or create a new program aimed at supporting career-readiness programs at our public two-year institutions. Two years ago, the Legislature approved annual increases up to \$10 tuition increases to help provide resources for community colleges' efforts to improve student success. Only one increase was implemented and we would ask that colleges be allowed to implement the other \$10 increase in the next biennium.

Establish a Workforce Rapid Recovery Fund

When there is a downturn in the economy or business conditions that results in significant job losses, community colleges are often faced with a rapid increase in enrollment as displaced workers look to retrain and improve their skills. This increase has historically coincided with times of decreasing tax revenues, often resulting in a major fiscal strain for both the state and college budgets at a time when trying to respond quickly to help make these Ohioans gain the needed-skills to move into a new job. The state should earmark a portion of the Rainy Day Fund to be used to help colleges quickly retrain and/or upskill the skills of Ohioans who lost their jobs, giving a community, or the state as a whole, a chance to attract new jobs to the area with the promise of a qualified workforce.

College Credit Plus

The program is enormously popular among both parents and students in Ohio because it is the most significant policy reform the state has enacted to tackle the rising cost of traditional higher education. However, the funding model has created unnecessary friction with our K-12 partners. As we continue to expand this extremely popular program, the state should phase-in directly funding the costs of the program instead of taking the funding from K-12 school districts. Additionally, the state should identify ways to increase the number of career and technical pathways by better aligning funding and eliminating barriers prohibiting students from participating in these career readiness technical programs.