



Pennsylvania's Workforce: The Role of Community Colleges¹

Community colleges are integral partners in the development of middle-skills among Pennsylvania workers. At a time when access to good jobs and wages has become more important than ever, Pennsylvania needs to take action to ensure more students can afford and access community college education and the increased earnings potential it provides.

Executive Summary

In the best of economic times, states across the country spent time and tax money competing for good jobs in their region – jobs in which workers could earn decent wages and healthcare benefits. Tax subsidies became the traditional bait with which to lure new businesses and jobs to struggling areas.

It will shock no one to learn that Pennsylvanians are not benefiting from the best of economic times today. Unemployment has risen dramatically, especially over the past year, causing the competition for good jobs to become even more fierce. As tax revenues dwindle, legislators and other state policy makers will need to think about how to bring new industries that benefit everyone to Pennsylvania. In the best and worst of economic times, one formula has proven its ability to bring new business: ensuring that those businesses have a skilled workforce to employ.

Employers need workers to possess industry-specific training beyond basic academic skills—usually a certificate/diploma or associate's degree related to their field. This training, when industry-related as opposed to company specific, gives workers the opportunity to gain skills they can transfer to a wide variety of workplaces so that they can stay employed as businesses cycle in and out of the Commonwealth. Over the next few years, Pennsylvania expects job openings in “middle skills” fields such as licensed practical nursing, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and paramedics, and bus and truck mechanics, as well as openings in high priority green jobs such as welders and industrial engineering technicians. All of these positions require some level of training beyond high school. Yet while many Pennsylvania adults need postsecondary education, only 5.6 percent of adults ages 25 to 54 were enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 2008 – a smaller percentage of adults than in 45 other states.

As we develop the workforce of the future, Pennsylvania has many tools at its fingertips – including those offered by community colleges. While community colleges are not and should not be the sole provider of workforce development, they are becoming more prominent at the national level as a means of training workers. With collaboration from state and local government as well as recognition of the programs that are working best in Pennsylvania, we have the opportunity to use community college programs as a tool for workforce success.

Below are some recommendations regarding how community colleges in Pennsylvania (as well as our workforce) can find even more ways to excel:

Affordability

- Ensure all community college students can attend school at in-county rates.
- Reinststitute the WAGE program for nontraditional students attending community college less than half-time

Accessibility

- Expand the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program beyond community colleges to partner with Industry Partnerships and other educational programs available throughout the state
- Create services and scheduling for nontraditional students, potentially based on KEYS facilitators and the services they provide
- Engage more TANF participants in community college and other opportunities for postsecondary learning

Readiness

- Expand remediation programs like Career Gateway to overcome the challenges that students face when they move from adult literacy to college
- Consider methods of dual enrollment for nontraditional students
- Offer self-paced remediation opportunities for students who can learn effectively in that setting

Introduction

Historically, Pennsylvanians have relied on a high school education to attain a self-supporting job. After high school, Commonwealth residents could find employment in manufacturing, mining, and other industrial jobs where they supported their families and their state. For instance, during World War II, Pennsylvanians, along with the rest of the country, provided ships, supplies and weapons to our troops.

While some believe that adults can rely on a high school education, the jobs that were available to our parents and grandparents require far more education. Still, more than half the adult population (25 and over) in Pennsylvania have ended their school career with a high school diploma or GED. In 2008, Pennsylvania had the third highest percentage of 18 to 64 year olds with only a high school degree or a GED.² Whether in a factory or in the healthcare field, this generation of workers needs at least some post-secondary education to earn a family-sustaining wage. Even industries that rely on physical skills, such as the trucking industry, needs workers who can handle not only the physical task of driving but also the complex computer and tracking systems that are part of the daily haul.

In Pennsylvania today, half of all jobs (51 percent) require some postsecondary education (though not necessarily a bachelor's degree), even though more than half of all Pennsylvanians lack the skills to perform them. This disconnect leaves many adult Pennsylvanians competing for the 19 percent of jobs available to those with only a high school education. At the same time, a diverse group of industries, ranging from manufacturing to healthcare, lack qualified, skilled employees. Pennsylvanians want to work in these jobs, and employers want to hire them – what is needed is a strategy through which workers can equip themselves with the proper skills to succeed.

Education also gives workers the opportunity to earn higher wages while simultaneously lowering unemployment rates. In Pennsylvania, workers over age 25 with only a high school education or GED have median earnings of \$27,571, while the addition of some college or an associate's degree increases earnings to a median of \$33,829.³ Over forty years of work (from age 25 to age 65), assuming median wages stay constant with no inflation, workers with some college or an associate's degree will earn \$250,320 more than workers who ended their education in high school. Additionally, workers with some college education were more likely to be employed in 2008 than workers with only a high school education.⁴ Workers with a high school education had a 4.5 percent unemployment rate in 2008, compared to 3.7 percent for students with associate's degrees. Pennsylvania benefits from employment and higher wages in the form of higher spending and tax revenue, something strongly needed in these economic times.

Table 1: Education Attainment and Earnings for Pennsylvanians, 2008			
<u>Educational Attainment</u>	<u>Median Earnings</u>	<u>Projected Earnings from Age 25-65</u>	<u>Unemployment Rate in 2008</u>
<u>Less than high school graduate</u>	\$20,766	\$830,640	8.1 percent
<u>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</u>	\$27,571	\$1,102,840	4.5 percent
<u>Some college or associate's degree</u>	\$33,829	\$1,353,160	3.7 percent for associate's degree
			4.1 percent for some college, no degree
<u>Bachelor's degree</u>	\$46,582	\$1,863,280	2.2 percent
<u>Graduate or professional degree</u>	\$ 62,925	\$2,517,000	2.9 percent
Notes: <u>Median Earnings</u> : American Community Survey, 2006-2008. <u>Projected Earnings</u> assume median earnings stay constant and does not adjust for inflation. <u>Unemployment Data</u> : Keystone Research Center, 2009.			

In order to bring workers and industries together, the Commonwealth has continued to focus on a series of programs and initiatives centered on workforce development. Through partnerships with regional industries, training entities, nonprofit organizations, and community colleges, Pennsylvania has put itself on the right track towards building the workforce of tomorrow. To stay on that track, the Commonwealth needs to find and replicate the most effective practices to help fill the skills gaps that remain. While private schools, four-year colleges, technical schools, and certificate-bearing classes all have a role to play in educating the workforce of tomorrow, community colleges are most often looked to nationally for large-scale change.

Why Community Colleges?

Community colleges make up an oft-forgotten portion of our education system. States focus on early and basic education programs, high school graduation rates, and the traditional colleges and universities housed within their borders—and with good reason. K-12 education provides the bedrock on which students build their future success, whether a high school diploma or a college degree is sought. However, residents and policy makers alike tend to skip over the role of community colleges as a vital educational resource leading to self-sustaining jobs.

As President Obama noted in July 2009, “community colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present and our prosperity in the future.”⁵ To qualify for self-sustaining jobs today, most workers need some additional education, and community colleges are one of the best large-scale training grounds available for middle-skilled jobs.

In Pennsylvania, community colleges operate in conjunction with local sponsors – usually a city, county, or individual school district or an association of districts.⁶ There are 14 counties with chartered community colleges in the Commonwealth. During the 2008-2009 academic year, 209,000 students were enrolled in credit programs, and 219,000 took part in non-credit courses.⁷

While community colleges cannot and should not play the only role in preparing for the workforce of tomorrow, they are uniquely positioned to reach many students in the Commonwealth. Among other funding, community colleges can apply for an Economic Development Stipend through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to align their courses with Pennsylvania’s High Priority Occupations (jobs in-demand from employers that require higher skills and pay family-sustaining wages).⁸ In the 2008-2009 academic year, the fourteen community colleges in Pennsylvania had 1,609 courses approved under this stipend, made up of 301 Associate Degree courses, 201 certificate courses, 52 diploma courses, and 1055 noncredit workforce development courses.⁹

The Need to Focus on Middle-Skill Development for Out of School Youth and Adults in Pennsylvania

When students plan to enter community college or other credentialing programs, many find themselves in need of additional preparation, be it a quick refresher course or longer-term skills training. One solution to the need for remediation is guaranteeing that when students exit high school, they are better prepared to begin postsecondary education. Among other actions in Pennsylvania, the Workforce Investment Board in 2008 accepted a resolution endorsing high school graduation requirements that will ensure students are better prepared for college or careers.¹⁰

While intervening during high school makes sense to increase college readiness, such intervention cannot help the many Pennsylvania adults who have already graduated. Nationally, two-thirds of the 2020 workforce has already exited elementary and secondary school, so making reforms at the grade school or high school level now will not fully impact the workforce for many years.¹¹ While we should make necessary changes to prepare for the future workforce, this paper concerns itself with the current workforce: adult workers in Pennsylvania with little or no postsecondary education because access to new skills for these workers has the most immediate impact on our workforce.

Part I: Affordability

What does Affordability Mean?

Determining what an affordable community college education should look like is not an easy thing to do. To set a baseline for what Pennsylvanians can afford, it is important to know that the median income for a Pennsylvania household in 2008 was \$50,272. Despite that median, 24 percent of all working families in 2008 earned less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, or \$42,400 for a family of four.¹² (Many researchers consider 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be a reasonable approximation of the income needed to make ends meet.)

Family Size	Federal Poverty Level	200 Percent of the Federal Poverty Level
2	\$14,000	\$28,000
3	\$17,600	\$35,200
4	\$21,200	\$42,400
5	\$24,800	\$49,600
6	\$28,400	\$56,800

At minimum, affordability should contain some combination of low costs and effective financial aid programs. In this report, we base affordability on the cost of community college in Pennsylvania versus the cost in the rest of the country and the availability of student loan and grant programs.

Cost Comparison Between Pennsylvania and Other States

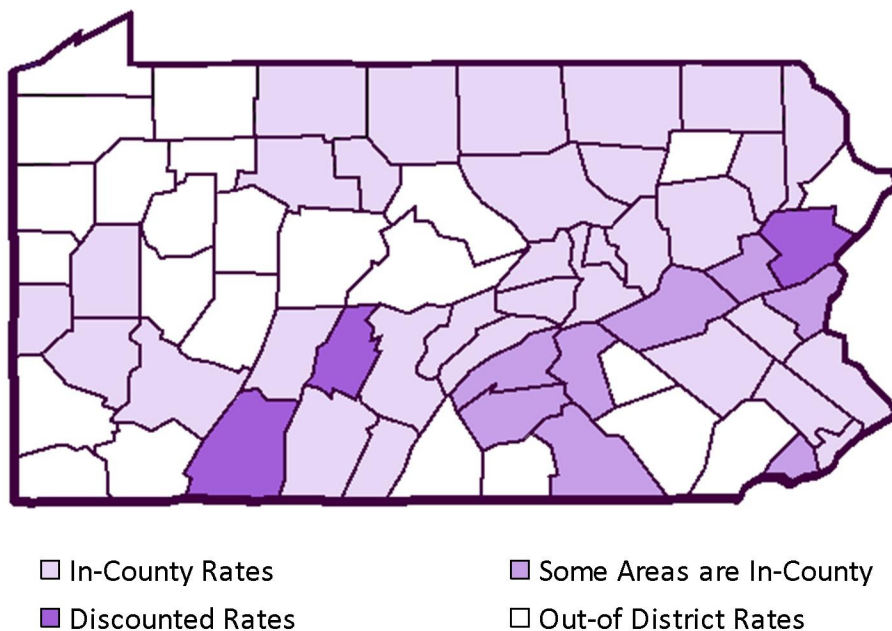
Community colleges in Pennsylvania are often a more affordable option compared to public or private 4-year colleges in the state. In 2008, 87 percent of a family's income was needed to pay expenses for a private four-year college, even after financial aid. At a public college, 41 percent of income is needed to pay expenses, while at a community college, 29 percent of family income is needed.¹³ Yet the cost of community college remains high in comparison to other states. The portion of family income needed to cover expenses has increased over time: compared to 29 percent of income needed in 2008, only 26 percent was required in 2006, while 23 percent of family income was needed to meet community college expenses in 2000. (By comparison, the median income in Pennsylvania, adjusted for inflation, has actually decreased: in 2008 dollars, the median income in 2000 was \$51,380; in 2008, the median income was \$50,272.)¹⁴ Only six other states require families to pay a higher portion of their incomes for community college.¹⁵

The tuition costs at Pennsylvania's community colleges are not solely at the discretion of the colleges themselves. The Commonwealth's community colleges were meant to operate with shared funding from "local sponsors" of community colleges (usually cities, counties, or school districts), the state, and the students. Each group was expected to provide one-third of the costs for the college.¹⁶ Over time, and especially now as state revenues are decreasing, local sponsors and state government have had less funding for community college, leaving students with a higher share of the cost.

The high cost of community college education means that even with financial aid grants, students still lack the funds needed to pay for their education. When applying for financial aid, students must fill out the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), which helps to determine the aid programs a student is eligible for as well as the expected family contribution (EFC) to the student’s education. The EFC is based on income, family size, and the student’s “status” (whether or not the student can be termed independent) among other information. A 2008 report from the PA Department of Education showed that in a family of four earning less than \$50,000 per year (or just below Pennsylvania’s median household income of \$50,272 in 2008), the combination of the EFC and grant funding still left a shortfall of \$2,947 to attend community college in-district. “In-district” refers to areas that provide sponsorships of community colleges. The sponsors are usually counties or school districts.

Because many counties in the state do not have a community college, a high proportion of families faced a greater shortfall between their combined EFC and financial aid and the cost of attending community college. In 2008, students living in districts that did not sponsor community colleges (known as “out-of-district” areas) had a gap of \$5,022 (see Figure 1).¹⁷

Figure 1: Rates of Tuition at Pennsylvania's Community Colleges, 2010



Note: Community College of Allegheny County offers discounted rates to counties without community colleges.

By visiting the websites of each of Pennsylvania’s community colleges, PathWays PA was able to determine the locations where students were considered in district versus out-of-district. In-district rates are generally available in the counties or parts of counties where the sponsoring

organizations are located. “Discounted rates” are set somewhere above the in-district rate, and out-of-district students pay even more.

In general, students who attend community college but live outside of the college’s sponsoring district pay twice the amount of students who live within the district.¹⁸ Tuition is set by the individual community college based on funding received from state government and local sponsors, and varies among colleges. The lack of coverage raises not only an affordability problem that needs to be addressed by all financial contributors to community colleges but also an accessibility problem, as we will see later.

Students who come from low-income families are most likely to face problems in paying for community college. According to the 2008 *Measuring Up* report, very low-income students in Pennsylvania spend 44 percent of their income to attend community college.¹⁹ As incomes rise, families pay a lower overall percentage of their income towards community college. In other words, when families earn more than \$50,000 per year, their combined expected family contribution and financial aid eliminates the need for student loans. It is only for families earning below \$50,000 where the gap remains. Similarly, dependent students (those who can be claimed as dependents by their parents) pay a lower percentage of total income for their community college education than do independent students, yet independent students are arguably more in need of a low-cost education, since they must also contend with paying for their own housing and food.²⁰

Loan and Grant Availability

Community college students in Pennsylvania are eligible for grant-based aid, with nearly \$19 million in aid provided each year from the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA).²¹ Through PHEAA, independent students with financial need are eligible for grants through the Pennsylvania State Grant Program. On average, community college students receive financial awards of \$1,566 per year from PHEAA.²² Many students also rely on Pell Grants, which are federal need-based grants. However, these programs do not always fit the unique needs of those attending community college.

Most funding at both the federal and state level target students who have just graduated high school and are attending college at least half-time.²³ Many students, particularly those attending community colleges, no longer fit the mold of this traditional student. Nontraditional students are usually older and often balancing childcare and full-time work in addition to their studies, meaning they are often limited to only one class (three credit hours) per semester. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 35 percent of first-time entrants in community colleges work full-time compared to 11 percent in the public four-year institutions.²⁴

These nontraditional, working students taking only one class a semester cannot benefit from many government grants because state grants and Stafford loans are only available if students attend school at least half-time. Some very low-income students can rely on Pell Grants while attending school at less than half-time, but only in rare cases.²⁵ While some students need more of an immersion into a new field than one class per semester can provide, many adult

students are trying to update their skills in the field in which they already work. Through the Job Ready PA program, loans are available to adults attending occupational programs less than half-time at community colleges,²⁶ According to one report, workers who utilized this program in 2005 had a 12.9 percent increase in their wages, while the businesses they worked for improved their retention and productivity.²⁷

The WAGE Program

PHEAA launched the *Workforce Advancement Grant for Education (WAGE) Program* in 2005-06 to reduce affordability barriers and to increase enrollment numbers, retention rates and program completion rates for adult students. WAGE students had to be independent of their parents, be ineligible for state grants, and be enrolled in study relating to a high priority occupation, but did not require students to be enrolled part-time. The WAGE Program provided a block grant to participating postsecondary institutions, allotting roughly \$3,500 (max.) per eligible student for the academic year. WAGE grants reached 2,698 students attending school at 186 colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. However, the program was cut when legislative changes to the Federal Family Education Loan Program ended the revenue stream from which it had been funded.**

However, with the absence of this program, adult students have few affordable options for enrolling in the types of classes—while working—that will allow them to compete for higher paying jobs.

* <https://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0B-xgdV5YxmNMM2I5ZWQ5MjgtN2UyNi00MzhiLWlwZjUtNzFiZjk0ZDNkMTli&hl=en>

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When state and federal grants are not sufficient to cover full tuition, students can turn to federal loans, such as the Stafford Loan. Federal Stafford Loans are long-term, low-interest rate loans, insured by the Federal government, and made to students by private lending institutions, such as banks, savings and loan associations, or credit unions. For the 2008-2009 academic year, both part- and full-time students were eligible for up to \$9,500 for the first year of schooling. While students rarely wish to rely on loans to pay for their education, Pennsylvania students are among the few who have the opportunity to use them (although Pennsylvania's community colleges recommend that students wait to take out loans until after their first term to determine if they really need the additional financial assistance) Only 28 states (including Pennsylvania) give all community college students access to federal loans.²⁸

Yet even federal loans do not fully cover the gap left by grant funding. A 2008 study shows that for Pennsylvania families earning below \$40,000 per year, the combination of expected family contributions, grants, and federal loans still leaves up to \$3,354 unpaid each year.²⁹

If students cannot find appropriate scholarships or other programs to cover their educational costs, they usually turn to the private loan industry, which may charge higher fees and interest rates than federal programs.³⁰ Although this industry has been expanding rapidly, a small contraction began taking place in 2007.³¹ While the decline is not linked to current lending problems, students may find it even more difficult to get federal or private loans.

Affordability Recommendations

Community colleges are integral partners in the development of middle-skills among Pennsylvania workers, and while students may incur debt in the short-term, the long-term benefits clearly outweigh the costs. However, at a time when increased wages are more important than ever, Pennsylvania needs to take action to ensure that more students can afford community college education and the increased earnings potential it provides. Therefore, stakeholders should:

1. Ensure that all Pennsylvania students can attend community college at “in-county” rates: While Pennsylvania needs to broaden community college access to all regions of the state, the first step is to provide affordable community college options to all. If potential students have no community college in their county, out-of-district fees should be waived as long as the student resides in Pennsylvania. To make up for financial shortfalls, Pennsylvania needs to determine how to remove disparities in the current funding formula. Removing disparities may require that all districts contribute to community college funding or it may mean looking for funding opportunities in the reauthorization of WIA. While the state and local areas need to provide more funding in the short-term to make up for the loss of “out-of-county” payments, they will reap the benefits in a more educated workforce and, thus, a stronger economy.
2. Reinststitute the WAGE program for nontraditional students attending community college less than half-time: To encourage nontraditional workers to return to school and gain skills in High Priority Occupations, Pennsylvania should reinstate the WAGE program or create a similar program to take its place.³² As a potential funding source, the Commonwealth could examine creating a pilot program with the federal government to fund the program using money from the Pell Grant system. The pilot would be necessary because Pell Grants require full or part-time enrollment.

Part II: Accessibility

What does Accessibility Mean?

While community colleges are not always affordable for adult students, barriers to attending community college go beyond affordability. Among those barriers is accessibility. Low-income Pennsylvanians benefit from the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, which increases accessibility to students who might otherwise face barriers in balancing class scheduling, family obligations, and financial and other needs. However, because of the distance to community colleges and the need for child care, nontraditional students still face difficulty in accessing the classes and tools they need to succeed.

Public Assistance Participants

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants face unique problems in accessing community college education. Many TANF recipients have basic skills needs, and by definition, all recipients are low-income. With access to education, especially postsecondary education, they could have the opportunity to leave TANF and other government programs for good, breaking the cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, current federal legislation only allows participants to stay in education and training for twelve months, limiting the amount students can achieve (in Pennsylvania, some recipients may continue in education for an additional twelve months). States can only “count” education and training as an activity for up to 30 percent of their recipients.³³ Other public assistance participants, such as those using the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps) face problems in trying to balance their already low-income while trying to pay for college tuition and fees.

In Pennsylvania, TANF and SNAP participants can overcome some of these barriers through the

<i>Table 3: Comparison of KEYS Participants and TANF Participants, Dauphin County</i>		
<u>Family of Three Living In Dauphin County</u>	<u>KEYS Participants</u>	<u>TANF Participants</u>
<u>Average Wage of All Graduates/ Participants in PA</u>	\$14.77	\$8.00
<u>Monthly Tax Payment</u>	\$415.58	\$121.75
<u>Monthly Co-Pay for Child Care Subsidy</u>	\$215.00	\$64.50
<u>Monthly SNAP (Food Stamp) Benefit Available</u>	\$0	\$386.21
<small><i>Average wage:</i> CLASP, 2010. <i>Monthly tax payment:</i> Includes federal, state, and sales taxes; PathWays PA Online Tool, 2010. <i>Monthly child care co-pay:</i> Assumes 4.3 weeks worked per month; CCDF Services for Pennsylvania, 2009. <i>Monthly SNAP:</i> Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger Screening Tool, 2009.</small>		

Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, which links participants, the Department of Public Welfare, and Pennsylvania’s community colleges.³⁴ KEYS was developed in response to research showing that workers with career-specific certificates and training are better able to get family-sustaining wages with benefits and have more opportunities for advancement.³⁵ Students in the KEYS program pay their own tuition through loans or grants, just like other students. Through the program, students also

receive referrals to KEYS facilitators located in the community college who help students access support in the form of childcare, help with travel expenses, assistance in financial aid applications, and counseling/tutoring.

Through KEYS, students can pursue short-term credits leading to marketable skills, one-year certificate programs, and two-year Associate's Degree programs.³⁶ The costs associated with the KEYS program includes the cost of facilitators, the loan of laptop computers for home use, tutors, and additional workshops. The benefits of the program far outweigh the approximate annual cost of \$3.5 million.³⁷ A 2010 paper on the KEYS program reported an average wage of \$14.77 for participants; the average wage may be even higher, since participants earning more than 235% of the Federal Poverty Level were not counted.³⁸ Meanwhile, the average wage of TANF recipients at the same time was \$8.00 per hour. Based on these earnings, a family of three living in Dauphin County who had used the KEYS program would earn more (resulting in higher tax payments) and qualify for fewer benefits (resulting in fewer expenditures for the state) than a family who got a job through the TANF program. The Department of Public Welfare is currently working on ways to expand KEYS beyond community colleges so that potential students who do not live near the schools can still access the program.

Physical and Transportation Barriers

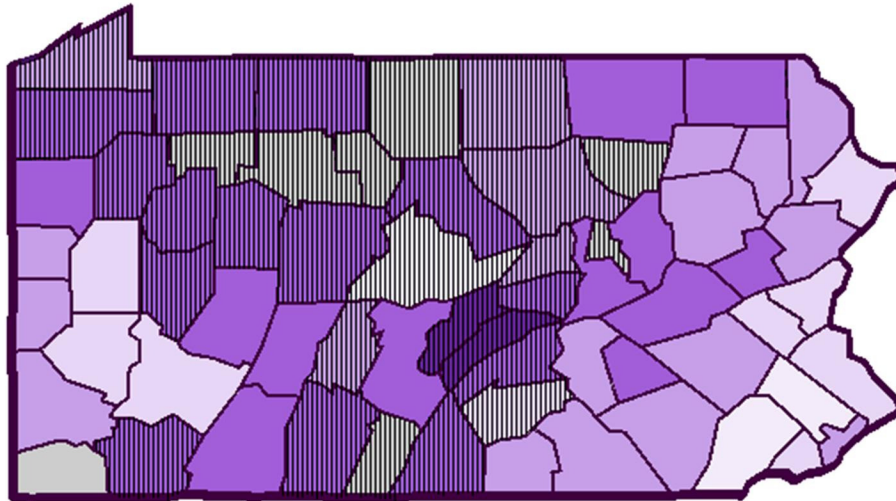
While Workforce Investment Boards throughout Pennsylvania support Industry Partnerships and other training programs for interested adults, Pennsylvanians who want to get their training from a community college face obstacles due to their physical locations.³⁹ Uneven geographic coverage by Pennsylvania's community colleges stymies access to educational progress for older, rural Pennsylvanians.

As noted in the affordability chapter, a large section of the state lacks access to a community college. Likewise, these areas of the state have low shares of workers with education beyond high school (see Figure 2).⁴⁰ In both Central Pennsylvania and Northwestern Pennsylvania, advocates have been seeking charters for new community colleges. However, the likelihood of success for these community colleges (especially in the current economy) is unknown.

Transportation barriers may also prevent students from attending class. In those counties without community colleges, transportation can be an insurmountable barrier for some individuals. Even in counties with good public transportation, planning courses around the bus schedule or allotting extra time for travel while juggling work and picking up children from child care makes attending classes impossible for many. The high cost and additional time for transportation are two expenses that many community college students simply cannot afford.

One option to address transportation issues may be as simple as educating employers. If employers hear the success stories of students in KEYS, Industry Partnerships, and other workforce programs (especially how those successes benefit Pennsylvania businesses), they may be more willing to find time for their employees to attend classes.

Figure 2: Percentage of Adults (Age 25 and Over) With A High School Degree or Less, 2008



30.0%-39.99%
 40%-49.99%
 50%-59.99%
 60%-60.99%
 70%+
 Unknown

Note: Stripes indicate that no community college campuses or centers are located in these counties.

Childcare

Among the issues preventing adult accessibility to community college is childcare. 56 percent of adults in low-income working families with children have no postsecondary education.⁴¹ To both attend school and work, many students will need access to childcare for at least part of the day. Yet the cost of childcare in Pennsylvania can be prohibitively expensive for this population, ranging from \$803 to \$1647 per month.⁴² In comparison, the median wage for a worker with a basic academic (high school) education in Pennsylvania is \$2,312 per month.

Even though some community colleges may be reluctant to house childcare centers on campus, due to the cost and potential liability, there are a number of advantages to having on-campus childcare programs. Some community colleges in Pennsylvania offer low-cost child care to students, although they may have shifted childcare services to non-college operators as opposed to campus-sponsored centers.⁴³ Aside from having students who are able to focus on the course work rather than who will to care for their children, centers, such as these , could also serve as a classroom where individuals studying day care training, child development, psychology, and early childhood education could work and study.⁴⁴ Because education is beneficial not only to individual students but also to the state and its employers, methods of funding childcare should be explored.

Another possibility for assisting students with childcare, especially those who attend school at colleges or instructional sites that do not provide it, is to find funding for childcare through the federal Workforce Investment Act. Under the Act, states can choose to provide funding for childcare or transportation.⁴⁵ Funding (including ARRA funding) is available under WIA Adult Formula grants and WIA Dislocated Worker Formula grants.⁴⁶

Recommendations

1. Expand the KEYS program beyond community colleges to partner with Industry Partnerships and other educational programs available throughout the state that will lead to marketable credentials and certificates for students outside of community colleges. This expansion will give more workers who live beyond the physical range of community colleges the opportunity to gain valuable skills.
2. Create services and scheduling for nontraditional students, potentially based on KEYS facilitators and the services they provide. When students' school or work schedule does not match up with their child care or transportation needs, there may be ways of changing these schedules so that students can still attend classes. This need may be addressed by creating more positions within community colleges similar to the KEYS facilitators, who could help nontraditional students access existing programs in the area. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry could also explore using WIA dollars to pay for childcare, transportation, or other needs for low-income students. Another option would be to work with employers to show the benefits of education so that they will be more likely to provide time for school to their employees.
3. Engage more TANF, SNAP, and low-income participants in community college and postsecondary learning: While this issue is more complex than can be covered in this paper, access by TANF recipients to postsecondary education and training will improve their ability to earn family-sustaining wages and lead to their exit from TANF and other work support programs. Expenditures to assist TANF students now can result in savings when they leave the program, and income from tax revenues and other spending.

Readiness

Why Does Readiness Matter?

When we discuss readiness, we refer to an individual's preparedness for college/postsecondary training and education. A high school education, unfortunately, is no guarantee of literacy or the ability to keep up with college coursework. Studies have shown that 59 percent of students entering postsecondary education and training through community colleges must first take remedial courses to prepare for their course of study.⁴⁷ Years of work also do not necessarily bring the skills workers need to succeed in the classroom, even if they are returning to school to learn more about their own field. While some students need brief review sessions to prepare for their return to school, others need more in-depth courses on basic skills to become college-ready.

Community colleges in Pennsylvania are reviewing developmental education options, as are other players, including Achieving the Dream, an initiative to increase the number of students earning degrees or certificates at community colleges or transfer to other institutions. Seven community colleges in Pennsylvania participate in the program.⁴⁸ Pennsylvania's community colleges are also experimenting with programs that offer intervention in math remediation such as smaller class sizes and new placement tests.⁴⁹ However, the need to address readiness is pervasive across the country, and should be reviewed here.

Which Students Aren't Ready?

Throughout the United States, adults entering postsecondary education often find themselves underprepared. In Pennsylvania, substantial portions of students require developmental education to improve their academic skills before being ready for college level courses: 38 percent in mathematics and 27 percent in English/writing. While the opportunity to take remedial courses exists, success in these courses is not guaranteed. According to a recent report, only "three to four out of every ten community college students who are referred to remediation actually finish the sequence of courses to which they referred."⁵⁰ Additionally, students who enter community college unprepared often exhaust their grant funding on prerequisite or remedial courses, leaving them with no funding to pay for credit-bearing classes that count towards graduation or credit completion.⁵¹

The need for remediation affects students, but it also affects the funds available for community college courses. Each remedial course requires staff, classroom space, and supports ranging from counseling to parking facilities. Using funds to pay for the remedial coursework decreases the amount of funding available for non-remedial work.⁵² If community colleges could prevent the need for remediation by one course for every student who would otherwise use it, Pennsylvania could realize a potential savings of \$82 million for community colleges.⁵³ At a time when the state budget and community college funding lacks access to revenue, making changes to how remediation is offered or the overall need for remediation could eventually pay for itself through a reduction in college costs and increased tax revenue stemming from higher

wages. One potential solution to this problem would be to contextualize remediation, so that a student entering the healthcare field would take healthcare-related Math and English classes. By linking the courses to the student's field of work, it might be possible to offer credits leading to graduation.

A Note on Financial and Logistical Barriers

While we have already addressed community college affordability, it is important to reiterate that the cost of education in Pennsylvania can be prohibitive, especially when students need remedial education. In order to afford a community college education, poor and working class families on average pay 44 percent of their income in addition to the financial aid they receive. When remediation comes into play, students use their valuable savings and financial aid to pay for developmental classes, but often do not receive college credits in return. Students in these situations may use all of their financial aid to cover remedial classes, leaving nothing left over for courses that count towards graduation.

Transitioning from Adult Education to Community College

In addition to other means of remediation, “gateway” courses that help students transition successfully to college are thought to improve retention.⁵⁴ While some adult students enter community college after a long gap in schooling, others enter postsecondary education directly from an adult literacy/GED program. Just as high school completion may not prepare a student for college, GED or similar postsecondary testing does not automatically make a student college ready. The GED is designed to test for basic academic skills, which are different from those skills needed for a successful transfer to college.⁵⁵ Even though they recently exited a school environment, 85 percent of former GED students need remediation courses before taking college level classes.⁵⁶ These students also have much lower rates of transitioning to postsecondary education when compared to students with a high school diploma.⁵⁷

To assist adult education students in bypassing the remediation process, many states look to dual enrollment programs that teach basic academic and college level skills at the same time.⁵⁸ Dual enrollment courses not only bring together different skill levels; they also bring together occupational learning along with academic content.⁵⁹

I-BEST, the most well known of these programs, connects ESL students in Washington state with certificate programs that have been proven to place students into high-paying jobs. Basic education teachers and college teachers co-teach the program for half of the time. During the other half of the time, the instructors take turns teaching basic and occupational skills on their own.⁶⁰ While the I-BEST program began as a method of teaching English as a Second Language, the model of bringing together basic and college level courses is seen as a best practice.⁶¹

In Pennsylvania, a promising program providing both basic and postsecondary education is a pilot program known as Career Gateway, which helps adults transition from basic education to postsecondary education services. Within this program, students in basic education classes learn skills that will aid them in higher level courses, and will also receive information about opportunities to receive training that will allow them to achieve family-sustaining jobs.⁶² In one

Career Gateway program, 98 individuals had taken Career Gateway workshops between 2006 and 2009, with 71 percent of those students transferring to postsecondary programs. Of the 20 students who moved from the program into two-year or four-year institutions, none required developmental education courses.⁶³

Tools for Remediation and Increasing Opportunities for Success

At a time of increased budget constraints, there are opportunities to expand remediation without expanding costs. Some adult students entering the classroom after a long absence need a quick refresher course in order to brush up on their skills.⁶⁴ Others may not have had the opportunity to learn the necessary skills in high schools, where completion requirements can match a 10th grade skill level or less.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in some cases, both groups of students are placed in the same semester-long remediation classes, despite having vast differences in how much remediation is needed. Many community colleges are beginning to address this issue, but best practices from other states show potential options.

For remediation purposes, self-paced open-ended classes give students the opportunity to learn at a rate that works both for them and for their schedules.⁶⁶ Students can begin and end their work at their own pace, allowing for differences between skills, learning styles, and even work schedules to be minimized in the pursuit of remediation.⁶⁷ These programs, with appropriate supervision, could also find success in areas of the state not physically served by community colleges, since the colleges could partner with existing education institutions in their areas.

There is some debate about the role academic advising plays in retention of nontraditional students. Some research indicates that counseling is key to student retention, particularly when advising leads to clear goals for the student.⁶⁸ Counseling and tutoring helps students become more socially integrated with the school, increasing persistence.⁶⁹ However, for nontraditional students, time for counseling and social integration may not exist.⁷⁰

Environmental aspects such as outside support, finances, and time spent in employment may have a larger impact on the ability of nontraditional students to persist with school.⁷¹ A compromise may be made by building communities or cohorts within schools in order to provide communal learning and support during the time nontraditional students are on campus.⁷²

Recommendations

1. Expand remediation programs like Career Gateway to overcome the challenges that students face when they move from adult literacy to college. Among those challenges, the program addresses test-taking, study strategies, and stress management, all important but often ignored skills in preparing for college. Including similar learning opportunities in all adult education classes, and perhaps offering a pre-college class in these courses for nontraditional students, might decrease the need for remediation.
2. Consider methods of dual enrollment for nontraditional students. While Pennsylvania offers dual enrollment courses, they primarily focus on giving high school students access to college classes. A dual enrollment program similar to IBEST could help students learn the skills they need for the workplace by combining basic and advanced skills into one course.
3. Offer self-paced remediation opportunities for students who can learn effectively in that setting. Individuals have their own unique learning styles, and may not be benefited by classroom-only remedial classes. Remediation programs that use computer programs, self-study, and other methods of self-pacing can produce better, less expensive results, allowing adults and their schools to focus on credit-bearing classes that achieve certificates, diplomas, and degrees.

Summary

As the country continues to focus on ways of improving our workforce and the earning capacity of our workers, the above recommendations reflect a means for Pennsylvania to move forward. In many case, community colleges along with other Commonwealth workforce entities are already taking steps to meet the needs of nontraditional students. However, these groups need to continue working together to ensure that Pennsylvania's current workforce has the opportunity to earn the education it needs.

Spotlight on: Distance Learning

Throughout this report, which focuses on affordability, accessibility, and readiness, there is one topic in particular that crosses all barriers: distance learning. Distance learning has the potential to address all three issues, but it also has barriers of its own.

Affordability: Distance learning courses may be more affordable for students and schools alike, since they cut down on child care, transportation, and maintenance costs. State and local governments can also explore ways that students living out-of-district can access distance learning without paying out-of-district rates. Right now, students who live too far from a community college to attend in person may avail themselves of distance learning programs through community colleges; however, many of these programs include additional costs on top of the out-of-district fee⁷³ (which on average adds \$5,022 to the overall cost).⁷⁴

Accessibility: Creating access to affordable distance learning provides an enhanced tool for adult learning. Students benefit from higher individual attention and communication from their teachers in both distance learning and blended learning (a combination of technology and classroom work) compared to learning that occurs strictly in the classroom.⁷⁵ One study has shown that literacy in low-skilled adults increased when they learned to use technology in their employment or in training for employment.⁷⁶ By expanding students' familiarity with technology, distance learning prepares students for online job applications and work with computers, complementing the skills they learn through online classes in their field.⁷⁷ By 2016, 70 percent of all jobs in the United States are expected to require some form of technology literacy.⁷⁸

Readiness: Within student readiness, distance learning provides an avenue for students to learn at their own pace, and to continuously review materials (including video and audio from the class) until they feel comfortable with the material, especially with the services of a proctor to deal with technical issues.⁷⁹

The Downside(s) (and how to address them): While distance learning has a number of benefits, students face barriers as well. Students who receive the Pennsylvania State Grant can only attend distance-learning courses for 50 percent of their total coursework.⁸⁰ This requirement creates a roadblock for students trying to fit school into their work schedules, and can be an insurmountable barrier for students in north and central Pennsylvania, where community college accessibility is limited.

Another barrier students face relates specifically to their learning styles and their comfort levels with technology. While students benefit from blended and distance learning, the classroom portion of a blended course may be difficult for students who live far from community colleges. Regular connection to and interaction with a teacher, whether in online or classroom based learning, will still be essential to positive outcomes.⁸¹

Finally, not all students have access to computers and internet. A map of Pennsylvania created by Speed Matters, a national nonprofit dedicated to increasing access to affordable high-speed internet, shows that areas with the slowest internet connections (based on those who took the

“Speed Matters” online test) overlap the areas without community colleges.⁸² Since broadband service is often needed to access distance learning courses, the lack of internet accessibility may prevent use of the programs in some of the areas that need it most. However, internet access is growing in all areas of the country. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 74 percent of all adults (18 and older) reported using the internet, including 81 percent of adults age 30-49 and 70 percent of all adults age 50-64. Of adults with only a high school degree, 63 percent use the internet.⁸³

Partnerships to Create a Solution: One solution to the downsides caused by distance learning could come through creating partnerships among community colleges and the non-profit organizations, technical schools, and school districts that serve areas otherwise out of reach to the college. By working with local entities to find classroom space, community colleges could create computer labs available in the evenings and on weekends for distance learning (along with a proctor to handle technical issues). Students could then familiarize themselves with computers and take online courses.

For students who need more training in basic skills or access to traditional classroom learning, these entities could also become partners in providing developmental education or short-term classes. PathWays PA, for example, offers one credit courses at the local community college and in their office space so that students can gain knowledge around phlebotomy, physiology, and other important healthcare needs. Similar classes could be set up around the state to increase classroom participation. These in-person classes may also be a way around the funding dilemma for students using the state grant program, since they can only use 50 percent of their funding on distance learning. PHEAA could also look at ways to allow students to use more of their funding for distance learning, provided that students took part in distance learning through a supervised computer lab setting. Corporations based in Pennsylvania could also collaborate with community colleges and local groups to provide space and funding in order to train their future (and current) workforce.

¹ Thank you to the Working Poor Families Project for their support. For more information on the project, please visit www.workingpoorfamilies.org.

² Working Poor Families Project, 2010.

³ American Community Survey 2006-2008.

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