Virginia's Community Colleges 2015 Legislative Agenda

Stackable workforce credentials are the higher education issue of our time. While bachelor’s and graduate degrees remain valuable they, alone, are no longer enough to position Virginia, or the people who live here, for the opportunities of the 21st century.

Virginia’s Community Colleges are pursuing a 2015 legislative agenda focused on helping more people obtain these credentials, which act as passports to today’s middle class.

Ensuring Veterans’ Service Counts

Virginia’s Community Colleges want to make it easier for veterans to get academic credit for military training applicable to his or her certificate or degree requirements. Over the past two years, 16 other states have already taken similar steps to ease the transition of retired, active duty and former military personnel to civilian education and careers. To be eligible a person must be enrolled in a Virginia community college and have a military transcript showing courses/programs confirmed for credit by the appropriate national association, according to the legislation pursued by the VCCS. The proposal conforms to Governor McAuliffe’s Executive Order 23 to help veterans make seamless transitions and bolsters the already strong relationship between the VCCS and the military.

Elevating Virginia’s Workforce Credentials

In order to lower the costs of training and instruction for students; enable community colleges to expand capacity; and meet the communities’ needs for more credentialed workers, the VCCS seeks to establish the Community College Workforce Training Grant Program. The $7.5 million proposal would put an additional 7,500 credentials in the Virginia economy by compensating a community college $1,000 when a student successfully completes an industry-recognized credential identified regionally as high demand by business and industry. The performance-based incentive would improve Virginia’s competitiveness with the 19 other states, including Maryland and North Carolina, currently funding this type of training.

FACT: “College graduates, meanwhile, have widened their income advantage over high school grads, as several recent studies demonstrate — including one from MIT economist David Autor, who found that the annual income gap between a college-educated family and a high-school-educated one grew by $28,000 over the past 35 years, after adjusting for inflation.”


FACT: “Nine out of 10 children who grow up at the bottom of the income ladder but then graduate from college move up to a higher economic bracket as adults, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. Less than half of kids without a degree make the same leap.”


PERSPECTIVE: “The biggest problem in the modern military is that the majority of vets don’t have a college degree,” Tony Lee [publisher of Career Cast Veterans Networks] says. “Employers are still trying to figure out how to treat years of experience in the military if the vet only has a high school degree.”

“How Veteran Unemployment Compares To Overall Unemployment In Every State,” Business Insider.com, July 15, 2014
Expanding Access to Workforce Training
Antiquated rules keep most of today's student financial aid out-of-reach from individuals pursing non-credit workforce training. That means these people are on their own when it comes to pursuing the credentials necessary for many of today's most in-demand careers. The Governor's introduced budget includes $1 million for need-based financial aid for students in non-credit workforce training. SCHEV had recommended $3.75 million for this purpose.

FACT: “Middle-skilled” jobs, which require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor’s degree represent half of future U.S. jobs.


Boosting Rural Virginia’s Competitiveness
The VCCS is pursuing matching funds to help spur investment in the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative. Every dollar of the $1 million General Fund request would be matched by three private dollars, raised by the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education and the local foundations serving the RVHI pilot colleges. All told, the RVHI plan calls for raising $42 million over ten years to increase educational attainment throughout the rural parts of the state served by 14 community colleges, in pursuit of two specific goals:

- Reducing the percentage of the population of the RVHI without a high school diploma from 21% to the current state average of 14% in 10 years; and
- Doubling the number of residents of the Horseshoe with an associate degree or other college certification from 26% to 53% in 10 years.

FACT:

“Over the next decade, 1.5 million jobs will need to be filled in Virginia.

“A half-million of those are expected to be new positions, with the remainder replacing retirees of the rapidly aging workforce.

“But more than half of those jobs will not require a college degree.

“What they will require are licensures, apprenticeships and certifications.

“These middle-skilled jobs are the most in-demand and will be the most numerous in the coming decade,' [Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice ] Jones said.”

“Virginia official promotes workforce development in Germanna presentation,”
Fredericksburg Free Lance Star, December 5, 2014