



Testimony before the House Higher Education Committee
House Bill 9 – Improving Credit Transfers
June 25th, 2019

Chair Keller, Vice Chair Riedel, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 9. My name is Jack Hershey, President and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, which represents Ohio's twenty-three public community colleges.

As Representatives Jones and Sweeney shared in their HB 9 sponsor testimony, the overarching goal of HB 9 is to help more students earn a postsecondary degree or credential by improving Ohio's transfer system and attempting to remove barriers for traditional age or working adult students. OACC thanks the bill sponsors and leadership for advancing this important conversation as a bipartisan priority for the Ohio House.

For the past several years Ohio has been working to meet the Complete to Compete goal of having 65% of working aged adults earned a degree, certificate or postsecondary credential by 2025. We face a severe shortage of skilled and prepared workers to meet the current and future in-demand jobs in this state – especially in high growth fields like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and technology that will drive the modern economy. Currently, Ohio ranks 33rd for overall educational attainment with a statewide postsecondary attainment rate of 44.6%, which is three percentage points below the national average of 47.6%.

While Ohio has made recent improvements in our degree attainment, the reality is that more needs to be done if we are going to meet the statewide attainment goal. We have all heard that a crisis is looming. In order to ensure our workforce has the skills and training necessary to fill both the current and future job openings in our state, Ohio needs to think and move boldly with innovative and inclusive postsecondary proposals aimed at increasing both access and completion for students.

From OACC's perspective, the fundamental goal of HB 9 is to challenge the state and our institutions to look at ways Ohio can improve transfer for all students. Through the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM), ODHE has developed a very good system for how credit is transferred among Ohio's public colleges and universities. Students are guaranteed the transfer of a large number of specific courses among Ohio's public colleges and universities and equitable treatment in the application of credits to admissions and degree requirements. The OTM is set up so that students know they can complete specified general education courses anywhere in the public system by assuring that the set of learning outcomes are the same, regardless if the general education course is taken at a public university main campus, university branch campus or community college, while protecting the integrity of the credential and degree programs of our institutions of higher education.

OTM is a good foundational structure for transfer and articulation. Recent laws like the Guaranteed Transfer Pathways built upon the OTM to help students who complete an associate degree at a community college, at our substantially lower tuition rates, be able to transfer to a public university knowing that their entire degree is guaranteed to be applied toward their bachelor degree requirements.

But that doesn't mean there still aren't ways we can strengthen how the transfer system works in this state for career technical, community college and university students. Every year, tens of thousands of students transfer between our public institutions and the goal of the OTM is to ensure that students are not being forced to retake the same course. Unfortunately, we know that is not always the case. For some transfer students, credits are still denied, or they are told the course credit is accepted, but the course still needs to be retaken at the receiving institution. Sometimes institutions create their own institution specific gateway courses, which require a student who has already completed certain general education courses at another college or university to repeat a substantially similar course at the institution they transfer to, in order to meet the specific requirements set by that receiving institution.

Ohio's public colleges and universities work every day to prepare students and make the transfer process work for them, but the reality is sometimes we all come up short. And when we do, discouraged students do not know where to turn to and ODHE is left with little enforcement power. For far too many students, the credit transfer process is confusing and daunting – they aren't familiar enough with the requirements or where to turn if a college or university denies their credit or simply accepts their credit without having it count toward their degree. Further stressing the need to increase transparency and guidance is underscored by the fact that our institutions are serving more first generation and nontraditional aged students than ever before.

National studies show that a large percentage of students entering community college want to eventually earn a bachelor's degree; and yet, Ohio ranks toward the bottom in the number of transfer students who eventually earn their 4-year degree. The question is why does this happen and what can we learn from policy levers and partnerships implemented in other states who strengthened their transfer systems and improved credit transfer efficiency for students.

We know this is not a simple problem with a simple solution. However, pretending the problem doesn't exist should no longer be a strategy Ohio embraces. Ohio can and should continue to look at ways to improve the overall process for students and we believe HB 9 should be viewed as another vehicle to evaluate how the University System of Ohio structures its gateway courses in a way that will help more students earn their degree. Tackling the impending workforce crisis head-on will require in-depth analyses and collaboration to evaluate and advance new student and employer-focused approaches.

Chair Keller and members of the House Higher Education Committee, thank you once again for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.