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Fairfield County is one of four of the 20 most populated counties in Ohio that is not part of a community or technical college district. It is also the fifth fastest growing county in the state. Governor DeWine has called for new investments in workforce development to help both Ohio citizens and job creators. “We’re going to invest more in our current career-tech centers and two-year community colleges, and we are going to create at least 10,000 industry certificates,” DeWine said in his 2019 State of the State speech. **To meet economic and workforce development goals, a large and growing county like Fairfield needs to have better access to career and technical programs.**

Ohio University Lancaster has been a great provider of post-secondary education in our community. It currently offers 12 Bachelor Degrees, 13 Associate Degrees, and six certificates. It has been a gem in our community and has provided a pathway for many local students to further their education and their careers. Its Engineering-Technology program is very impressive and has been a great pipeline of high-skilled employees for local manufacturers. The price of tuition is also very reasonable. A student will invest just over \$10,000 per year to receive the degree and even less if they receive aid. But as a two-year program it cannot quickly provide mid-level skilled manufacturing employees.

Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical School’s location in Fairfield County caters more toward high school students and carpentry is its only program in the skilled trades. It offers only one adult program – dental hygienist.

There is an even larger gap in Fairfield County than other counties when it comes to the certificate and technical programs that Governor DeWine referenced. The county has created a Career Readiness Endorsement that targets the approximately 700 high school graduates each year that do not go to college. Our goal is to get these students into a local career right after high school while still developing skills through a local technical school. But for many of the career pathways there are no local options. Counselors tell us that transportation is the No. 1 barrier for many of these students so leaving the county to gain these skills is impractical. Without practical options for certificate and technical programs, the Fairfield County workforce will be economically disadvantaged; and there are negative, statewide effects to this problem.

As the Area 20 Workforce Development Board Director my role is to oversee allocated funds from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. These funds go to individuals to help retrain them to gain skills for in-demand jobs in our community. A certificate program can help retrain a job seeker before their six months of unemployment expires. Since the majority of our

programming in our county includes two-year degrees there are limited options for these individuals. They would have to work while pursuing their two year degree – which can be difficult if you are a single parent.

Hocking College, a technical college with a proven track record of success in delivering certificate and technical programs, desires to quickly add programs and meet needs of Fairfield County in conjunction with Governor DeWine’s stated goals. The new programs they are prepared to provide will supplement the other great post-secondary options currently available in the county and will target specific company needs. These certificates will include electrical and mechanical (plant maintenance); OSHA certification; forklift certification; welding certification; cybersecurity; STNA; and programming to meet needs of developmental disability clients in their pathway to employment. For example, a welding certificate could be attained in 14 weeks for \$2,700.

Ohio University is interested in expanding its offerings in Fairfield County, specifically in engineering. An agreement between Hocking College and Ohio University could offer pathways for students to receive stackable certificates at Hocking College that could ultimately lead to a Bachelor’s Degree at Ohio University. Manufacturing is responsible for 30% of Fairfield County’s economic base. Creating a pathway that includes Hocking College and Ohio University could help solidify that base and the nearly 5,000 manufacturing jobs in our county. This would also be a critical piece in helping to attract new manufacturers to our county. Fairfield County employers continue to attract more workers from the Appalachian region due to its proximity to Southeast Ohio. By connecting programs to two of the largest providers of post-secondary education in Southeast Ohio it will create a long-term pipeline of employees in Fairfield County.

Fairfield County will participate in establishing new programs with Hocking College and Ohio University Lancaster. Fairfield County will have excess property that it can transfer to its Port Authority. The Port Authority would use the building as a Workforce Training center and could be used by both Ohio University and Hocking College. The building is in a great location in the center of the county with easy access to both Business Route 33 and the Route 33 Bypass.

Magna International, an auto parts supplier, has announced plans to locate a new plant in Lancaster, Ohio. This plant will employ 300 people and could expand to employ an even greater amount. The key to Magna’s ability to expand is local programming to train its workforce. It expects local education providers to have both short-term and long-term programming to create a pipeline of employees. Having a pathway that includes both Hocking College and Ohio University will be critical to that success.

Fairfield County, Hocking College, and Ohio University are seeking funding for the new programs to be placed in the state budget.