



Ohio Association of Community Colleges

Testimony on House Bill 108

The Informed Student Document Act

House Education and Career Readiness Committee

February 20th, 2018

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chairwoman Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, I am Tom Walsh, Vice President of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, which represents the presidents and trustees of Ohio's twenty-three community colleges. Our college leaders share the same goals of the bill sponsors to empower students and their families by helping them make informed decisions on their higher education options by providing transparent and accessible information on the costs of attending a college or university.

Student debt continues to be a major concern for students and their families, policymakers and state and national leaders. While there has certainly been a number of recent efforts to curtail the rising costs to obtain a postsecondary degree, clearly more work still needs to be done. According to a recent report by The Institute for College Access and Success, the average debt for graduating students in Ohio is now \$30,351, with two-thirds of students graduating with some debt from institutions of higher education in this state. On the flip side, with an average annual tuition around \$4,000, nearly 60% of all community college students graduate with no debt.

Ohio's community colleges are positioned to help Ohio meet its workforce needs by delivering an affordable, high-quality education for students of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. If Ohio is going to meet the attainment goal of 65% of all working aged Ohioans having some type of postsecondary credential or degree by 2025, we must continue to identify ways that make college more accessible for all students, from the traditional graduating high school student to working aged adults seeking new skills and career training necessary to meet the ever-evolving workforce demands.

The Informed Student Documents created under HB 108 could be a valuable tool as students and their families make the important and often confusing decision of where to attend college. While there is no silver bullet to addressing the rising costs of higher education, we strongly believe in the old adage that "knowledge is power." For that, we thank Representative Hagan and Senator McColley for working to provide readily available information so that students and their families make an informed decision that best meets their educational *and* financial expectations.

Additionally, we very much appreciate the bill sponsors for their willingness to work with OACC to improve upon an earlier iteration of this legislation, HB 383 from the 131st General Assembly. Ohio is fortunate to have such a wide array of postsecondary institutions and for this tool to be most useful it is imperative we provide students with as much useful information as possible when considering their best options for their career goals and financial situation.

"Student Success"

HB 108 would require the Chancellor to develop an alternative measurement of "student success" for institutions where more than half of their enrolled students are not first-time, full-time students. Nearly 70% of all of community college students attend our colleges on a part-time basis so we strongly support an alternative measurement. Additional metrics such as completion of short-term training programs, students who transfer to a public or private university, student persistence and an accounting of students who already have a degree but are pursuing additional training or industry

credentials provide a more accurate picture of our student successes. OACC appreciates the acknowledgement that the student populations vary greatly between our sector and many of the university students. *In order to ensure ODHE develops the most effective metrics for our sector, OACC requests amending HB 108 to require the department develop these measurements in consultation with the presidents of our colleges.*

“Costs”

An increasingly important low-cost pathway for students to obtain their bachelor’s degree is through what are commonly referred to as “2+2” or “3+1” transfer pathway agreements between a community college and public or private university. Under these agreements, a student can attend the first two (or three) years at a community college and then seamlessly transfer to the university to complete their baccalaureate degree. These agreements can result in significant savings for students and have shown great promise in easing student debt while increasing degree attainment rates. *Therefore, OACC recommends that the Informed Student Document provide information on all 2+2 and/or 3+1 transfer agreements that are currently in place at each institution.*

Additionally, it is often difficult for first-generation and low and middle-income students to understand the types of financial aid that may be available. This is especially true if the student comes from a background where nobody in their family has ever attended college. HB 108 requires that each document include information on federal student aid forms including FAFSA and we support the amendment that was accepted by the committee late last year that would make it permissive for a school board to adopt a policy to encourage students to complete the FAFSA forms. However, OACC believes that this requirement should be stronger and we suggest amending HB 108 to require the Chancellor to work with our colleges and universities, K-12 and financial aid experts. Completing FAFSA forms would greatly benefit lower income, first-generation, and underrepresented students, including minority and rural student populations, know that higher education may be financially viable. Far too many students often do not pursue a postsecondary education simply because how they do not believe they or their family could ever afford it.

“Admissions”

The admissions data required under the bill does not necessarily make sense for community colleges or many open-access universities. Measuring an institution’s admission rates, the percentage of students who graduated from an Ohio high school in the top 10% of their class and the average SAT or ACT test scores for the 25th and 75th percentile does not make sense for community colleges or open access universities. While admission rates may matter for *US News & World Report* university rankings, they simply have little to no weight for our open admission colleges. In fact, considering the important purpose that two- and four-year open access institutions provide and the student population they serve, the admission reporting contained in HB 108 would likely inadvertently cast the open access mission of these institutions in a negative light. This is clearly not the intent of the bill sponsors. *Therefore, OACC recommends amending HB 108 to exempt open access community colleges and universities from having this information included in their documents.*

In conclusion, Ohio’s community colleges applaud the bill sponsors for helping students navigate the important decision-making process of attending a college. This price transparency tool, coupled with the financial literacy requirements, will help Ohio’s families identify affordable pathways to follow so that a college degree remains within reach. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of these changes that we believe will strengthen this bill.