

Testimony on House Bill 49
House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
March 14, 2017

Chairman Perales, Ranking Member Ramos and distinguished members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 49. I am Steve Johnson, President & CEO of Sinclair Community College, which serves over 30,000 college credit students a year and an additional 15,000 non-credit or custom training students a year in the Dayton Region. I am sure the members of this committee are proud of the work done by Ohio's 23 community colleges. More students than ever are getting more education, faster, and for less cost than before. Ohio's community colleges are the affordable answer to a college education. I would like to share with you today some of the extraordinary results that we have achieved at my college, which in many ways reflects what is happening in community colleges across this state. I'd also like to discuss what we need to do to take these successes to the next level.

The discussion of higher education in Ohio and across the country often begins and ends with the costs of college. We completely understand why that would be the case but, simply put, community colleges do not have an affordability problem because our direct costs to students are comparatively quite low and are

usually covered by financial aid. 63% of all of my students pay less than \$1,000 for tuition, fees, and books to attend Sinclair and the average cost of attendance is \$800 per year for all Sinclair students. I think we can all agree: this is a reasonable cost for a product than can change the rest of your life.

However, while we do not have a problem of excessive cost, community colleges and their students do have a student completion problem. And confusing a completion problem with an affordability problem that our sector does not have will make our completion problem that much worse. Why? Because it will cut resources such as advising, tutoring, counselling, and mentoring away from the students who need them the most. Community college students are the most at risk of any educational sector and lead lives that are very different from traditional university students. Our students are more likely to be older and away from traditional school for many years, more likely to be working, more likely to be parents, and significantly less likely to be academically prepared at the time of enrollment than traditional university students. The good news, however, is that Sinclair and other schools in Ohio have done great work to increase student completion, though much is left to be done. Our faculty and students have also

earned the right to take pride in these successes and to make the case for how additional resources would be used to take student success to the next level.

Sinclair has used the following 5 approaches to increase student success:

1. Reduce time in developmental education
2. Build guided pathways for students
3. Emphasize effective academic advising
4. Improve curriculum structure
5. Expand career development

Together, our work on these approaches has seen an extraordinary growth in student success. Our course completion rates have climbed and our withdrawal rates have fallen.

We are using better placement measures so that students are not unnecessarily placed in developmental education that costs them time and money. We are also increasing the intensity and effectiveness of our advising services, using data analytics to help students before they reach a stage of crisis and fail their courses.

We have made advising mandatory and are assigning students to specific advisors who reach out proactively to students.

This approach is working: in 2015, 93% of students reported that they met with an advisor, up from 58% just five short years ago. We have also reduced the number of credits needed to a degree and assigned students MAPs (which stands for My Academic Plan) so that their academic journey is laid out clearly to them and they can avoid costly detours.

Students are being guided into Career Communities and are gaining access to their career earlier in their education. Those students who are unready to decide are guided to an advisor who specializes in helping students decide which careers that they want to pursue.

All of this work is being supported by national leaders such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation. We will work with anyone, anywhere, if it helps our students and all the credit goes to the faculty, students, and staff that do this difficult work every day.

And it is working. I am very proud to tell you that we have seen a 27 percent increase in credentials earned at Sinclair from FY13 to FY16. To put that in raw numbers, we have seen an increase from 3,300 credentials earned in FY 13 to approximately 4,200 in FY16 while enrollment has been more or less constant.

And the best news is still to come. We are projecting that we will graduate more students with a credential than at any other time in our history this year, with an estimated 4,600 credentials completed for FY17. That is an astonishing increase in such a short period of time.

These successes are being recognized by the Performance Based Funding model, a force that has helped to catalyze a systemic approach to student success. Ohio is the only state in the country that has gone 100% in on Performance Based Funding. Our students are succeeding at higher rates than ever before and are filling the open jobs in my community. We are better than we have ever been at the core business of getting students a credential with meaning that will allow them to get a job.

The significance of this is that students with a college education earn more money and are less likely to be unemployed than those without. We tracked a recent cohort of our graduates and found that students who graduated with a degree see an 114% increase in earnings on average the first year after graduation. That is a difference of \$19,900 a year. What I just described is the difference between not quite making it and having a real shot at the American Dream. Finally, these students stay in Ohio and in their communities at a pace of over 90%. An investment in Ohio's community colleges is very much an investment in Ohio's future.

We at Sinclair, and at our peer community colleges throughout Ohio, want to take these successes to the next level, and we believe that is what you expect of us. We want to build off of the good work done by faculty, students, and staff and hit Governor Kasich's ambitious goal of 65% college attainment by 2025. It is important, however, that we speak bluntly about what it will take to get there and by whom the work must be done. Because even with all the good work we have done, we are on track to fall short of this goal as a state, only hitting around the 45% mark. That means that good people will be left behind and that good jobs will go elsewhere when we do fall short. We must be frank: a continued

investment in higher education generally, and in the community college sector specifically, is the only way in which we will hit the Governor's goal and advance our workforce to remain competitive in this global economy.

While the focus in Columbus and across the country is very understandably on the cost of a college education, it is important to realize also that a college education is the very best investment a person can make over the course of their lifetime. Something of value inherently contains a cost and the education that we provide is an absolutely outstanding value. We certainly understand a desire to bring educational costs such as textbooks and tuition under control so that Ohio's working families can afford the education they need for the jobs of the future. As always, we want to be a part of a holistic solution and would be very excited to work collaboratively with you and our peers on these challenges.

There are many provisions in this state budget that will help our students pursue their dreams. We are particularly strongly supportive of an effort to catalog and invest in short-term certificates, something that employers strongly embrace to get the employees they need, as well as a push to increase the capacity of 3+1 agreements with Ohio's great universities. However, a continued disinvestment in

Ohio's community colleges, such as continued tuition caps and an unexpected and unbudgeted and unfunded textbook mandate inherently harm the students we are seeking to help. When colleges like mine have fewer resources, students suffer because we have less capability to provide the individualized service that they need.

When low-cost providers like Sinclair cannot adjust tuition and fees, I will acknowledge that students save a modest upfront cost (literally as low as \$2 a credit hour for most of my students on a 2% tuition hike). However, depriving my school of that tuition costs us \$900,000 a year and \$9 million over the course of a decade. This is what we mean when we say that solving the affordability problem that we do not have makes solving our completion problem that much harder.

The approaches I have outlined earlier (more prescriptive advising, curricular redesign, data analytics to help support students, and better screening and measurement for students) all cost resources to provide. The work we are doing is clearly making a difference for Ohio's community college students. We at Sinclair, and our partner colleges, want to provide an even higher level of service to the students we serve and would like to track and assist students past graduation so

that we know what skills are necessary to provide local employers with the workforce they need.

This continued investment in our colleges, our students, and our state's future is a very worthwhile choice. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the work done by Sinclair's students and faculty. I appreciate your time and attention today and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.