

Testimony Before the House Higher Education Finance Subcommittee  
House Bill 110 (FY 2022-23 Budget Bill)  
March 3, 2021

Chair Cross, Ranking Member Howse and members of the House Higher Education Finance Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address this committee today on House Bill 110 and the vital role that Ohio's community colleges play in Ohio's economic future. My name is Dr. Michael Thomson and I have the privilege to serve as President of Northwest State Community College, located in Fulton County. As you heard from President Dorey Diab, Ohio's 23 community colleges, working with our Association of Community Colleges, have five top priorities for your consideration. Today, I will address three main points that inform why this list is so critical to Ohio's present and future.

In 2019 and 2020 I had the honor of co-chairing ODHE's Adult Learner Initiative (Finish for Your Future: <https://www.ohiohighered.org/FFYF>) where over 100 postsecondary stakeholders from public and private colleges, universities, and career center collaborated. We focused on **closing the gap for the 1 million Ohioans who have some college, but no credential or degree**. Our work was informed by students, employers and third-party partners in our field. We detailed policy recommendations, documented high-impact practices, demonstrated the return-on-investment and provided solutions for closing equity gaps. Many key items to assist Ohio adults in their educational pursuits are reflected in OACC's Top Five recommendations, which was included in President Diab's testimony.

Most notable to improving the lives of Ohio adults is our top priority - supporting workforce training. We've learned from national groups like STRADA, that the majority of Americans now desire short-term education that upskills and re-credentials learners to critical jobs with higher incomes. That national data is echoed in phone calls to our 23 community colleges, where learner confidence is low, and finances are challenging. Our learners are adults with an average age of 28 who balance the demands of work, school, family, civic and faith-based obligations. They are asking for, in fact demanding, that we provide the short-term credentialing they need to create a better life, and to strengthen the communities that they reside in. Top certificates are in critical job areas such as health careers (STNA, Health Information Systems, Dental Assisting), logistics (CDL) and IT (coding academies). Ohioans, especially adult learners over age 25 deserve a 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational funding model that directs needed resources towards postsecondary workforce and job training programs for the in-demand short term certificates or credentials leading to better jobs.

Second, the **path to making many of these workforce programs function is strengthening our continued partnership with civic, faith-based organizations and businesses**. Often, a civic or non-profit partner serve clients and have a strong support system to help them navigate their journey ahead. In Northwest Ohio, key players include county economic development organizations as well non-profits such as Cherry St. Mission, Goodwill and Defiance Dream Center. Then, community colleges like NSCC, Owens and Terra provide up-to-date curriculum to serve these clients. Then, our business partners provide immediate employment to learners completing our programs that support the five critical industries in the Regional Growth Partnership ([www.rgp.org](http://www.rgp.org)) - advanced manufacturing, energy, logistics, automotive and food processing. I live in Defiance, Ohio. There, the County Economic Development Department, Northwest State Community College and Defiance Dream Center had already graduated multiple classes in needed short-term certificates resulting in immediate local employment for automotive and construction employers.

The Rapid ROI proposal, modeled after the successful Tech Cred program, provides needed one-time funding to scale efforts. Rapid ROI uses the lessons learned from Tech Cred by expanding efforts from strictly employer-based referrals to these larger multi-sector partnerships. Funding will support 15,000 Ohioans receiving needed credentials and degrees that lead to new or improved employment. Scale up funding for rapid recovery will especially assist the thousands of Ohio's small and medium businesses that lack the personnel or time to navigate the current Tech Cred system. RROI funding is the "vaccine" to help Ohio emerge from the pandemic as a strong economic force in the post-pandemic global economy.

Lastly, we laud the accomplishments of College Credit Plus, a strong improvement over PSEOP that has seen strong enrollment growth over the last few years. However, we do note that the great bulk of CCP participants still mirror the PSEOP populations traditional college-going students, missing the intended impact of the CCP legislation to widen the scope of college going behavior in Ohio. **We urge this group to facilitate pending recommendations to widen CCP with alternative eligibility requirements that create workforce-ready pathways.** These workforce pathways lead to local jobs at family-sustaining wages using pre-apprenticeship programs. NSCC's experience is in serving manufacturing companies like Automatic Feed (<https://www.automaticfeed.com/>) and APT Manufacturing (<https://aptmfg.com/>) with these pre-apprentice programs. High school students travel on-site to earn strong advanced manufacturing and robotics skills as well as earn college credit. Other community colleges have similar experiences with companies in industries serving their local employers. This work helps Ohio re-align our future citizens' work credentials to the future jobs in Ohio. The workforce pathways also help our P-12 schools implement Ohio's latest graduation requirements. These pathways often count for 12 points towards high-school graduation, like MSSC (<https://www.msscusa.org/>) and are currently used in high schools and career centers.

Thank you so much for your consideration of OACC's top five recommendations, which is supported collectively by all 23 of Ohio's community colleges, will serve Ohio well now and in the future. We believe these priorities are important because investments in workforce funding will modernize Ohio's educational funding model to meet both current and future job demands. These priorities will support multi-sector regional partnerships and create provide workforce aligned certificates and degrees for a rapid recovery from the current economic recession. Lastly, expanding opportunities for more workforce ready pathways will realign our future workforce to the jobs of the future while also assisting more high school students reach Ohio's high school graduation requirements.

Thank you for listening to my testimony today, and I would be glad to answer any questions that the members have today.