



Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee

HB 110 (FY 2022-23 Operating Budget)

Thursday, May 12, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Jack Hershey, President of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC), which represents the trustees and presidents of all twenty-three of the state's public community colleges.

Many of you may be asking why community colleges are here to testify on a day meant to discuss health and human services issues. The answer is because we increasingly see local human service agencies as key partners in our efforts to help more students graduate from community college. Because of our commitment to remaining affordable and the open access mission of our colleges, community college students are often the first higher education choice for many underrepresented or "nontraditional" students, including minority, rural, Pell eligible, First Generation, returning adults and working parent students.

To help students overcome many of the non-academic challenges that they are dealing with, our colleges have begun partnering with a myriad of social service organizations in their communities to help with these obstacles. For instance, stronger partnerships with county Job & Family Service Agencies, food banks, Housing authorities, mental health clinics and more are now a key strategy we are exploring throughout the state. In short, we now believe partnering with the experts, as opposed to building our own internal bureaucracies, is the future of community colleges.

The importance of these partnerships became even clearer to us after The Trellis Company, a national research company, conducted a survey of Ohio community colleges shortly before the pandemic. A one-page overview of the Student Financial Wellness Survey Results is attached to this testimony, but it illustrated to us that our students were experiencing greater degrees of food insecurity, housing insecurity and were more financially fragile than we believed. Perhaps most striking to us was that nearly 60% of the Ohio community college students indicated that they would have trouble paying for an unexpected expense of \$500 or more.

Community College Acceleration Program (CCAP)

Understanding the connection between student finances and student success is critical. One of the most promising programs where human and social services are being seamlessly woven together with academic and career services is in a new model known as ASAP. Three of our colleges (Cincinnati State, Cuyahoga Community College and Lorain County Community College) were part of project managed by the Ohio Department of Higher Education that highlighted the importance of very intensive, consistent advising that addresses not just the needs of a "student", but rather all the needs of a person to keep them on track. The project attempted to replicate a program developed by the CUNY system in New York. This holistic advising, combined with financial supports that were provided through the ODHE project, led to a 50% increase in graduation rates for these students. Those results gained national attention, but unfortunately, the program was simply too expensive to implement to any significant degree within the existing resources of any community college.

This is where the Community College Acceleration Program (CCAP) comes into play. This program, run through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, aims to take advantage of the US Department of Agriculture's SNAP Employment and Training Program. That program is focused on helping SNAP recipients gain the training or education necessary to help them secure a job that leads to economic self-sufficiency. The program, once fully operational, would reimburse community colleges for 50% of the academic costs and support services that we offer to students who are currently receiving SNAP benefits. Those are funds we could utilize towards the costs of increased student advising and other student success initiatives.

CCAP is a partnership between community colleges and county JFS agencies in their region. The goal is to help support individuals receiving food assistance work toward a job-focused credential or degree. It is designed to provide support with other academic related expenses such as textbooks, uniforms, fees, and equipment or supplies for technical programs. The last budget authorized five pilot projects throughout the state between community colleges and county JFS agencies to implement these programs. Setting these up has been no easy task, but has been made easier by the willingness of ODHE and ODJFS to coordinate the early efforts to set up the structure for how such a program would work in Ohio. Currently, the participating colleges are Clark State, Columbus State, Lorain County Community College, Northwest State and Southern State, and they collectively are partnering with 20 different county JFS agencies.

HB 110 currently allocates \$2.5 million per year in SNAP Employment & Training funding to continue and eventually expand this program. OACC appreciates ODJFS' budget recommendation to support this program and we respectfully request the Senate maintain the funding. We view this as a smart one-time investment that will help provide federal matching in the future to hopefully help bring CCAP to scale statewide, and allow us to draw down millions in funds from the US Department of Agriculture in the future once the program is fully implemented.

Student Emergency Funds

As we wait for the CCAP to be brought to scale to more colleges in Ohio, **we would also ask the Senate to support an OACC-requested amendment that would establish a grant program that would supplement community college emergency funds program on our campuses.** These programs are designed to provide very targeted grants to quickly assist students who inform us that they are intending to stop out of their classes due to unexpected expenses.

By identifying the reasons that put students at risk of dropping out, these programs work with the students so that they remain enrolled and on track toward completion in exchange for helping them with the unexpected expense of financial barrier. While most government student aid programs provide significant amounts of financial aid to students, these targeted programs have shown to have an extremely high impact given the very low cost it takes to operate them. As everyone on this committee is aware, community college students are not eligible to receive OCOG and yet we believe this request will help provide needed, targeted assistance to our most financially fragile students continue their postsecondary pathway.

Chairman Dolan and members of the committee, once again thank you for the opportunity to share with you some of the new and innovative ways we are working with our health and human service partners to help better prepare Ohioans for their careers. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



OHIO COMMUNITY COLLEGES



STUDENT FINANCIAL WELLNESS SURVEY RESULTS

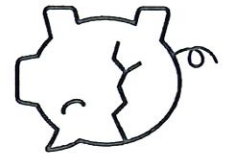
FALL 2019

Understanding the connection between student finances and student success is essential to supporting the 21st century student.



57% of students **WORRY ABOUT HAVING ENOUGH MONEY** to pay for school

52% of students have **RUN OUT OF MONEY** 3 or more times in the past year **x3**



49%

of students show **SIGNS OF HOUSING INSECURITY** (struggling to pay rent/utilities or the need to move frequently)



57%

of students indicate that it is important to them to **SUPPORT THEIR FAMILY FINANCIALLY** while in school



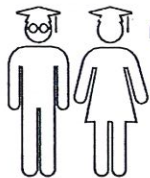
57%

of borrowers indicate that they **HAVE MORE STUDENT LOAN DEBT** than they expected to have at this point



28%

of students show signs of **VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY** according to the USDA scale (skipping meals, eating less or less nutritious food)



71% of **STUDENTS ARE LESS THAN CONFIDENT** they will be able to **pay off the debt** they acquired while in school



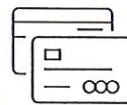
63% of students pay for college **using money from their current employment**



find their **50%** **TOTAL DEBT** amount to be **OVERWHELMING** (credit card, car loan, money owed to family/friends)

24%

of students pay for college with **CREDIT CARDS**



64%

of students say they **WOULD USE FINANCIAL SUPPORT** services if offered by their school



59% of students say they would have **TROUBLE GETTING \$500** in cash or credit to meet an unexpected need within the next month