

Community College of Allegheny County

Workforce Development, Job Creation and Growing Pennsylvania's Economy

The Community College of Allegheny County—often referred to as CCAC—has been at the forefront of workforce development and training for more than 50 years and is home to a wide range of workforce development programs carried out in partnership with numerous community and industry partners. Individually and collectively, this network continues to be an effective avenue for addressing the need for skilled workforce talent both in the region and further afield.

With this in mind, CCAC launched a new campaign to enhance the synergy of the region's workforce development system to improve our ability as a community to respond to the current needs of the region's employers. Through a series of interviews with both employers and providers, the college identified numerous examples of interagency collaboration and innovation that highlight the effectiveness of the region's system of providers and support organizations. In addition, Campos, a research-driven strategy firm, was engaged to research trends in workforce development and the construction of workforce training facilities. Through these studies, CCAC has gained a greater understanding of the Pittsburgh region's workforce needs, expectations and concerns, thus positioning CCAC to respond to them effectively and with keen insight.

CCAC and Pennsylvania's other community colleges are innovating the ways we provide workforce development and training within our respective regions and across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. At CCAC, existing labs and training spaces are being upgraded, and curriculum is being rejuvenated. Working with data, researchers and regional players, we are forecasting what hard and essential skills will be needed by employers, and we are retooling programs to meet those requirements.

To address the areas where gaps are most pronounced, CCAC is constructing a 60,000 sq. ft. workforce center, easily accessible to the broader urban population and focused on providing training for careers in high-demand occupations while expanding apprenticeships, partnerships and collaborations throughout the region. This facility will provide an infinitely adaptable environment for training in a broad array of career paths: in-demand and emerging fields such as cybersecurity, information technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, culinary arts and hospitality, process technology, machine learning, mechatronics, CNC machining, and additive and advanced manufacturing.

Of course, it is not only important for CCAC and the other Pennsylvania community colleges to design 21st century workforce development training that addresses employer needs, it is essential that what takes place inside CCAC's facilities involve the most advanced instructional practices in order that students learn and learn well. CCAC continues to seek new partnerships with employers and other entities focused on interdisciplinary learning, K–12 engagement, faculty professional development, enhanced curriculum, and industry partnerships. These collaborative efforts are designed to expand and create new early learning college courses and dual enrollment academies to help ensure that students entering CCAC and other postsecondary institutions have a strong foundation that they can build upon in order to acquire the specialized and additional knowledge and skills necessary to enter and succeed in Pennsylvania's myriad career fields.

As the country begins to move beyond the COVID–19 crisis, the need for a highly skilled workforce—across all sectors—is increasing. An increasing number of employees require enhanced training or must be retrained if Pennsylvania is to remain competitive and sustain future growth. Fortunately, community colleges are uniquely positioned to meet these needs.

Throughout the pandemic, community colleges have demonstrated the ability to successfully respond to rapid shifts in the economic landscape. This ability to adapt quickly to ever-changing circumstances will enable CCAC and our sister colleges to



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address post-COVID workforce challenges across the region and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a whole. Adults who become students again will seek to maximize the benefits of their general education degrees and existing skill sets in order to move with the times and rebuild their careers. They are going to want to gain knowledge and learn the skills that will enable them to obtain a job in a lucrative field or move up the career ladder. Because of this, educational institutions need to thoroughly understand the specific requirements of each business or industrial field when developing retraining programs. Program curriculums need to be designed to meet a clear demand, and schools need to be adept at identifying current and evolving industry trends.

Pennsylvania's community colleges have long partnered with corporate leaders to form industry advisory committees that help us develop on-point curricula. These committees serve as ongoing forums for sharing information and relevant data, and pinpointing and forecasting future workforce needs.

Whether the jobs are in the professional trades, health care, hospitality, finance, energy, IT, advanced manufacturing, robotics, artificial intelligence or other career fields—industry and education partnerships need to continually exchange information, and refresh and adjust training programs, to keep pace with new and emerging technology.

Members of our workforce need to recognize that change is constant, and this is also true for career education. Change may be precipitated by a monumental event like a pandemic that causes immediate and widespread disruption, or it may be the result of natural evolution spurred by advances in technology. Either way, the people who will benefit from new technology will be the individuals who are trained in whatever new skills are required.

Skills training and lifelong career education are areas where community colleges have always excelled and continue to have an important role to play in preparing a workforce for the post-COVID economy. But no institution alone has the required resources or the reach to address a challenge of this magnitude on its own.

Job training programs will need to be creative and include community-immersed organizations that are familiar with the complex array of obstacles holding their communities back, and which can identify resident needs and develop wraparound services designed to support participants.

State and federal governments, along with philanthropic foundations, play an important role in facilitating collaboration between corporate partners and community colleges to build and deliver workforce training programs to train the diverse pool of skilled workers critical to the commonwealth's growth. Pennsylvania's community colleges offer a wealth of career and technical education programs and possess a proven track record of outstanding job placement rates. And community colleges have the tools to provide industry-led training, with help from community-based organizations as well as government, business and foundation sources that are invaluable in their ability to allocate much-needed funding to support Pennsylvania's current and future workforce.

Through our shared commitment to providing students with multiple pathways to achieve their academic and career goals, the Community College of Allegheny County, along with the other 14 community colleges, continuously seeks new opportunities for our students—ones that give our graduates the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in an increasingly complex, competitive and changing global society.



Testimony for Dr. Quintin Bullock, President, Community College of Allegheny County
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