

Discussion of Research Results



Evaluation of Northwest Pennsylvania's Workforce Development and Educational Challenges and Opportunities

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for
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Strategy

- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Forums with key community and business sectors
- Online surveys
- Review existing data

Connecting with People

About **2300 stakeholders** from
Erie, Crawford, and Warren Counties

- **98 interviews** conducted
 - *22 public officials, 47 industry leaders, 29 community leaders*
- **114 forum participants in eight forums**
 - Three industry sectors, community service, educational leaders, high-school students, parents, adult learners
- **2084 online survey** respondents

Setting the Context

Regional Economic and Workforce Challenges

- Economic and workforce transition
- Trend for job loss (including manufacturing) although productivity remains high
- Areas of job growth might not bring new economic or demographic growth (*exceptions: healthcare, professional, technical services*)
- Regional unemployment rate higher than the US
- Per capita welfare aid averages higher than the US
- Region experiencing gradual population decline

Setting the Context

Regional Economic and Workforce Challenges

- “Brain drain”
- Per capita average wage less than US average; cost of living only slightly less than US average
- K-12 system is gradually losing students
- Aging population and impact on filling jobs by 2012
- Underemployed may need retraining to fill new jobs
- Postsecondary attainment slightly higher than US average, but slightly lower than PA average

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

INTERVIEWS

Top *Economic Trends*:

- Transition from manufacturing to tourism, travel, and service industries
- Current economic conditions
- Aging workforce as baby-boomer generation begins to retire
- Transition to a global economy
- Loss of qualified workforce

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

INTERVIEWS

Top *Economic Opportunities*:

- Growth in the convention and tourism industries
- Excellent water resources (abundance and quality for a number of commercial applications)
- Growth of the medical industry
- Reputation as a small town with great potential
- Proximity to other larger metropolitan areas
- Opportunities for entrepreneurship
- Availability of postsecondary education

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

INTERVIEWS

Top *Economic Challenges*:

- Locating low-cost training for current needs
- Obtaining technically-qualified employees
- Contending with business operations costs
- Finding employees with strong “soft skills” (work ethic, communication skills, problem-solving, etc.)
- Contending with government regulations

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

INTERVIEWS

Top Education Challenges:

- Affordability at all educational levels
- Establishing the importance of education
- Strengthening preparedness for the workforce
- Increasing government regulation of K-12
- Graduates without strong “soft skills”
- Competing with the global marketplace

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

INTERVIEWS

Top Workforce Concerns:

- Maintaining a sufficient pool of qualified workers now and in the next five years, specifically:
 - Technical workers
 - Supervisory workers
- Providing continuing education for employees
- Finding new employees with sufficient skills

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

FORUMS

Top *Economic Challenges*:

- Availability of a qualified workforce
- Loss of talent from turnover (retirement, etc.)
- Younger talent (experienced and skilled workers) leaving the area
- However: 55% of student forum participants indicated they would like to stay in the region if there were jobs for them

Economic Challenges & Opportunities

FORUMS

Top *Educational Challenges*:

- Need for “basic skills”
- Need for “critical-thinking skills”
- Affordability of education

Current Workforce Deficiencies

SURVEY

From *Business Respondents*:

- Soft skills (communication, written/verbal; math; teamwork)
- Technical skills
- Critical thinking, problem-solving skills
- Work ethic
- Interpersonal skills
- Workforce readiness

Support for a Community College

- **Interviews**: 75% said “very important” or “somewhat important”
 - 67% said “very important”
- **Employer Group Forum**: 71% said “very important” or “somewhat important”
 - 42% said “very important”
- **User Group Forum** (parents, adult learners, high-school students): 71% said “very important” or “important”
 - 43% said “very important”

Observation

- These concerns about the economy, workforce, and educational challenges are commonly addressed by a community college mission.
- Regardless of whether a community college is created here, these are concerns not being currently addressed in the region.

Why is a Community College Important?

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

- Loss of talent in the area
- Lack of skilled workers
- Need for enhanced training
- Low-cost training to meet current needs
- Maintaining educational affordability
- Strengthening workforce preparedness
- Need worker pool for the next five years
- Need additional training resources and options

Why is a Community College Important?

FORUM SUMMARY

- Maintaining availability of a qualified workforce
- Overcoming talent loss from retirement and out-migration
- Maintaining adequate number of skilled workers
- Providing more affordable educational options
- Providing more accessible educational options
- Availability of programs aligned to the needs of the community – flexibility

Why is a Community College Important?

ONLINE SUMMARY

- Maintaining the availability of trained workers
- Addressing skill deficiencies in the existing workforce

Would there be Sufficient Enrollment?

- **Interviews**: 67% = there would be enough students
- **Parents**: 81% = community college would be an attractive or somewhat-attractive option
- **High-school students**: 77% = community college would be an attractive or somewhat-attractive option
- **Parents**: 60% = would consider a community college for their children if it was available
- **Adult learners**: 75% = would consider a community college if it was available
- **High-school students**: 67% = would consider a community college if it was available

Would there be Sufficient Enrollment?

State of Pennsylvania graduation data indicating community college market penetration statewide indicate:

A regional community college could expect an enrollment between 1500 and 2500 students by the fifth year, not including on-site employee training or other employee training programs

Support for Career & Transfer Programs

- **Interview**: 92% rated college transfer programs as “very important” or “somewhat important”
 - 50% = “very important”
- **Interview**: 99% rated career programs (leading to direct employment) as “very important” or “somewhat important”
 - 92% = “very important”
- **Survey**: 79% rated career programs high or medium priority
- **Survey**: 74% rated college transfer programs as high or medium priority.

Support for Other Programs

- **Interview**: 86% rated lifelong-learning programs “very important” or “somewhat important”
- **Interview**: 91% rated business and industry site-based training as “very important” or “somewhat important”
- **Interview**: 87% rated continuing education programs as “very important” or “somewhat important”
- **Survey**: 73% rated certificate programs as either a high or medium priority

Observation

The programs that received the most support are those that are core components of community college missions nationally.

Community College Challenges

INTERVIEWS

- Building awareness of need and value of education.
- Determining and consistently meeting constituent needs.
- Implementing advisory boards.
- Capitalizing on willingness of stakeholders to support the college.
- Cultivating and maintaining support from community and educational leaders.

Community College Challenges

FORUMS

- Maintaining affordability and flexibility.
- Aligning programs with community and regional needs.

Working with Other Entities

- Strong support, especially in the business community, for partnerships between a community college and business and industry.
- Respect for the existing postsecondary schools and colleges. Important to establish working relationships and partnering where beneficial.
- If there is a community college, assure continued alignment with area economic and workforce needs.

Funding

- Respondents across all methodologies expressed some concern about funding a community college.
- While some indicated this concern was a possible stumbling block, others suggested alternatives be considered to help fund a community college.

*State funding formula =
1/3 State, 1/3 tuition, 1/3 local*

Funding Considerations

INTERVIEWS

- 56% willing to contribute either financially or in other ways to help support the community college.
- Suggested the college demonstrate its “return on investment.”
- Suggested cultivating foundation and private sector business support.
- Indicated it should be a priority to look for alternative strategies for college funding.

Observation

Data from the American Association of Community Colleges indicate an average Return on Investment (ROI) from a community college to be \$3 for every \$1 invested.

Observation

- Information across methodologies expressed concern about the present and future workforce
- Much of this concern relates to the need to provide additional education and training options
- There is a high level of support for a regional community college across methodologies

Major Recommendations

1. Create a regional community college with a goal to begin service as soon as practical.
2. The college should offer both career and college transfer options.
3. Establish a regional governing system that is accountable to stakeholders.
4. Establish partnerships where it is mutually beneficial.
5. Look for innovative ways to help finance the college.



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