



WHY A COMMUNITY COLLEGE?

Today's community colleges earn the word "community." They provide two-year degrees, certificates and adult training and retraining in response to the changing needs of local communities.

Community colleges are affordable, flexible and accessible. Anyone can participate in a degree program with a high-school diploma or GED, and credits can transfer to most four-year colleges. In Pennsylvania, the average annual community college tuition is \$2,500 a year, and most students work either full- or part-time.

WHY RETHINK?

*The numbers are staggering.
We must do something.*

- In Erie, the number of residents with a high school degree or less is 22% worse than the national average.
- The number of residents with a college (BA or higher) degree is 17% below the national rate.
- Our per-capita income is 27% below the national average.
- Our poverty levels are nearly 30% higher than the State average and 18% higher than the national average.

In addition, the region has acute workforce training needs and an eroding tax base combined with an increased demand for social services — all of which would benefit and improve from a low-cost and accessible post-secondary education and job-focused option. Our region needs a community college.

WHY HERE?

The needs of our region are those that are addressed by community colleges throughout the state and across the country. Unfortunately, these needs are not being met here.

- The poverty, income and education attainment rates in our region are unacceptable.
- Regional businesses are having difficulty finding skilled workers, making it tough to compete; this also adversely affects business attraction efforts.
- Many are unemployed or underemployed, but cannot or will not attend a four-year college. We need affordable educational opportunities that will help them earn sustainable wages.
- Our region needs an affordable, flexible and accessible post-secondary training option.

Here are the real facts about a community college for northwest PA.

MYTH -VS-

A community college is a nice idea, but this isn't the right time.

We already have plenty of colleges and universities here.

REALITY:

It is precisely the right time. Layoffs increase the demand for taxpayer funded social services and in a struggling economy taxes will inevitably rise to support these programs. With our community's education attainment and income levels significantly below the national average and our poverty rates significantly above, training people to fill jobs and pay taxes seems like a much better way to spend our money, doesn't it? What are we waiting for?

Yes, and they are all fine institutions, but none of them can offer the kind of education and training a community college can provide, and **none of them are as affordable, flexible and accessible as a local community college would be.**

MYTH -VS-

REALITY:

We pay enough in taxes and we can't afford a community college.

We can't afford not to have a community college, and taxes needn't be the only source of funds. Grants, endowments and private sector support will all help to pay for a community college here. Since education is the key to increased earnings, wouldn't you rather invest in a community college to reduce the hundreds of millions we spend on social services in Erie County — services that are mandated and will continue to rise if we don't fix the problem? You may also be surprised to learn that we are already supporting a community college — actually 14 of them in PA. Shouldn't we be benefiting from the State taxes we pay? For example, **in southwestern Pennsylvania, residents are realizing an almost 6 to 1 return on their local community college investments. Do we not deserve the same?**

Starting a community college means construction of expensive new buildings on its own expensive new campus. I read it could cost \$108 million.

Not at all. Many community colleges are doing just fine with leased (that is, existing) buildings, and right now there is a great deal of relatively inexpensive space to choose from in our area. By the way, the \$108 million price tag that you may have seen is the maximum cost for constructing a new campus from the ground up — something REthink Erie has no plans to do at this time. The State requires that a long-range capital construction plan be included in the application. **The actual local startup investment in a community college is estimated to be less than \$2 million.**

Opening a branch campus of another community college would be a better option than starting a new community college here.

While this is an option, it's not ideal. Why? Because such an arrangement would offer only transfer credits, not retraining programs for local workers. We would pay for any specialized and occupational programs customized to the needs of our local workforce and employers. Moreover, students would pay double tuition and there would be no local representation on the board of trustees. Wouldn't community control and community accountability be a better option for our community college?

Four-year institutions will not accept credits earned at a community college.

Actually, the 14 universities of the State System of Higher Education are **required by law to accept certain credits** earned at PA community colleges.

I am retired and on a fixed income and I have no kids or grandkids to send to college. There is nothing in it for me.

There is much more in it for you than you know. **A better local economy benefits us all.** The mandated costs of social services in Erie County will continue to rise if we don't invest in education and our workforce. We're at a point in our community where we either invest now or pay later. Businesses with stable, productive workforces stay in business and pay taxes and community college systems also help to attract new businesses to our region. **We can't risk the cost of not having a community college.**