

## Report Highlights

### The Need for Public Community College Programs in Rural Pennsylvania

Senate Resolution 2011-147 calls on the LB&FC to examine Pennsylvania's public community college (PCC) programs in rural counties (Bedford, Bradford, Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Crawford, Elk, Forest, Fulton, Greene, Huntingdon, Jefferson, Juniata, Lycoming, McKean, Perry, Potter, Somerset, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Venango, Warren, Wayne, and Wyoming). We found:

- **PCCs help meet the demand for increased workforce skills required to compete in the global economy, and increase economic opportunity.** Most jobs in 2018 will require postsecondary education training. For PA working age adults with an associate degree, their median income is 50% higher than those with just a high school diploma.
- **Most (25 of 26) rural counties have no community college.** Rural students have little opportunity to attend a PCC. For example, rural counties had only 0.43 residents per high school graduate enrolled in a community college or publicly supported associate's degree program vs. 1.37 residents per high school graduate in such programs in non-rural counties. Measured another way, 21 of PA's 26 rural counties had 50 or fewer full-time students enrolled in a PCC.
- **Associate programs at PCCs and other public colleges are varied (business, health care, technology, etc.) but due to the absence of PCCs, such offerings are much more limited in rural counties.** For example, nearly 60% (23 of 41) of non-rural counties have nursing programs, and about 30% (11 of 41) have engineering, compared to rural counties, where fewer than 20% (5 of 26) have a nursing program and only one has engineering.
- **In the 1960s, a PA State Board of Education consultant recognized rural counties would be unable to meet the Board's student (minimum 500 FTEs, optimum 1,500 after two years) and financial (1/3 of operating costs) criteria to be a PCC.** Today, none of the rural counties have sufficient high school graduates to reach the minimum FTEs, and only two have taxable property that could support 1,500 FTEs with a 1 mill tax levy. As a result, the Commonwealth has developed only 14 of the 28 community colleges envisioned in the Board of Education's original master plan.
- **Rural youth are in a difficult situation, living in communities unable to establish PCCs, and if they do enroll in a PCC, they must typically pay twice the tuition of those from areas with a PCC.** Annual tuition for out-of-district students (i.e., students who live in a county without a PCC) averages about \$6,000. This is a heavy burden on rural students and their families, for whom postsecondary education is often least affordable. It is also about twice the cost charged to in-district students.
- **Almost all states provide statewide coverage of community colleges.** They do this through state community colleges, local districts that levy taxes, and state funding policies, including use of "chargeback methods."

**Recommendations.** We recommend the General Assembly enact legislation to:

- Establish a public community college in rural counties through creation of a "state community college" affiliated with the PA State System of Higher Education, with multiple campuses or learning centers based in designated regions, with a separate appropriation, and student tuition linked to that of existing colleges.
- Allow a defined period when rural counties may choose to join with or form a new independent community college.
- Promote such regional college formation by permitting new local sponsor contributions to be related to the actual value of existing sponsors' contribution per local FTEs, and permitting use of less stringent student criteria when feasible.
- If a state community college is not established, require the student surcharge from areas without a college be based on the actual local contribution.