

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Community Colleges React to the Governor's 2013-14 Proposed Budget**

Increased demand and local sponsorship issues are compounded by the state's flat-funding proposal

**Harrisburg** – Pennsylvania's community colleges say they can be a key player in helping to lessen the state's severe skills-gap, but they require an increased state investment to help meet the ever-growing demand.

Under Governor Corbett's 2013-14 budget proposal, community colleges would receive no additional funding for their operating budgets or capital projects. The colleges have seen no additional increase in their operating appropriations in the last five fiscal years and have suffered a decrease in one of those years. These budgetary constraints are coupled with years of enrollment growth and increased demands from students and local employers.

The colleges collectively asked for an increase in operating funding from the state to help expand programs and courses to Pennsylvanians who are seeking an affordable pathway to the baccalaureate or the skills to re-enter the workforce.

"It is central to the community college mission as open-access institutions to enroll every student who comes to our doors; however in order to carry out this responsibility we need to keep access affordable for our students," said Dr. Alex Johnson, president of the Community College of Allegheny County and president of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.

Johnson and other college leaders fear that programs – particularly high-cost programs that are most needed by employers – could be at stake.

A recent study from Georgetown University found that an estimated 2 million jobs go unfilled today as a result of skills, training and education gaps. In Pennsylvania, the Governor's own Manufacturing Advisory Council noted that the number of new workers entering the industry, coupled with the growth in manufacturing, has left a staggering gap of available skilled workers.

In addition, it is estimated that 1.5 million job vacancies in the country consist of jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree.

"For 50 years, the state's 14 community colleges have served this exact niche," said Diane Bosak, executive director of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, the nonprofit entity that represents the legislative interests of the state's 14 community colleges. "As open access institutions, community colleges are the only avenue to education and training for hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians. Given the appropriate resources, these institutions can be the solution to Pennsylvania's skills gap."

In addition to community colleges' role in workforce training, they also offer the most affordable and accessible pathway to the baccalaureate. A recent study by American Association of



Community Colleges found that more than one-quarter of those who earn a bachelor's degree began their college experience at a community college and transferred to a four-year institution along the way. Nearly half of bachelor's degree recipients take at least one course at a community college.

Research shows that transfer from a community college to a four-year institution not only works, but also saves money. Further, students who start at a community college and transfer to a four-year university are just as successful as those who begin at a four-year institution.

"The community colleges understand the need for fiscal restraint but the road to the commonwealth's prosperity is through a strong mix of business and industry, good paying jobs, and an educated and trained workforce," said Dr. Nick Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College and vice-president of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.

Neupauer noted that governors from both Connecticut and Massachusetts have proposed significant spending increases for higher education in their states. In Massachusetts, the state's community colleges would get a nearly 10-percent boost in appropriations, or about \$20 million.

"An increased investment into the community colleges - and all public higher education - is the most important investment a state can make," Neupauer said.

Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges serve students from every county of the state. The Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges is a volunteer membership association for Pennsylvania's community colleges. Its members include the college presidents, members of colleges' boards of trustees and key college administrators. The Commission represents the interests and advocates the collective needs of the community colleges to federal and state policymakers. For more information please visit [www.pacommunitycolleges.org](http://www.pacommunitycolleges.org).

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