Community college funding benefits all

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Clackamas Community College recently completed an online survey that 1,100 people in our community participated in. We learned that people in our community most value access to degree and certificate programs that lead to careers and transfer education that leads to four-year degrees.

As a Clackamas Community College graduate and college president, I care deeply about keeping college affordable for students. Community colleges provide the education and training that enable people in our state and country to achieve family wage jobs and attain the American Dream. For many people in our district, we are the first and only choice. We are close; we are affordable; and we are responsive to the needs of our community.

The Oregon Legislature is now making budget decisions for the next biennium. Both the governor and the co-chairs of the Ways and Means committee are recommending funding all 17 Oregon community colleges at $428 million. This is a funding level last seen 10 years ago when the state’s community colleges served 70,000 fewer students.

This funding level is inadequate for the state’s community colleges to meet their obligations without additional tuition increases, cuts to programs and staff, and a continued decline in our ability to carry out our mission. Ten years ago, the state provided 49.9 percent of the community college budget, and tuition from students accounted for 15.4 percent. Today, the student’s share of the budget has increased to 37 percent, while state appropriations are 26 percent. This is not a sustainable trend.

We must work to keep tuition affordable for our students and not overburden them with debt. We must work to support business and industry in our community by providing quality career technical education and customized training that adapts to changing needs in the economy. We must work to protect the community’s investment in CCC and ensure our employers have access to employees with cutting-edge skills. We must work to ensure that our children and our children’s children have access to the programs and training they need to be successful.

Since 2008, Oregon’s community colleges have faced tough budget decisions that have reduced program offerings and increased tuition for students. At Clackamas, we have reduced dozens of full and part-time positions over the past five years, while serving about 20 percent more students. We have reorganized our structure and streamlined our processes. We have made tough choices, always with the best interests of our students in mind.

The state cannot continue to disinvest in its community colleges and meet both the needs of students and the needs of business and industry. Oregon has thousands of jobs open today but lacks the trained workers to fill them. The governor has an ambitious agenda to meet the state’s needs for an educated and skilled workforce, and we are a part of that solution. But you can’t build a skilled workforce with baling wire and duct tape. An investment in community colleges is needed.

Community colleges are asking our legislators to increase our state funding to a minimum of $460 million — a percentage increase equal to that being proposed for our kindergarten through 12th-grade partners. Funding at this level will help prevent further erosion in our programs and tuition increases to our students.

The Legislature needs to hear the voices of those who know the value of education. You can find the name of your representative at leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr. If keeping quality, accessible education and training in your community is important to you, I urge you to contact your legislator and ask them to support community colleges at the $460 million level.

Joanne Truesdell is president of Clackamas Community College.
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http://portlandtribune.com/cr/28-opinion/150858-community-college-fund...