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NC Community College System

Report to the State Board of Community Colleges  
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Sometimes in addressing urgent issues, people and organizations run the risk of overlooking other things that are also extremely important.

Right now, it is very important for the North Carolina Community College System to keep our eyes on the ball of our most important role -- assisting thousands of North Carolinians in dealing with increasingly challenging economic circumstances.

To that end, two important things happened at this Board meeting – two things that could perhaps be overlooked given the circumstances – but two very important measures that you took that will help us better prepare North Carolinians to compete for jobs in an increasingly competitive international economy.

First, following special provisions passed by the North Carolina General Assembly, you made important changes to our customized training programs which had been rigidly separated into organizational “silos”-- New and Expanding Industry Training, Focused Industrial Training, and Customized Industry Training. Individually, these programs were great, but increasingly employers who needed help were falling in the GAPS between the silos.

By consolidating these programs into one new Customized Training Program, you have enabled our colleges to focus on supporting North Carolina companies that 1) create jobs; 2) enhance productivity; and/or 3) invest in technology. Through the changes approved by the North Carolina General Assembly and this board, we will be better able to optimize our resources and develop new instructional capacities that will make us more competitive for the future.

Our customized training efforts have a unique place in North Carolina's economic history as well as the history of the North Carolina Community College System. The program to support job growth at new and expanding industries was actually one of our very first training program initiatives, started in 1958, and offered through auspices of the Industrial Education Centers, the forerunner institutions for what is now our community college system. It was also the nation's first customized job training program, a program that has been copied in some form or fashion, but never fully replicated, in over 40 states since. Since that time our customized training programs have frequently been referred to by economic developers as their most important economic development tool, and in recent times have played key roles in helping our state attract new companies in emerging industries such as the biotech company Merck that is creating 400 jobs in Durham and the new aerospace company, Spirit Aerosystems, that will create over 1,000 new jobs in Kinston. Customized training of all kinds reaches all corners of the state, supporting job growth and increased productivity at companies such as Honda, soon to be building jets in Guilford County; Fountain Power Boats in Beaufort County; and Stanley Furniture in Graham County. The total for customized training last year – more than 31,000 people trained in 790 projects.

The changes you made today, following on the leadership of the General Assembly, make these important economic development programs stronger to compete in an increasingly competitive environment.

A second thing you did at this meeting was, for the first time in our System's history, approve additional funding based on a weighted FTE formula to support technical education areas of construction, transportation systems, engineering, and industrial programs.

These are program areas that are high cost – with respect to equipment and instructors – and they are programs that, to be honest, our colleges have struggled mightily to keep afloat given the combination of declining enrollment numbers with increasing costs. Now admittedly, the \$1 million that you were able to allocate to colleges to be used for

either instruction and equipment are not enough to sustain these important programs for the future, but they do send an important message that we are focused on maintaining and reenergizing our vital role in technical education and that we will continue this focus for the future.

You may remember that it was only a few years ago that we received our first weighted funding for healthcare programs -- \$1 million for nursing – and today three years and an additional \$10 million later, these programs are stepping closer to the funding levels they require – although we are still only a third of the way there. Today, through the funding of the North Carolina General Assembly and the allocations you approved today, we also made a very important initial step to address our technical education programs.

I think it is always important to give a face to our programs, because at the end of the day when we talk about programs at this level, what we are talking about where the rubber meets the road is education and training for people to compete in a changing economy.

One of those people is Jeaneth Hernandez, one of four female students of approximately 75 total machining students in the program we worked hard to improve and expand – at considerable expense -- during my last few years at Craven Community College. When she was a young girl, she moved with her family from El Salvador to the United States and eventually at the age of eighteen began working for a military contractor in New York. Today she is not only a machining technology student at one of our community colleges, but also the mother of three girls between the ages of one and thirteen, and the wife of a marine aviator stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point. The last time I saw her, her husband was deployed to Iraq, or as she said “vacationing at Camp Fallujah.”

On top of that, she is also an entrepreneur who owns a manufacturing contracting company in North Carolina that contracts to companies as far away as California.

Through her small company, she supports jobs here in our her state, but her point in learning machining was to not only arrange for manufacturing contracting, but to be able to do the manufacturing through her own shop. To do so, she wants to know the technology. Given that she is a North Carolina entrepreneur, she does not need the technical degree to get a job, but as she says, having the degrees says she is a machinist who knows what she is doing.

She and her husband will likely move to a new duty station, but they have plans to return to North Carolina where they will keep the business because they love it here and as she told me, “I already have too many good people working here and they deserve to be employed.”

That is something that can be said for all North Carolinians – they are good people who deserve to be employed.

Actions that you have taken at this Board meeting will help our colleges to assist in this most important of our objectives.

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