

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Allocation for Equipment to Test Personal Protective Equipment

Request: The State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) is asked to approve an allocation of up to \$500,000 to Catawba Valley Community College for the Manufacturing Solutions Center to establish a personal protective equipment testing laboratory.

Background: The Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) was created at Catawba Valley Community College in 1990 with a mission to create and retain jobs in the United States. The MSC currently offers training, prototyping, applied research and development, testing, domestic product sourcing, on-site business incubation, and entrepreneur commercialization.

In response to COVID-19 and the resulting supply chain issues for personal protective equipment (PPE), many existing United States companies began exploring shifting their production to medical PPE. However, the requirements for medical PPE are much stricter than for typical sewn products. While a number of companies have developed products that could meet the specifications, they are held up by testing availability – currently there are only two labs in the US that can perform the entire range of PPE testing and neither is in North Carolina.

Through existing grants and equipment, the MSC has been able to perform some of the testing required for masks and gowns for NC companies. As a result, 28 companies can now produce fabrics approved for the first three levels of gowns. The MSC currently lacks the capacity to test for the highest level of gown and can only perform one of the five required tests for medical masks.

Rationale: Funding for additional equipment for mask and gown testing would allow the MSC to perform these additional tests and establish a national PPE testing lab to test fabrics quickly, develop a database of approved mask and gown fabrics for medical use, and help US companies make medical grade PPE.

Budget: The Board is asked to approve up to \$500,000 for this project. If approved, \$381,021 would be available beginning July 1, 2020, for the purchase of equipment for mask and gown testing. The MSC continues to seek funds from other sources to set up a “clean room.” Once the MSC secures that funding has been secured, the remainder (up to \$118,979) will be available to purchase equipment for the clean room.

Fund Source and Availability: Funding is available through the 2020 COVID-19 Recovery Act (Session Law 2020-4) and is contingent upon certification of these funds by the Office of State Budget and Management

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