

U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

August 16, 2019

Testimony of Robert J. Denson, President, Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC)

It is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of the many large and small businesses and communities in our service area, and the nearly 60,000 credit and non-credit students who attend DMACC annually, seeking one or more of the 250 degrees, diplomas and certificates we offer. We are proud to offer the lowest tuition and fees in Iowa to DMACC students.

I would like to address several issues that our businesses, students, parents, and communities face. To sum up: “workforce, workforce, workforce.”

- I. Increased academic and career advising in K-12, particularly in middle and high school, is sorely needed.
 - a. On behalf of Governor Reynolds and the Governor’s STEM Council, I have worked with the Iowa School Counselor Association to help better engage school counselors in helping students engage in STEM careers and the occupations that need them.
 - b. With a target goal of 250 students per counselor, nationally the average is 482. Iowa is close to the national average at 499. <https://ct.counseling.org/2017/10/u-s-student-school-counselor-ratio-shows-slight-improvement/>
 - c. A recent survey showed that administrators, school boards, and counselors agreed that counselors should be doing more career and college advising, but also agreed that their duties related to class registration, mental health, discipline, etc. do not give them the time to do it.

- d. Students and their parents are inundated with college and university solicitations, but generally do not have the information, background, support, and time to sort out career goals and the best college for them. Much time and money is wasted.
 - e. America's workforce shortages would decline if students and parents received more and better information, career awareness, and professional guidance, the earlier the better.
- II. We must provide more skill training to prisoners while they are incarcerated to improve their chances of success upon release, and fill needed jobs.
- a. "Over 10,000 ex-prisoners are released from America's state and federal prisons every week and arrive on the doorsteps of our nation's communities. More than 650,000 ex-offenders are released from prison every year, and studies show that approximately two-thirds will likely be rearrested within three years of release."
https://www.justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html
 - b. Our work in the Newton Men's Prison and Mitchellville Women's Prison resulted in the Iowa Department of Corrections telling us that those coming out with our credentials had a 9% recidivism rate. Those without the credential had a 29% recidivism. For several years, the DOC would deliver prisoners to us for welding classes at 10:00 p.m. and pick them up at 2:00 a.m. Funding is the challenge.
 - c. There is a current program in place to give waivers so some community colleges can access PELL for prisoners to pay for skill training. This needs to be granted to more

community colleges and made available to all offenders getting close to release.

III. Small business training works and needs to accelerate.

- a. DMACC recently completed the first 2 cohorts of training for the Goldman Sachs Foundation called “10,000 Small Businesses”, with the goal of increasing their revenue and grow their workforce. Seventy-six business owners graduated last Friday at the State Fair, with the Governor presiding.
- b. The curriculum, delivered by Iowa community colleges and developed by Babson College, has trained over 8,600 businesses nationally and needs to continue.

IV. Supporting short-term training.

- a. We support the use of PELL for short-term training, and thank Senator Ernst for being a co-sponsor of this legislation.
- b. Community colleges are highly regulated and, as a result, quality and cost are assured, all protecting the student consumers and the businesses that hire them.
- c. We urge you to put in place strict safeguards to make sure consumers receive the highest quality, and that the training is guided by the businesses that are looking for skilled talent. The training should be by regionally accredited academic entities and established with a credit conversion so students can use the training credits should they later want it as a part of, or desire to enroll in, a diploma or degree.
- d. DMACC has more than 50 short term credit certificates that can stand alone or fit into a diploma.

V. Work-Based Learning.

- a. Many students need employment as they pursue their academic goals.**
- b. Providing high school and college students the opportunity to work and receive income from businesses in the area of their career goals really works. Led in our area by companies like Accumold, Shazam, Vermeer, TMC Trucking, etc, both registered and non-registered apprenticeships have proven successful in Iowa.**
- c. We need to continue to streamline the processes leading to the development of these opportunities so that companies see the early hiring of young people as the smart way to start building their skilled-worker pipeline.**

VI. Student debt is a drag on the economy and the students and families who are burdened by it.

- a. There is a server at a restaurant near my office who has a 4-year degree and says she has her student loan debt: “paid down to \$90,000.” As you know, her story is not unusual in a \$1.56 trillion dollar debt world, impacting 44.7 million students, 12% being delinquent.
<https://studentloanhero.com/student-loan-debt-statistics/>**
- b. Free higher education may or may not be the answer, but more support for financial counseling, in conjunction with increased career and college advising and work-based learning, likely is.**
- c. Governor Reynolds’ Future Ready Iowa Last Dollar Scholar Program is getting very good early results, focusing on great Iowa jobs in high demand occupations, helping 1000 DMACC students this fall. This program has great potential.**

VII. Equipment expenses continue in great training areas like Wind Technology.

- a. High demand and growing fields, like Wind Technology, can only grow if they have skilled workers.**
- b. Wind training, like many career and technical program areas, have very sophisticated and expensive equipment needs. We must train our students on the same equipment they will experience on the job.**
- c. Any support we can receive to help cover the cost and keep up with current technology would be appreciated.**

We have a long list of needs to order to best address the excitement of a strong economy.

We appreciate your continuing support.