

March 21, 2011

Field Hearing

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I would like to thank the Committee on Education and the Workforce for allowing me to offer testimony on the role of higher education in job growth and development. I am especially thankful to the Bloomsburg Area School District for enabling to be here today.

As a Hazleton City Council President and an educator for over thirty years I believe that I have a unique perspective to offer this committee with regards to communities, education, and job growth.

As you are aware our city like most cities is struggling with lost revenue, high unemployment and limited resources from the state and federal government. We are the victims of a stimulus policy that did not benefit our city and reckless spending that has fallen on the backs of working class families like those in Hazleton, Bloomsburg, and other local municipalities. Our city has seen an increase in population due mainly to an influx of immigrants which have lead to an increase in violent crimes causing a strain on our police department and an unending burden on our citizens and our city budget. Our school district and hospital are all burdened with increase expenses and limited resources. The result is that our federal government is passing the buck to the states that have passed it on to the school districts and communities like ours. That buck is mere pennies now.

From a city council perspective we need to stimulate our local economy and that only happens when we have skilled jobs. We would like to see an increase in funding to be able to train or re-train the unemployed, especially those that need to learn English as a second language in addition to learning a skill. An example is the partnership between the Workforce Investment Board, through our Career link which provided the grant, Luzerne county Community College and the Manufacturers and Employers Association who provided the training. The result was a small graduating class that was able to be interviewed and offered jobs. This type of program must continue to be funded and expanded because it benefits the workforce as well as the community. Another way to improve our economy is to allow our local businesses to be able to grow and develop without the many layers of regulations from the federal, state, and local levels. One local businessman told me that we are regulating ourselves out of business; he felt it was easier to provide rental space properties than start a company and employ workers.

From an educational view point we would like to see a greater focus on more efficient methods for colleges to adapt curriculum to new and emerging job field such as the natural gas industry and cyber technology industries. In talking to students at all levels, faculty, administration, and parents there is a common thread that is evident when discussing local communities needs from our local colleges and universities and that is a lack of communication and a need for more collaboration. We need a triangle approach between local communities, school districts, and higher education. This will allow all of us to meet the needs of the students of all learning abilities in an ever changing world. Many schools have collaboration with local universities and colleges which allows select students to take college courses at

reduced rates with the state paying a portion of the cost. At the present time this dual enrollment program is not being funded. The collaboration is very inconsistent from high schools to colleges.

The Career Education and Work is the thirteenth Academic Standard required by all schools in the State of Pennsylvania. This needs to be a focal point for all school because we need to prepare all students to enter the workforce directly from high school or after earning a degree. We need more Cooperative Education opportunities for all students at the high school level, which will allow students to experience internships in the business and work environment while they are in school, earning both educational credit and a paycheck. A recommendation from one administrator is to fund a career in the workforce program for school districts which would especially benefit those students who may not be going to college or are not enrolled in a career or vocational technical school. A student would earn academically an opportunity to work with industry volunteers on a job shadowing project that would be a benefit to everyone at all levels.

At our High school, as part of a student's required graduation project all of the 10th grade class is exposed to a career day at Penn College of Technology where they explore all of the careers that a technical school has to offer. Each student is to research 3 careers thoroughly including a job shadow day along with a formal presentation in front of family and friends. As one recent graduate told me, because of this exposure he knew that he wanted to pursue a career as an aeronautical engineer before he graduated.

In my discussion with students, staff, and administration the topic always focuses on a problem that has an impact on our ability to prepare students to be lifelong learners, that is the enormous amount of standardized assessments that all of student have to endure. Students from grade 3 through 11 are tested for nearly a month every year. The preparation time is a yearlong challenge. We want to be held accountable for our students but we are losing valuable teaching time and the amount of stress and anxiety on all school districts is overwhelming.

In closing students need direction and purpose to meet the challenge that lie ahead. It is our job to make sure they are prepared academically and have the skills to meet the needs of rapidly changing job market. There is very little room for error between our communities, schools and institutes of higher learning when it comes to our students. A skilled and prepared workforce will have a positive impact on our entire community.