



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, August 29, 2018

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OACC Receives \$1.2 million Grant to Close the Skills Gap to Meet Workforce Needs

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) has received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help Ohio's 23 community colleges increase the number of graduates who are able to fill the state's workforce skills gap. This 3-year, nearly \$1.2 million award will build on the OACC's statewide policy agenda, as well as continue state level data and evaluation work, particularly around one of the nation's most comprehensive outcomes based funding formulas.

"We are thrilled to continue our partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to raise awareness and support implementation of best practices that will help more of our community college students reach their goals," says the Center's Executive Director, Laura Rittner. "In addition to the continuation of OACC's policy efforts promoting student success, the grant will allow us to expand our work into the critical areas of faculty engagement and leadership development."

The grant funds will be allocated to pursue the following strategic goals:

- Provide policy makers and community college leaders with information about best practice and relevant data in helping more Ohioans to obtain industry certificates and college degrees.
- Reduce the need for remedial classes in math and English so students can progress more rapidly towards completion.
- Continue to support community college leadership development through the Ohio Student Success Center.
- Raise awareness and understanding of critical best practices already under way in Ohio such as the "guided pathways" business model and outcomes-based funding policy.

Important to this work are the state and local partnerships between community colleges and the private sector. "Aligning academic and career technical programming to meet the workforce needs of our business and industry partners is at the core of the mission of community colleges," said Jack Hershey, President & CEO of OACC, emphasizing the important role of partnerships between community colleges and the private sector. "This support will allow OACC's Student Success Center to continue implementation of our promising work to increase student completion rates while also allowing us to work directly with industry sectors at the statewide level, all to help better connect our students with in-demand jobs in their local communities."

The OACC has also, over the years, championed several policy changes that have been adopted by the Ohio Legislature aimed at improving student success, reducing inefficiencies in Ohio's higher education system while also reducing the cost of obtaining a college certificate or degree to ensure the cost of higher education remains in reach for Ohio students and families. These policy changes include:

- Establishing guaranteed transfer pathways with Ohio's public universities to ensure credits earned can be seamlessly transferred and applied toward a bachelor's degree.
- Expanding state financial aid to Ohioans in a short-term certificate program instead of just to those pursuing a college degree.

- Coordinating implementation of College Credit Plus aimed at improving college access, student success and affordability by allowing students to earn college credit while in high school.
- Working more closely with social service and community partners to help Ohioans depending on public assistance to move into family-sustaining careers.

Work will be headed by the OACC team and the Ohio Student Success Center, which was one of the first members in the national Student Success Center Network coordinated by Jobs for the Future.

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About the Ohio Association of Community Colleges: Dedicated to furthering the mission of Ohio's two-year colleges, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) serves as an advocacy organization on behalf of community colleges, as well as a resource for its member institutions. To support the colleges in their efforts, the OACC facilitates and coordinates collaboration in statewide initiatives to: increase awareness, opportunities, excellence and impact for Ohio's community colleges; enhance alignment and partnering among industry, educators, and community organizations; and develops resources to create, scale, and sustain new ideas and innovations.