



The \$250 Million Pie

Bush's federal funding program may be a pie with many slices, but for schools not prepared to vie for the funds, it may be a pie in the face.

by Jean Marie Angelo

When President Bush delivered the State of the Union Address on January 20, he gave a substantial nod to that unsung hero of higher education, the community college. That night, he proposed pumping \$250 million into community college systems to boost, quite specifically, workforce development programs. Labeled the "Jobs for the 21st Century" initiative, the money will be funneled through the Department of Labor to help train workers in high-growth areas. If Bush pulls it off, he may indeed find himself a hero in the community college sector, his legacy pushing such an ambitious program through the DOL. Some education policy analysts note that reportedly, Bush initially considered a much lower sum: \$150 million. That the total grew by \$100 million by the time the president addressed the nation is more than heartening for those guiding workforce development efforts at U.S. community colleges. In fact, community college advocates couldn't be more excited.

"I jumped off the couch," says Jesus Carreon, chancellor of **Dallas County Community College District**, about his reaction to Bush's remarks. Carreon jokes that his reaction was so abrupt it scared the dog. "It made me feel good to see 80 percent of the crowd cheering for community colleges," he adds.

Such recognition is long overdue, say community college administrators. And the push to retrain the nation's workforce--though a novel addition to Bush's presidential agenda and 2004 election-year platform--is certainly nothing new to community college leaders and their staffs. Those institutions have been training young people entering the workforce and adult workers going back to school for countless years, via programs as varied and profuse as anyone might imagine. The 1,170 member colleges of the American Association of Community Colleges (www.aacc.nche.edu) currently enroll 5.2 million credit and 5 million noncredit students. And they do so at tuitions that are affordable to students.

"The average annual tuition is \$1,905"--a far cry from public and certainly private IHE tuitions, according to Jim McKenney, the association's VP for Economic Development and International Programs. And that's a good thing; right now, U.S. workforce development efforts are attacking an ever-broadening scope, and job growth is expected to be an important issue for the November 2004 presidential election and beyond. (Estimated U.S. jobs lost since 2001 total 2.3 million; only Herbert Hoover presided over greater job loss.)

Filling in the Funding Gaps

Today, the term "workforce development" covers such emerging and highly visible initiatives as nanotechnology and homeland security (which in and of itself includes everything from training new firefighters to educating new law enforcement professionals). Of course, workforce development continues to cover the basics--everything from teaching remedial language and math skills to adults already in the workforce, to helping immigrants learn English.

Without a doubt, the infusion of a quarter of a billion dollars to aid such efforts couldn't come at a better time. The admission rolls are swelling with contract education workers--those employed at local hospitals, industrial complexes, hospitality businesses--who need additional skills and whose companies are subsidizing or paying for the education, as well as those who are out of work and looking to break into new fields. Yet, at the same time, says McKenney, states are financially bruised and forcing community colleges to cut courses or shut programs.

Given that by design, low tuition is the hallmark of community college education, only about 20 percent of a typical community college's funds come from this stream, adds Larry Warford, an executive with the League for Innovation (www.league.org), a nonprofit organization that furthers the causes of community colleges and their educational efforts. And depending upon the dictates of a state's funding, as much as 60 percent or as little as 30 percent can come from state and local coffers. To date, the federal government provides a scant 5 to 10 percent of funding (again, depending upon institution and state). The rest of the funding comes from the growing number of contract education agreements, such as the one in place with the Dallas community college system (to provide

specialty skill training for Texas Instruments workers), or the agreement **Springfield Technology Community College** (MA) signed with Massachusetts' Baystate Health Systems (to supply much-needed nursing graduates to the facility's labor pool).

Perspective Needed

Certainly, that the federal funding will be boosted is a good thing, says Warford, but he, like so many others, feels compelled to put the \$250 million figure into perspective. "This money is a start, not a panacea," he makes clear.

One higher education association, the American Council on Education (www.acenet.edu), reserved enthusiasm for President Bush's initiative, focusing instead on what ACE policy analysts feel are education budget shortfalls in Bush's proposals. According to the President's plan, the maximum for the Pell grant, says the ACE, will remain \$4,050--a hardship for low-income students. Further, ACE forecasts that 8,000 fewer students will be awarded Pell grants under Bush's proposed budget. Defenders of the budget note that the Pell program is due to receive a \$33 million boost, but critics charge that the program is already underfunded and that the truly needy simply won't get enough help.

Supporter or detractor, everyone is anxious to know how the \$250 million will be awarded, and how it will be managed through the DOL. For instance, will the funds go to colleges in areas that need a boost to their homeland security training efforts? If so, schools such as **Monroe Community College** (NY) and **Cincinnati State Technical and Community College** certainly stand to gain. (The former recently built the Homeland Security Management Institute, a simulation facility to train workers for homeland security initiatives. The institute also creates asynchronous training programs that can be licensed and used at other community colleges. And CSTCC, which has boosted its EMT training, is tying health care initiatives to homeland security, to address local emergency needs.)

Moreover, will the money be used to shore up existing programs, or launch new ones? To date, there are no clear answers. Some analysts predict the \$250 million will be funneled through a funding formula, ensuring that each state receives money to be distributed to its community colleges. But more sources are speculating that the money will be awarded via competitive grants. If they are right, community college systems are going to have to fight hard for the money. There will be more emphasis on grant writing, which, in turn, will require more work by existing staff or even the need to add staff to do the paperwork. And schools may have to make their decisions about these things more quickly than they'd like. Says McKenney, "We don't know if states are going to have to prove they have a plan."

Getting the Infrastructure in Place

Certainly, the unanswered questions about vying for a piece of that \$250 million are in the air everywhere. But an even bigger question, say the pundits, is this: Are community colleges ready to expand workforce development? The answer: Not in all cases.

"While I agree that community colleges have been treated as the poor stepchild of the educational system, most have a way to go in functioning as effective workforce institutions," says Julian Alssid, executive director of the NY-based Workforce Strategy Center (www.workforstrategy.org). The Center is currently involved in projects with training of low-income populations at Wisconsin's **Madison Area Technical College**, and the information technology training at New York's **LaGuardia Community College**.

Better organization is needed before community colleges can run at an optimum level, and run workforce development optimally, says Alssid. As with all IHEs, the divisions in a community college often don't know or understand the multiple educational missions, he points out, and this can hold schools back. Some programs are a gateway to four-year programs and graduate schools, others are focused solely on developing the local economy, or contract training agreements. Each of these many programs has its own students, faculty, funders, and resources, he explains. In truth, all by itself, workforce development covers so many areas (remediation, training of low-income populations, certificate programs for those who already have college degrees) that offices and programs scattered across vast and sometimes multiple campuses frequently don't "know" each other.

"I've seen some horror stories," Alssid admits. At a meeting with one community college highly regarded for customized business training, he and his staff asked the trainer for the high-tech sector how to involve low-income populations. "The trainer said, 'I wouldn't know where to begin,'" recalls Alssid. "Meanwhile, this same community college had a remediation program within the school that trains 5,000 students who are learning English and bringing their math skills up to speed. This is a classic disconnect."

Frankly, he says, it will be difficult for a school to qualify for those Bush workforce development funds if the top administrators there are not even clear about who is doing what. Now is the time, urges Alssid, for community colleges to better integrate their various elements and reorganize their workforce development efforts. They may discover that many new or expanded programs can grow from existing resources and staffs. The key is structure.

Getting the Jump on Retooling

As it stands, some schools have already retooled their departments. **Columbus State Community College** (OH), with an enrollment that has grown 42 percent over the past seven years (now at 37,000 credit and 5,000 noncredit students), has made several moves to reorganize workforce development. In fact, when President Valeriana Mollar reorganized the college six years ago, her first move was to create a new position--Dean of Community Education and Workforce Development. Her second move: to have the new dean report to the provost.

"In most colleges," she says, "the workforce development executive might report separately to the president, but usually not to the provost or the vice president of Academic Affairs." Yet, being close to all academic functions gives this dean a clear view of all programs at the college, explains Mollar. "She knows who to go to when she has to supervise or create a credit or remedial program," says Mollar, adding that there is a tendency at community colleges to create too many noncredit programs if those in charge of workforce development are not aware of all students' needs and the resources available. The school may find itself starting programs from scratch, without tapping the expertise of the instructors on hand--precisely the point Alssid stressed.

Columbus and a host of other community colleges have also paid more attention to dedicated workforce development facilities. The school now has dedicated space for its workforce efforts, as opposed to using "leftover" space around the campus, and this is a true attraction for student prospects as well as contract education partners. It may also prove to help attract federal funding.

And as the focus on workforce development grows, there may be more efforts made such as those at **Clackamas Community College** (OR). In 2002, planners spent \$5.8 million to expand an old, underutilized building into a 51,000-square-foot training center. The expanded site--triple its original size--is serving as a training center for utility workers of Portland General Electric and PacifiCorp. Each of the companies paid one-third of the expenses to upgrade and expand the training center, with the college covering the remaining one-third of the costs. The center includes a range of classrooms, computer centers, hands-on training bays, and an outdoor training area. Clackamas can now market its workforce development program to those specifically looking for career paths in the utilities industry, while at the same time providing more classroom space for all students. With burgeoning enrollments--not to mention the specter of that federal funding spurring even more community college growth--Clackamas is certainly not the only community college or system concerned about physical expansion.

"We need to expand capacity," echoes Carreon of the Dallas County Community College District. The student body of the district is currently at 62,000 credit students, 26,000 noncredit, and still growing. As Carreon waits to learn about where the new funds can fit into Dallas' future, he continues to drive support for a proposed \$450 million bond measure that will be used to improve the district's campuses. Meanwhile, college administrators and staff move forward, continuing to train displaced workers re-entering the workforce as safety and security managers at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport--and dreaming about their share of a \$250 million federal funding pie.

Related Information

Why Workforce Development?

In the next six years, the greatest job growth in the U.S. will be in jobs that require an associate's degree. This, according to Julian Alssid, executive director of the NY-based Workforce Strategy Center (www.workforcestrategy.org), a nonprofit think tank that consults with community colleges and other organizations. Jobs in the health, biotechnology, manufacturing, and information technology sectors will grow 32 percent by 2010, Alssid says, adding that importantly, it is community colleges that are poised to fill these labor needs, and that are in position to offer postsecondary certification programs.

"Many industries recognize that they need short-term, focused technical training," he says. Community colleges, he offers, would be wise to pick up the pace on their workforce development initiatives because specialists in these labor sectors areas aren't entering the workforce quickly enough.

And, according to Haydar Hassan, a principal in the Higher Education/Science and Technology division of Burt Hill (www.burthill.com), a planning and architecture firm serving community colleges among other clients, by mid-2005 the manpower shortages we experienced in 1999 will seem like a minor irritation. According to the

firm's research, there is a growing and severe labor shortage among the skilled labor force. In just six years, predicts the study, the U.S. labor force will be reduced by 5.3 million skilled workers. That number will swell to a 14 million drop by 2020. The reasons for the coming shortage are numerous, he says, not the least of which is the retirement of the baby boomers, and the smaller pool of younger people entering the workforce. To illustrate, he notes that the workforce grew 54 percent during the past two decades, but, alarmingly, will only grow 3 percent from 2000 to 2020.

--JMA

What He Said...

Excerpts from President Bush's Jan. 20 State of the Union Address

"America's growing economy is also a changing economy. As technology transforms the way almost every job is done, America becomes more productive, and workers need new skills. Much of our job growth will be found in high-skilled fields like health care and biotechnology. So we must respond by helping more Americans gain the skills to find good jobs in our economy."

"... we must ensure that older students and adults can gain the skills they need to find work now. Many of the fastest growing occupations require strong math and science preparation, and training beyond the high school level. ... I propose a series of measures called Jobs for the 21st Century. This program will provide extra help to middle and high school students who fall behind in reading and math, expand advanced placement programs in low-income schools, invite math and science professionals from the private sector to teach part-time in our schools.

"I propose increasing our support for America's fine community colleges, so they can train workers for industries that are creating the most new jobs. By these actions, we'll help more and more Americans to join in the growing prosperity of our country. Job training is important, and so is job creation."