

CCBC's Davis speaks in favor of more state funds

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The COVID-19 pandemic has “devastated” Community College of Beaver County’s enrollment and staffing, the school’s president, Roger Davis, told Pennsylvania lawmakers Monday.

Davis testified before the state’s House Appropriations Committee in favor of increased 2021-22 funding for two-year colleges. He joined Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges President Elizabeth Bolden, Westmoreland County Community College President Tuesday Stanley and John “Ski” Sygielski, president of HACC, Central Pennsylvania’s Community College.

Workforce development and technical education are vital now more than ever, administrators testified, as thousands of Pennsylvanians face unemployment and job insecurity. CCBC, for example, has crafted programs specifically designed to prepare local residents for jobs with Shell, Nova Chemicals and other energy/manufacturing companies in the region.

Gov. Tom Wolf’s proposed 2021-22 budget would provide the state’s 14 existing community colleges with the same level of funding as last year – directing \$245 million in operating appropriations to the institutions. A \$1.4 million increase from last year would be directed to a new community college in Erie.

The commission is asking for an ad-



The COVID-19 pandemic has “devastated” Community College of Beaver County’s enrollment and staffing, president Roger Davis told Pennsylvania lawmakers Monday. SUSAN HAMILTON/CCBC

ditional \$15 million in combined operating and capital appropriations to assist students and faculty with unexpected expenses related to COVID-19.

“We had to furlough approximately one-third of our workforce,” Davis said Monday. “We’ve laid off 10% of our full-time workforce and have lost over 200 students. It’s been pretty devastating to our institution.”

Colleges now face sizable financial challenges, including additional costs of implementing new safety measures and remote learning – most are seeing less revenue in room and board, Bolden

said. The unexpected costs of providing students with laptops, broadband access and other necessary resources is another hit, she said.

Nearly half of Pennsylvania community college students are considered low-income, coming from families earning less than \$30,000 annually, Bolden told lawmakers. Students can save “at least \$20,000 on the cost of higher education, reducing their overall student debt,” she said.

Technical fields that require intensive instruction with industry-standard equipment are especially difficult

to maintain without public investment, she added.

Davis said some CCBC students simply lack the support and technology needed to learn during a pandemic, something he expects will continue in the coming year.

“COVID impacted the poorest students...this is the population that is suffering the most,” he said. “They can no longer take care of their children, try to find employment, try to take care of their parents and still sustain. So, what we’re predicting is students will move to a much more part-time basis. It will be a slower drive to the ultimate goal of some type of credential.”

The commission also asked lawmakers to consider establishing a statewide dual enrollment or early college program and authorize community colleges to award bachelor’s degrees.

Davis spoke of the hurdles many community college students face when trying to transfer to four-year universities. It’s sometimes easier to transfer out of state, Bolden said, because Pennsylvania universities don’t have a streamlined mechanism for accepting community college credits.

“To be able to successfully transfer to four-year institutions we had to create 600 individual articulation agreements and keep them current,” Davis said. “The process is very difficult.”

Many colleges are still awaiting federal CARES and other allocated funds, but leaders say need far outweighs resources.

“These are dire times,” Davis said.