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DECA Threatened by State Cuts

06.23.2009 | Education  Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland’s latest budget proposal eliminates funding for nine early college high schools, putting in jeopardy the future of the innovative schools that prepare urban students to succeed in college.

"Early colleges have been one of Ohio's most successful education innovations," said Thomas Lasley, dean of the University of Dayton's School of Education and Allied Professions. "The cuts the governor proposes will make it virtually impossible for these schools to be sustained."

Lasley said Strickland's budget zeros out $12 million in early college funding from the current Ohio House and Senate versions of the budget.

Early college schools operate in Dayton, Columbus, Canton, Akron, Cleveland, Youngstown, Lorain and Elyria, and Toledo. More than $40 million has been invested to start and operate the schools by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the State of Ohio and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Lasley said the schools have demonstrated success in preparing under-served students – especially from families in which they're the first to go to college and minorities – to succeed in college.

"Overall, 80 percent of Ohio's early college students are leaving high school with a semester's worth of college credit. That's the tipping point for success in completing a degree," Lasley said. "The research shows that students with a semester or more of college credit are more likely to continue through to complete a degree."

And some are leaving high school with that college degree already in hand. More than one out of every three early college students in Ohio are graduating from high school with an associate's degree as well, he said.

"This funding cut creates a potentially long-term compromise in Ohio's ability to confront its economic challenges," he said.

Lasley said if Ohio is to reach Strickland's long-stated goals to increase the number of Ohioans with a college degree and increase the graduation rate among those who start college, the state needs early college and other dual enrollment approaches.

Lasley has seen that success first-hand at the Dayton Early College Academy, an innovative charter school, operated on campus by the University of Dayton under the sponsorship of Dayton Public Schools. It was the first high school of its kind in Ohio and in the vanguard of similar schools nationally. DECA is the nation’s only charter school operated by a Catholic university.

Every member of the Dayton Early College Academy class of 2009 has been accepted to college. All have completed at least three college courses, while some have 40 credits or more, and the entire class has been offered $1.4 million in scholarships —nearly $54,000 average per student.

DECA Principal Judy Hennessey said: "Early colleges are crucial to growing a pipeline for Ohio high school students to Ohio colleges who will likely return to their Ohio communities to live and work. These early colleges are one of the most effective tools to stopping the cycle of poverty in their communities. Education stops poverty, and schools like DECA definitely have an impact on how likely students are to succeed in college."

Hennessey said a huge amount of research and development dollars were pumped into Ohio by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, through KnowledgeWorks.

"It takes a lot of seed money to start a program like the Early College initiative, and to see it abandoned even though it's producing results is frustrating. Other states are expanding their early colleges," Hennessey said.

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