

STUDENTS COVER MOST NONCREDIT WORKFORCE EDUCATION COSTS

By Matthew Dembicki
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Students paying out of pocket cover a large chunk (42 percent) of the cost of noncredit workforce development programs offered at community colleges, according to preliminary findings from an ongoing survey by Opportunity America and Lumina Foundation.

Employers cover 18 percent of such programs, while states and “other sources” – such as military benefits, means-tested federal programs and foundations – cover 16 percent each, according to the survey findings. Funding through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act covers 8 percent.

The nonprofit Opportunity America emphasizes that the findings are not final and include responses from 127 institutions in 14 states. Many additional colleges that wanted to participate requested more time as they are dealing with the Covid crisis, so the deadline to complete the survey is now February 1.

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR CTE

Opportunity America hopes the information culled from the survey will encourage state lawmakers to allocate more funding for career education. Career and technical programs already were critical prior to the pandemic, when employers were desperate for highly skilled workers. They will be just as vital when the economy begins to rev up in the post-pandemic recovery.

“The problem is, you have millions of Americans wanting these short, job-focused programs that the colleges are well-positioned to provide, but in many states there’s no way to pay,” Opportunity America President Tamar Jacoby told Public News Service last month. “You can’t use your Pell Grant to pay for them. Most states do not fund them.”

Many community college and business leaders have advocated to allow Pell grants to cover quality, short-term workforce training programs. Some congressional members have indicated they support the idea; however, opponents contend that doing so could open the doors to some unscrupulous for-profit programs that might exploit students.

OTHER FINDINGS

The Opportunity America survey also gauges what credentials noncredit workforce students earn. It finds that more than one-third (36 percent) of them attain industry certifications, and 23 percent earn other third-party certification, including government-issued certifications or licensure. Also, many earn more than one type of credential.

Findings also show that about one-third (31 percent) of community college employer partners offer some type of work-based learning experiences for students, such as internships, apprenticeships, co-operative education and other on-the-job work experiences.

Opportunity America notes that employers partner with community colleges in other ways, such as offering labor market advice and designing and providing instruction.