

Prada Shoes – the sequel! Last year I wrote a column about how state funding for community colleges works in Kansas. I likened state funding for credit hours to selling shoes in a strange way. If you recall I pointed out that no matter how much it costs to offer a particular class – from inexpensive classes like US History, to expensive classes such as nursing courses – the College received the same dollar per credit hour.

It was like being a shoe salesman with only one low cost for all his different types of shoes. Both the Prada shoes and the cheap plastic flip flops would have the same price. You sure hope you don't sell too many Pradas or you would go out of business! I told you that the state was changing this with a new funding formula that would give us more aid for nursing than we get for history.

Well that formula passed and was signed into law in 2011, which is great news! (There was no money for the formula, which would have been better news. But at least we got this through.) Using that new formula we can see the cost of each of the credit hours offered by NCCC, and, more importantly, how much the state should provide for those hours.

The formula considers that tuition provides some revenue, as does local tax support, but that the State of Kansas has an obligation as well. It shows that for all community and technical colleges in Kansas, there is a \$67 million shortfall of what we should be getting to provide this training. Specifically in our case, Neosho County Community College should receive about \$6 million in state aid for the type and amount of hours it produced last year. However, we got about \$2.5 million – only 42% of what the formula indicates we should have.

That is the lowest percentage support of any community or technical college in the state.

It is no wonder that state support for NCCC has fallen to a mere 12% of our total revenue. Why so low? State aid was cut several times in recent years and held steady in others, while NCCC has become one of the fastest growing colleges in the state. In fact, this fall only Fort Hays and Wichita State grew faster than we did. And 40% of the credit hours produced at NCCC are in technical education, such as nursing, welding, and health information technology – the “Prada” cost programs. The “perfect storm” of lower state support.

But I have some potentially exciting news! Governor Brownback has included \$8 million in his budget for the new funding formula. If these funds survive the budgeting process (why did “I’m Just a Bill” from School House Rock go through my mind just now?) NCCC will receive a nice increase in state aid, something we have not had in several years.

The \$8 million is part of a \$28 million package designed to increase the amount of technical education offered in Kansas, especially at high schools. It includes money to pay the tuition of high school students enrolled in technical classes, transportation for the students to the technical classrooms, even a “bonus” for the high school for every student that earns a college/industry certificate.

But our integration of technical education into other educational enterprises won't stop there. NCCC has received a grant to infuse our adult basic education program with workforce training. Students will

be earning college/industry certificates at the same time they are earning their GED. This grant is through the State of Kansas and Jobs for the Future, part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

See, I know firsthand that this plan will work! USD 413 and NCCC have partnered for years now on delivering welding, construction and other technical education to the Chanute High School students. The students have been earning their certificates while getting the high school diploma. The District provides the space and pays the tuition and fees of students in technical classes, while the College provides the instructors, equipment, and supplies. Enrollment has been very strong, quality of the instruction is high (State Welding Champion!), students have succeeded and found jobs after graduation. This is the exact model Governor Brownback is suggesting. We are partnering with other high schools too, such as Ottawa High and Erie to offer similar programs. These funds could really expand what we are doing with all of the schools in our service area.

This new emphasis in technical education is very exciting and I applaud the Governor for this initiative. I know the “devil is in the details” and “many a slip between the cup and the lip” and whatever other saying you’d like to throw in there. There is much to learn and shape about this plan, and let us not forget the matter of the House and Senate having their important say in the package. Still it is great to see this move forward.

I’ll keep you posted!

As always I welcome your thoughts and comments at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).