

When I sit down to write this column each month I think of a recent topic that you might like to know the college is advancing. I check with a few staff members to see if they agree the topic is a good one. Then I check my past columns to see how long ago it was that I covered that topic – I want to keep it fresh!

It was during this process that I found a column that I wrote back in February of 2011, almost eight years ago. In that article I was very excited to tell you that Kansas was changing the way the fund community colleges and how it was going to benefit our students and local workforce needs.

In that article I told you that the State is switching our funding formula from a simple dollars-per-credit-hour method to a process called the cost model. In the past NCCC got the same amount of money per credit hour to offer a less expensive course, such as Introduction to Sociology, as we did for offer very expensive courses, like Patient Centered Care II in nursing.

I was quite happy to tell you that after long last NCCC will get properly rewarded for offering very expensive courses that help graduates find great paying jobs and meet local workforce needs. Kansas was incentivizing starting higher cost programs, but ones that were needed in the community and across the state. With these extra dollars we would be able to expand some of these workforce offerings into other high-cost areas and better meet the needs of Kansans.

If you haven't guessed, it has not worked out the way I hoped in 2011.

While the formula was approved it was never fully funded. In fact, we don't follow any formula at all now, even the old per-credit-hour-method. Back in 2011 the state community college funds were frozen using the old method. So not only do we not get more money for offering more expensive programs, we also don't get more money for growing under the old method. NCCC gets what it got last year plus or minus any cuts or additions to the state budget. We essentially have not had any operational funds added since 2008.

And for the most part the funds remain the same today. During the economic downturn the community colleges voted to support the legislature freezing our funds at then current levels. We also agreed to support leaving it that way for five years. The time is long since up.

To activate the formula now would be bad for about half of the community colleges in the state. There just isn't enough money in our community college allocation to support the formula. The colleges like NCCC who have large enrollments in expensive workforce programs such as nursing are greatly underfunded by the formula. If the formula were turned on, many colleges would see their allocation drop considerably, while NCCC and others would see theirs go up. Of course, some could argue that those colleges had the opportunity to invest in high-cost workforce programs and didn't, so that was the choice they made, and they should see the ramifications of that choice. Others don't want any college hurt by a formula originally designed to help them. So the formula remains turned off.

Continuing the way we are, now eight budget years later, is not good for Kansas and its workforce needs. We are not incentivizing growth or workforce training for adults.

The smart thing from a budget-only perspective is to end all of the expensive workforce programs that are good for the area but cost a fortune to offer and usually have lower enrollment. Instead bottom-line focused colleges should focus on less expensive transfer education where the enrollment is higher.

One's allocation from the state will not be affected at all since the money is frozen, even if you shrink in enrollment.

Some colleges across the state have chosen to do just that, which means less opportunity for local students and less workforce in areas needed the most.

NCCC has done the opposite since the funds have been frozen, adding more and more workforce programs and more locations to get that training. Much of that is due to a state program for high school students only called Excel in Career and Technical Education (Excel in CTE). But that program doesn't help working adults who want a new career, or certain programs that are not open to those under 18.

If the formula were fully funded the way it was passed back in 2011 NCCC would get almost \$1 million more in state aid and other colleges would not have to give up money in the process. That money could really help our students and our service area in lots of greatly needed ways.

I'm excited to tell you that the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) is supporting the community college legislative request for \$25 million to fully fund the cost model formula. My guess is that this would be a multi-year approach so that we would receive, say, \$6.25 million a year for four years until the formula is fully funded. The colleges that are already fully funded would not get any of these funds, instead the money would go to colleges like NCCC who are well-underfunded by the formula. If the fully-funded colleges wanted more of these funds, they will have to put in those needed but expensive workforce programs.

Finally we would be incentivized for growth and for meeting ALL of the needs of Kansas, not just the inexpensive needs of the state.

I don't know if this will make it through the legislative session this year. Often it seems like items such as this happen late in the session, sometimes on the last night! KBOR, NCCC and the other 18 community colleges will be pulling for this effort.

NCCC and its Trustees have a record of doing the right thing by the service area, with or without the once-promised help from the state, to accomplish its mission of enriching our communities and our students' lives. We built the Ottawa campus in 2011 without any state aid or mill levy support for the building. We added programs that met workforce need, such as court reporter, without funding formula support because it was the right thing to do.

And we will continue to do so no matter what the state does. But a little more help would sure make it easier.

If you have any questions or comments about this column or anything else, please feel free to email me at binbody@neosho.edu.