

Testimony before the United States Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

“Rebuilding the Middle Class: What Washington Can Learn from Iowa”

The Eastern Iowa Community College’s John T. Blong Technology Center Educational Processes

Impacting the Middle Class

On

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Testimony of Robert Allbee

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I would like to thank Senator Harkin for the opportunity to testify today at this hearing on the middle class in the Quad Cities. I am Robert Allbee from the Eastern Iowa Community Colleges. My current role is as Interim President of our campus in Muscatine. Prior to this assignment my role was as a Business and Industry liaison for the College working directly with area industry to create training programs for their current employees. That role also included the creation of certificate, diploma and degree programs which would provide trained employees for these industries.

The Eastern Iowa Community Colleges (EICC) was established in 1965 by the Iowa Legislature as one of fifteen community college merged areas. This combined Clinton Junior College, Muscatine Junior College and the vocational-technical programs of the Davenport schools. In 1979 Palmer Junior College was acquired to make Scott Community College a comprehensive institution.

The Eastern Iowa Community College District consists of Clinton, Jackson, Muscatine and Scott counties and parts of Cedar and Louisa Counties. The District had a fall 2011 enrollment of more than nine thousand students of which approximately three thousand six hundred enrolled in one of more than forty career technology programs.

The Colleges are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. This accreditation means that our programs meet or exceed the standards for academic excellence set for every private and public college in a nineteen state region.

EICC also enrolls more than thirty thousand students annually in continuing education, business and industry and adult education classes. These classes are designed to help individuals improve a job skill, upgrade general education skills or learn more about a topic of interest.

EICC Career programs support students as they move from unemployment or underemployment to professional technical careers in healthcare, manufacturing and other technical careers. The increase in knowledge and job skills earned by EICC students also brings

enhanced job security, benefits as they enter their new career and skills that are desired by area industry.

An example of a student success story is a male in his late fifties who lost his job due to a plant closing. He returned to EICC in early 2010 and selected Computer Numerical Control (CNC) as his program of study. In less than a year he completed his programming certificate and was hired at an area manufacturer with an approximate starting wage of \$ 20/hour.

Individuals seeking employment today need some form of credentialing beyond high school to compete for highly skilled technical jobs. This credentialing may be in the form of a short term training program leading directly to employment, a program with specific certification such as welding or an Associate of Applied Science degree.

The Eastern Iowa Community Colleges work in direct cooperation with area industry building programs that teach students the job skills needed to successfully obtain employment and succeed in their chosen profession.

The Blong Technology Center provides support for Quad City area apprenticeship programs. This includes industry sponsored programs in cooperation with the Department of Labor. The Machinist apprenticeship is housed at the BTC under the guidance of a advisory committee and in 2011/2012 enrolls more than forty individuals from small to medium sized manufacturers. With the inclusion of the on job training program completers receive the Department of Labor Journey Workers card which provides credentialing of their knowledge and skills which may be taken anywhere in the country. This insures employment potential for those individuals for many industries.

For certificate, diploma and degree programs in the Career/Technical field (CTE) the colleges establish advisory committees comprised of subject matter experts from area industry who assist the colleges with curriculum development, recommendations for equipment purchases and future trends in the industry. This allows the colleges to build and maintain relevancy within each program so that graduates can successfully establish their professional knowledge base in their skilled trade.

For contract training programs designed for specific companies the college uses account representatives who establish a relationship across many departments for their clients. This may include but not be limited to: Human Resources, Skilled Trades, Quality Control and Logistics.

The College's have also worked with area industry customizing pre employment training programs such as welding providing a pool of potential employees for area manufacturers.

The site of today's hearing the John T. Blong Technology Center (BTC) was designed as a College for Working Learners. Students at the BTC include individuals who are unemployed, underemployed or taking coursework to upgrade their job skills or to remain current with technology.

The BTC offers certificate, diploma and degree programs in: Machining, Welding, Mechanical Design, Electromechanical Controls, Renewable Energy and Logistics. The Center also offers contract training for business and industry which is customized for their needs, continuing education courses and apprenticeship programs.

The Center uses a unique format designed for adult learners. The programs are self paced using a competency based modular approach. Students may register for individual modules or entire courses based upon their needs. The courses are eight weeks in length and begin at multiple times per year.

Program delivery encompasses different methodologies to accommodate individual learning styles. The traditional lecture format is used in some instances, however most classroom material is delivered using both web based and server based technology.

Web based technology works well for adult learners who also work and have other personal obligations. This allows the students to watch the lectures via the web when their personal schedule permits.

To complete the hands on activities that are such an important aspect of technical programming the BTC has an open lab concept featuring both day and evening hours. Within the modular format the student works directly with their instructor to complete all hands on projects under close supervision. Most of the instructional staff at the BTC has real world experience in the subject matter they teach. This brings a valuable presence and level of knowledge that enhances the learning experience.

If a student needs extra help a "learning Lab" is available to them under the supervision of a mentor. The mentor assists the students with their server based training and in many instances also provides tutoring/instructional support for those individuals needing extra help. Without this guidance and support many students who have been away from the classroom for many years would find it difficult to complete their course work.

The programs at the BTC are successful because of their multi faceted approach including: close and direct contact with area industry designing programs that teach relevant skills necessary to obtain employment in a skilled trade, a flexible learner centered approach, support services in a learning lab environment and instructors with practical experience in their field.

This approach works for the many students served by the BTC: apprentices, laid off workers seeking to avoid poverty when faced with a job loss, those seeking a career, those looking to change careers and incumbent workers seeking to keep pace with ever changing technology. The BTC provides the Quad City residents with the opportunity to learn the skills needed for the manufacturing workforce of today with an eye for their future stability.

I would like to thank Senator Harkin for the opportunity to testify about the programs and services of the Eastern Iowa Community Colleges that assist Quad City area individuals and business and industry.