A NEW MODEL FOR REGIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE COLLABORATION

Uniting to Strengthen Talent Development, Equity and Economic Advancement

By Dr. Curtis L. Ivery, Chancellor, Wayne County Community College District

Community Colleges can play a major role in advancing the economic and equity agenda of southeast Michigan.

We firmly believe that the community colleges in southeast Michigan, working in collaboration rather than independently can make a significant impact on increasing the number of citizens who earn a higher education credential, in developing a highly skilled workforce in support of regional economic growth, and advancing the equity agenda.

We also believe that a community college collaborative can play a more central role in creating a region-wide talent development strategy aligned with ongoing economic development strategies. We seek not to compete, but to cooperate with our sister colleges as we advance our shared educational, economic and equity objectives for the southeast region.

By leveraging the unique set of educational programs and services of each community college, we can have significant impact on increasing the number of citizens who earn a higher educational credential, develop a talented workforce in support of regional economic growth and grow opportunities advancing the equity agenda.

WCCCD would like to serve as a catalyst in bringing the leaders of the Southeast Michigan Community Colleges together to participate in a roundtable discussion to explore working together on a regional collaborative. We can partner to better serve the educational and workforce needs of Detroit, Wayne County, and southeast Michigan.

The pressing economic, educational, cultural, and demographic challenges we face require a regional strategy that is coordinated with the needs of business, government, non-profits, and faith-based organizations, as well as other educational groups.

This strategy can be built on existing shared ventures such as Detroit Promise, Detroit Drives Degrees, and the Workforce Intelligence Network. For example, the collaborative could work in parallel with the University Research Corridor (University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University) on regional educational strategies.

Southeast Michigan has some of the finest community colleges in the nation with Wayne County Community College District, Henry Ford College, Macomb Community College, Oakland Community College, Monroe Community College, Schoolcraft College and Washtenaw Community College. Historically, each of these institutions has had a major impact on the success of individuals, businesses and communities in their respective service areas. Each college also has a unique and valued set of “mountaintop” career education and workforce development programs that can significantly contribute to a united regional strategy.

Amazon cited what it viewed as a potential shortfall of a skilled work force in the region as a key reason why metro Detroit did not make it to their new headquarters final list. Our own experiences tell us that we have all the talent we need in our region, but that we need to cooperate on a regional basis if we are to create the momentum the communities we serve need to grow and succeed now and in the future.

The excitement that surrounds Detroit as a model for innovation in nearly every discipline gives us a phenomenal backdrop to come together and consider new models of collaboration to drive this region forward. Now is the time for us to provide leadership in making our regional community colleges an essential partner of this transformational journey.