

These Legislative Policy Position Statements provide a summary of key issues by the Education Affairs Division of the Beckley Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce. They were adopted by the Board of Directors to be presented to Legislators for the 2018 Legislative Session.

## The Whole Child

The Chamber supports Raleigh County Schools' position that every child, in every school, deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. Providing high quality instruction; decreasing educational gaps between programmatic grade levels; increasing an emphasis in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM); creating school environments that meet individual student needs; and increasing successful matriculation of graduating students into college and careers will ensure the needs of the whole child are met.

## Preparedness of Students

Our citizens must be prepared to enter college and/or the workplace. Of major concern are students who enter the workplace or pursue higher education without the basic math, English, social, and problem solving skills to be viable employees. The skills gap is real, it is growing, and it must be addressed. Students have difficulty making change without a calculator, speaking to customers or co-workers in a professional manner, and solving problems. College-bound students have difficulties in the same areas and are too often required to take developmental courses to get their skills to an acceptable college level. These developmental courses do not go toward the credits needed to graduate. Funding for development of enhancement programs for students performing below basic competency skills on state assessment as defined by WV Department of Education and nationally normed assessment tests should be a priority.

## Student Attendance

The Chamber supports Raleigh County Schools' Attendance Matters initiative. Attendance is critical to the success of our students in school and in the workplace. Research shows that missing 10% of

the school year— two or three days a month— can add up to so much lost time in the classroom that children just can't keep up. The Chamber collaborates with Raleigh County Schools on a mentoring program that targets at-risk students to provide support and to improve attendance and student success.

## Drop Out Rate

The Chamber recognizes that the growth of Raleigh County is dependent on our youth and their future. Consequently, the dropout rate within our high schools is of concern. Data suggests that dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, to need public assistance, and to be involved in crime—further supporting the need to address dropout rates. The Chamber is in a unique position to link school officials and the business community together to create solutions that will positively impact our youth and inspire them to finish high school or complete an alternative equivalency program. The Chamber supports funding of effective and innovative programs and mentorships that target the student who is likely to leave high school before graduation. Local dropout recovery programs that address the dropout rate (e.g., Option Pathways) are vitally important. The Chamber supports the funding for programs that give students a second chance to re-enter school and for programs that reward schools that improve their graduation rate and increase their mentoring programs with an increased focus on middle schoolers and ninth graders, and their families.

## Career and Technical Education

The Chamber recognizes that Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduates help drive the state's success and vitality. CTE programs create an environment that integrates core academics with real world experiences. CTE programs change and evolve in creative and innovative ways to meet West Virginia's needs and to provide the state's students with a life-changing educational experience.

## Simulated Workplace

The Chamber believes that WV Department of Education's Simulated Workplace initiative provides an opportunity to directly influence the success of

the next generation of West Virginia's workforce, and it supports continued funding for this worthwhile program. The demand among business and industry leaders for a more work-ready employee continues to grow. The Simulated Workplace helps fill this void by immersing students in an engaging environment that provides the needed technical training while emphasizing the workplace's requirements of attendance, drug-free status, professionalism, problem solving, leadership, and the ability to work on a team. The Simulated Workplace puts business and industry processes and behaviors directly into the CTE programs and shows students how their individual success can lead to the company's efficiency and profitability.

## School Counselors

The Chamber recognizes school counselors deliver a unique set of skills and services to our schools, to our students, and to our communities. School counselors help students gain academic achievement and personal/social development of skills and attitudes needed to reach their fullest potential and to be college and/or career ready. The Chamber encourages support of increased funding to provide full time school counselors in ALL West Virginia schools.

## Technology Integration

We advocate that sufficient continuous funding must be provided to ensure that all WV students have equitable and sustained access to technology at a level at least comparable to national averages and a state-of-the-art computing device for every student. WV has long treated technology acquisition as a grant or one-time procurement. Dependency upon grants should never be considered as a long-term viable option. Planned continuous funding of technology for acquisition, upgrading, and planned replacement of network infrastructure and supplies on a regular basis is vital.

## Promise Scholarship

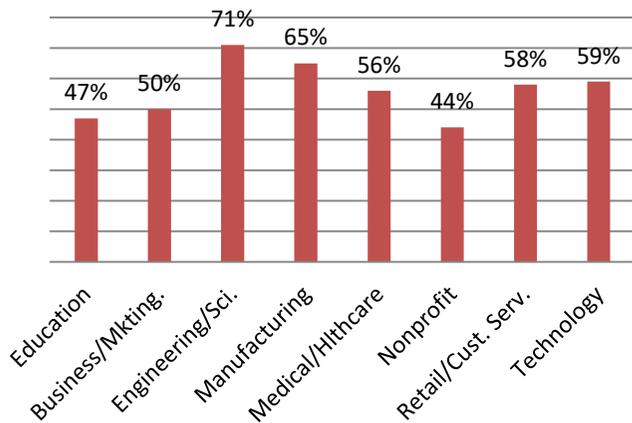
The Chamber supports fully funding of the Promise Scholarship and the Higher Education Grant Program as well as the Engineering, Science and Technology Scholarship in next year's budget. Cut-off scores for the Promise Scholarship should be at an achievable level

so that WV's brightest students stay in WV. Budget cuts reducing the amount of money available, the practice of steadily raising minimum scores on the ACT/SAT college entrance exams and HS GPA requirements should not be used as a sleight-of-hand way of decreasing the number of students awarded the Promise.

### Higher Education Funding/Budgets

Raleigh County is recognized as a hub for higher education, and the Chamber recognizes higher education as key to revitalizing the economy in WV. While other states are increasing funding, WV continues to cut funding to higher education, forcing schools to compensate for lost revenue by increasing tuition, eliminating positions, and decreasing program offerings. It is difficult for people to complete degree programs that will allow them to stay and thrive in our communities. In 2015, according to the Economic Policy Institute, on average, college graduates earned 56% more than high school graduates. As cited in the West Virginia Higher Education Report Card, less than 30% of West Virginia residents hold at least an Associate degree and by 2020, more than half of the jobs in West Virginia will require an Associate degree or higher. The Chamber sees an investment in higher education as an investment in the future of West Virginia.

Lack of Qualified Applicants for Open Job Positions (from payscale.com 2016)



### Professional Development for Educators

The Chamber supports legislation and/or funding to increase opportunities for the professional growth of teachers. As educators search for ways of improving student achievement, it is imperative that focus be placed on teacher learning and development. As a Chamber, we believe a greater emphasis must be placed on sustained embedded professional development. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "research confirms that educators are the single most important factor in raising student achievement." Higher standards for educators accompany the push for higher standards for students and greater accountability for student learning. Professional development is a critical link among new policies, school reform, and improved educational practice (Knapp, 2003). Training must be fully funded and sustained over multiple years.

### Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

The Chamber recognizes that the recruitment and retention of quality teachers is critical to ensuring Raleigh County provides a quality educational system to its students. The Chamber encourages the alternative licensure process while ensuring that teachers completing the process have the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to effectively teach. The Chamber further encourages the Legislature and State Board of Education to enhance the salary and benefits provided to teachers in order to attract and retain teachers to the profession.

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245 North Kanawha Street, Beckley, WV 25801  
(304) 252-7328

### Raleigh County Board of Education

Larry Ford, President  
Jack "Gordie" Roop, Vice President  
Marie Hamrick  
Dr. Charlotte Hutchens  
Marsha Smith

Raleigh County Superintendent  
C. David Price  
(304) 256-4500



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