

These Legislative Policy Position Statements provide a summary of key issues identified 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 2017 Legislative Session.

## Accountability

The Chamber believes that Senate Bill 359 (amended 18-2E-5) which calls for the evaluation of our public schools on a “bell curve” is patently unfair and is detrimental to both students and teachers. Accurate evaluation and assessment are vital to building stronger and better schools. Any approach that predetermines that the majority of schools will be “average” and the remainder will be F’s and A’s is subjective and counter-productive. Schools should be evaluated in a way that captures a fair and consistent standard of the educational process and reflects student learning. Credible information about school performance is imperative if we are to attract new families into our area. Every student deserves the opportunity to earn an A. This does not mean that they will, but that they have the opportunity to do so. A “bell curve” system does not allow this. The Chamber recommends that the Legislature develop objective indicators and measures of system performance that convey a better understanding of how well instruction is being delivered.

## 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.

## 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., Options 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.

## 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.

## Simulated Workplace

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

success of the next generation of WV’s workforce, and the Chamber supports continued funding to support this worthwhile program. Simulated Workplace students are immersed in an engaging workplace environment which provides the necessary technical training with an emphasis on attendance, drug-free status, professionalism, problem solving, leadership, and the ability to work on a team. The demand for a more work-ready employee among business and industry leaders continues to grow, and this program places business and industry processes and behaviors directly into career and technical education programs and provides students with an understanding of all aspects of an industry or business and shows them how their individual success leads to company profitability.

## Promise Scholarship

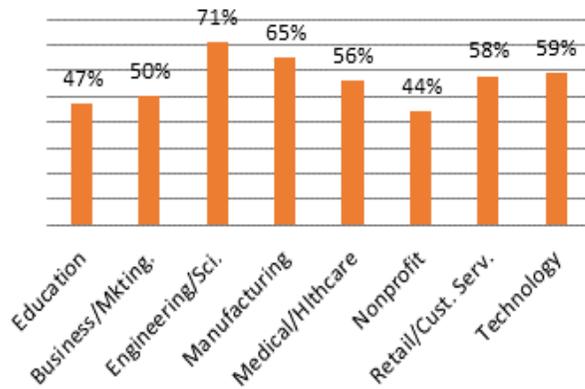
The Chamber supports fully funding of the Promise Scholarship and the Higher Education Grant Program as well as the Engineering, Science and Technology Scholarship in next year’s budget. Cut-off scores for the Promise Scholarship should be at an achievable level so that WV’s brightest students stay in WV. Budget cuts reducing the amount of money available and the practice of steadily raising minimum scores on the ACT 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

An estimated 49% of the WV jobs requiring postsecondary credentials will not be filled without increased funding to higher education. Raleigh County is positioned to become 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. The Chamber sees an investment in higher education as an investment in the future of West Virginia.

# education positions

Percentage of companies that believe there is a lack of qualified applicants for open job positions (from payscale.com)



## 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 on a regular basis is vital.

## 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 teachers to the profession.

## School Counselors

The Chamber recognizes school counselors provide 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.

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