



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Bridging the Skills Gap

Dr. Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Chancellor
West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education

Dr. Sarah Armstrong Tucker is the Chancellor of the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education. Previously, Dr. Tucker served as Vice Chancellor of the Community and Technical College System of WV, and the Director of Planning and Research for the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and Community and Technical College System of West Virginia. Her work focuses on college access, particularly for first-generation rural students, and redesigning developmental education. She completed her doctorate at the University of Michigan in 2010. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, she was a behavioral specialist and general education teacher in an adolescent girls' group home. Dr. Tucker earned a B.A. in Psychology from Harvard University and a M.A. in Quantitative Research Methodology from the University of Michigan.

In addition to her duties with the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, Dr. Tucker serves on numerous state-wide committees and councils dealing with workforce development, economic development, and other issues relating to community and technical college education.

By 2018, West Virginia employers will generate 30,000 new jobs in energy, advanced manufacturing and information technology. Unfortunately, many West Virginians lack the level of education needed to land the high-paying jobs in these industries.

Sixty percent of these new jobs will require at least a two-year degree and 74 percent will require some post-secondary education. In order to bridge our state's skills gap, community and technical colleges (CTCs) are creating and enhancing programs to arm West Virginians with the training sought by current and future employers.

For many years now, our colleges have worked with regional employers to deliver education and training programs to meet workforce needs. In 2013 alone, our nine colleges delivered training to more than 500 employers and strengthened our educational partnerships.

It is through these partnerships that CTCs are able to consistently supply a pipeline of educated and reputable workers. A great example is the Petroleum Technology Program at Pierpont Community and Technical College and West Virginia Northern Community College.

Since the beginning of the Marcellus Shale boom, these two colleges worked with notable energy companies such as Dominion, Southwestern, Noble and others to develop a program that would provide a workforce for the natural gas industry. Our colleges worked tirelessly with these companies to gain insight into the needed skills, seek guidance on curriculum, and garner information on changing workforce needs. These companies also donated new equipment, provided internship opportunities for students, scholarships, and adjunct faculty – all while serving as advocates for community and technical colleges in the region.

In May 2015, Pierpont and WV Northern graduated their first class of Petroleum Technology students. The majority of students immediately found jobs in the industry, with some making \$26.50 an hour or more. Additionally, nearly

17 percent of the 90 students in the program's second class were placed in summer internships with these companies.

The success of this partnership and program has set the tone for future endeavors. Recently, Proctor & Gamble broke ground on a \$500 million facility in Martinsburg. By Fall 2017, P&G will need 300 people to employ and, ultimately, 700 employees by 2019. Blue Ridge CTC and P&G will work collaboratively to develop programs that prepare employees to step onto the P&G floor. The company also generously donated \$30,000 to invest in training. As manufacturing continues to grow in West Virginia, each school will be poised to develop training programs for careers, like the Toyota Advanced Manufacturing Program (AMT) at BridgeValley CTC.

The AMT program, a joint effort by BridgeValley and Toyota Motor Manufacturing West Virginia, delivers education and experience to students in multiple areas needed by manufacturers. Each week, students work towards a two-year associate degree while attending two days of class and working three days on the plant floor at the Toyota facility in Buffalo. With the opening of the Advanced Technology Center of South Central West Virginia (ATC), Toyota pledged \$1 million over five years to enhance the center's technology and training equipment.

The ATC was built to prepare students for high-demand, high-tech jobs in an environment surrounded by the latest technologies, experienced faculty and dynamic curriculum. A second ATC is under construction in Fairmont, in coordination with Pierpont CTC, to house training equipment and programs for manufacturing, oil and gas and allied health.

Our technical programs are designed to get West Virginians into in-demand and high-paying jobs. By providing affordable access to technical training, we will help our state bridge the skills gap and build a highly-skilled and highly-paid technical workforce. ▽