

WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18B-3B-1

§18B-3B-1. Legislative findings and intent.

(a) The Legislature makes the following findings:

(1) Evidence from national studies shows clearly that the need to increase the number of Americans who hold post-secondary credentials has reached a critical point. According to Complete College America, the United States has fallen from its long-held position as first among the nations and now ranks tenth in the percentage of young adults with a college degree. Even more discouraging is the statistic which shows that, for the first time in national history, the current generation of college-age Americans will be less educated than their parents' generation.

(2) In West Virginia, the large numbers of high school students who are uninterested and/or unprepared for college can be attributed to three primary factors:

(A) Lack of alignment in courses between public education and public colleges and universities;

(B) Lack of clear career pathways presented to students early enough to help them choose and follow an articulated path from high school through post-secondary education; and

(C) Lack of knowledge among students and parents about financial aid opportunities that can help them and their families defray the cost of attending college.

(3) Sixty-three percent of jobs now available or to become available in the near future require post-secondary education. This statistic is particularly relevant for community and technical college students, but even for students who choose to pursue a four-year degree, it is critical that they be clearly focused on career goals in order to succeed.

(4) Currently, a severe gap exists between the demands for technically skilled workers in West Virginia and the aspirations and programmatic focus of many of our students. Nearly thirty percent of the state's high school students have failed to enroll in either the pre-baccalaureate professional pathway or the career and technical education skilled pathway. Most of these individuals could be better served in a focused program of study that begins in the public schools and makes a seamless transition to the post-secondary level in the state community and technical colleges.

(5) The best way to promote this focus on career goals among our students is through implementation of career pathways. This is an integrated collection of programs and services intended to develop students' core academic, technical and employability skills; provide them with continuous education and training; and place them in high-demand, high-opportunity jobs.

(6) In West Virginia, preparing students to achieve higher levels of education is a responsibility shared among the state agencies responsible for providing education and workforce development training. Since increasing the education level of state citizens enhances West Virginia's economic future and the general well-being of its citizens, providing additional opportunities to earn a college credential is the responsibility of all public secondary education and state institutions of higher education.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to encompass the entire public higher education system to remove those obstacles that block these pathways to college completion and to direct agencies and institutions to collaborate and cooperate to deliver needed services. Therefore, the object of this article is two-fold:

(1) To set forth a viable collaborative model that public community and technical colleges and public school career centers shall adopt to increase the number of West Virginians with a college credential; and

(2) To maximize existing resources and capacity to train the work force in West Virginia by encouraging the most efficient expenditure of available dollars.