

JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

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CONTACT: Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director
Phone: 410-234-8045, E-mail: Jason@jotf.org

LEAKY COLLEGE PIPELINE LIMITS ADVANCEMENT FOR MARYLAND WORKERS

New Report Finds High Costs, Inadequate Student Supports and High Need for Remediation Hinder Local Students from Achieving at the College Level and in the Workplace

BALTIMORE, Feb. 2008 – Although Maryland has one of the nation’s highest proportions of residents with college degrees, the reality is that many students in the state struggle to make it through the education system and gain the academic skills needed to compete in today’s knowledge-based economy.

A new report from the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) documents the challenges facing the large number of Marylanders who either drop out or fail to make a smooth transition from one academic level to the next. The report finds that more than half of all Marylanders in their prime working years—1.3 million local adults—lack a college degree, a basic credential for many good-paying jobs.

The report, *Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Helping Low-Skill Marylanders Access and Succeed in College*, highlights key problems facing many Maryland students:

- **Affordability:** The 2006 National Report Card on Higher Education gave Maryland an ‘F’ for affordability because of the state’s high tuition costs, limited investment in need-based financial aid, and students’ heavy reliance on student loans. State financial aid rules make it especially difficult for low-wage adult workers to attend college.
- **Difficulty Completing Developmental Coursework:** An alarming number of Maryland students enter school unprepared for college-level work and must complete developmental, or remedial, courses before they can make progress toward their degree. In 2001, 71 percent of new community college students had to enroll in at least one developmental course. After four years, 26 percent of these students had graduated or transferred, compared to 57 percent of non-remedial students.
- **Need for Student Supports:** Navigating the unfamiliar college environment can be difficult for students without an experienced support network, especially when trying to balance obligations such as work and family. These challenges often impact performance. At local community colleges, two-thirds of students fail to graduate or transfer. To improve retention and completion, Maryland must help students manage the outside issues that impact academic performance.

“Many Marylanders find it difficult to meet program entrance requirements. Others can get in, but can’t pay for it or find enough financial assistance. Of those that can get in and find a way to pay, many do not graduate,” the report concludes.

The issues identified in the report fall particularly hard on low-income, first-generation, and working adult students.

“Low-income Marylanders need higher education more than anyone if they want to compete in the workplace. But our post-secondary system is not set up to be responsive to the needs of these students,” said Jason Perkins-Cohen, executive director of JOTF. “We have to take steps now to make education and training more accessible and affordable to working adults.”

Older, non-traditional students make up a significant portion of the college population. Half of all Maryland college students are over 25, and nearly half are enrolled part-time. However, many state policies are designed for students who enter college directly from high school. The report makes ten recommendations for moving students of all backgrounds more smoothly through the post-secondary system and into the workforce.

Among the key recommendations:

- **Hold the line on tuition.** Tuition at Maryland colleges and universities has been rising at a pace that local families can't keep up with. State leaders must commit to holding the line, and approve the tuition freeze in Governor O'Malley's 2009 budget.
- **Increase financial support for part-time students.** The Maryland financial aid system does not offer enough support to students that must attend part-time due to work, family and personal obligations. Funding for the Part-Time Grant program should be increased.
- **Provide supplemental and/or incentive funding for developmental education.** Students with low academic skills are often the hardest to serve. Maryland should weigh these courses more heavily in its funding formula, or offer incentive funding to schools with strong performance.
- **Make student success a priority.** Maryland must make increased retention and completion a top post-secondary priority, particularly for non-traditional and at-risk students. The state should support schools by making funding available for specific programs or as a performance incentive.

Pamela Paulk, vice president of human resources at Johns Hopkins Hospital, said the JOTF report should be a wake-up call to state policymakers concerned about keeping the state economically competitive.

"We are struggling to find qualified workers to fill jobs, and many of our jobs require some education beyond high school," said Paulk. "It is just too expensive for many job seekers to get additional education on their own. Once hired, we encourage and support our employees financially to enroll in education and training programs, but it remains a challenge for them to balance work, school and family. Not having the workers we need is a real economic development challenge not just for our institution, but for many other employers in Maryland."

Patrice Cromwell, senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has worked to improve workforce development in the Baltimore region, said the state should do more to support working adults seeking new skills and academic training. “We have a responsibility as a society to give all Maryland residents access and resources to pursue post-secondary education in order to build skills, create opportunity and keep our economy competitive,” said Cromwell.

JOTF is an independent non-profit whose mission is to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers. For more information visit www.jotf.org.

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