



# State needs more comprehensive approach to education, not just Band-Aid

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“Gov. Matt Bevin has issued an executive order to create a new scholarship that is designed to encourage students to pursue career paths in Kentucky’s top five industries,” Charles A. Mason noted in last Sunday’s paper. “Healthcare, advanced manufacturing, transportation and logistics, business services and IT and construction are the sectors targeted for the 2017-18 academic year.”

Not unrelated to the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship Program is the Council on Postsecondary Education’s mandate to create a funding model for public colleges and universities based on criteria such as degree completion percentages and number of majors in the STEM + H (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics and Health) disciplines.

There seems to be a general consensus, at least among lawmakers, that higher education is not doing enough to meet the present and future demand for individuals with particular skill sets. Interesting, given recent surveys indicating the top five competencies considered missing or deficient by employers are professionalism, written communication skills, analytical skills, business knowledge and verbal communication skills.

If institutions of higher education really want to be more responsive to societal needs, funding should be based on placement rates (in the field of study) exhibited by their graduates instead of student persistence or degree completion. Moreover, incoming students should be provided with accurate and reliable information on the placement rates of alumni in their prospective majors. This would serve to align program offerings with projected needs in a more comprehensive and efficient manner.

While I certainly applaud and support Bevin’s assertion that colleges and universities need to be doing a better job of aligning educational programs with employer needs, his initiative only addresses the symptoms – and not the underlying cause – of a much more widespread problem not limited to Kentucky. Unfortunately, this kind of Band-Aid approach is destined for failure.

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