Investing in Workforce

Leaders in education, business must join with politicians to help prepare future employees with proper skills.

By GARY L. TOEBBEN

Essential to preserving California’s status as the sixth-largest economy in the world is investing in a well-educated workforce. Too often, that goal is left by the wayside. California will face a shortage of 2.4 million certified and degree-holding individuals—which will limit the growth of our businesses and the economy of our state.

Through California’s outstanding system of public and private colleges and universities, we have built a talented workforce and stoked an entrepreneurial spirit that shapes our economy and produces a globally competitive workforce. The fiscal challenge associated with the Great Recession led to reductions in public education funding at all levels, with one of the results being prolonged degree completion. California is faced with the real prospect of a collective workforce that is insufficiently educated to meet our future needs.

This presents a huge challenge, but the good news is that California has the power to make choices that will put us on the right trajectory. The No. 1 deterrent for many students to attend a college or university is his or her financial situation, which is why 70 percent of California’s postsecondary students are enrolled in community colleges. The availability of financial aid is a barrier that we can overcome. In 2014, more than 140,000 California high school graduates did not complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, resulting in more than $342 million dollars in Pell Grants being unused.

Financial stress

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce believes we can alleviate some of our students’ financial stress by asking Congress to simplify the FAFSA process when they reauthorize the Higher Education Act. Completing FAFSA is a complex, time-consuming, and confusing process that often deters students and their parents from pursuing a college education. We encourage Congress and the Trump administration to help close the attainment gap for low-income and minority students by strengthening the Pell program, maintaining financial aid eligibility for part-time students who need to work during college, and maintaining investments in pipeline programs that help prepare students for college.

For 16 years, the chamber has been a leader in the L.A. Cash for College Campaign. With more than 150 workshops across greater Los Angeles each year, the campaign provides students and their families with individualized assistance to complete FAFSA forms and other related financial aid documents. We’re proud to say that through this program we have been able to help students secure an average of $35 million dollars in state and federal financial aid each year. But there is much more that needs to be done.

It is imperative that we focus on cultivating California’s most valuable asset, our young adults.

Public-Private Ventures May Build Up Infrastructure

By CHARLES L. HARRINGTON

To better understand the severity of America’s aging infrastructure, one need only look at the issues California faced in February alone.

In Northern California, the Orville Dam crisis forced the evacuation of more than 180,000 residents amid fears that the emergency spillway could collapse. Then, in San Jose, a massive flood not only forced 14,000 people to evacuate the city, a damaged levee led to the temporary closure of the 101 freeway. Separately, Pfeiffer’s Postsecondary students are enrolled in community colleges. The availability of financial aid is a barrier that we can overcome. In 2014, more than 140,000 California high school graduates did not complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, resulting in more than $342 million dollars in Pell Grants being unused.

Financial stress

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce believes we can alleviate some of our students’ financial stress by asking Congress to simplify the FAFSA process when they reauthorize the Higher Education Act. Completing FAFSA is a complex, time-consuming, and confusing process that often deters students and their parents from pursuing a college education. We encourage Congress and the Trump administration to help close the attainment gap for low-income and minority students by strengthening the Pell program, maintaining financial aid eligibility for part-time students who need to work during college, and maintaining investments in pipeline programs that help prepare students for college.

For 16 years, the chamber has been a leader in the L.A. Cash for College Campaign. With more than 150 workshops across greater Los Angeles each year, the campaign provides students and their families with individualized assistance to complete FAFSA forms and other related financial aid documents. We’re proud to say that through this program we have been able to help students secure an average of $35 million dollars in state and federal financial aid each year. But there is much more that needs to be done.

It is imperative that we focus on cultivating California’s most valuable asset, our young adults.

Education and business leaders as well as elected officials must work together to ensure that we are providing our students the quality education they need for a brighter future and our businesses need to grow and compete in a global economy. Success requires us to utilize all the federal resources available and prioritize as a state the investments and reforms necessary for California’s K-12 and higher education systems. Our future depends on it.

How to reach us

LETTERS: Please keep your letters less than 150 words. Include your name, address and daytime phone number on all submissions. We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity and taste.

Submit op-ed ideas to jdiamond@labusinessjournal.com

GUEST OPINIONS: Op-ed pieces must be 700 to 800 words and on topics about the L.A. business community. Submit op-ed ideas to jdiamond@labusinessjournal.com.

Charles L. Harrington is chairman and chief executive of Parsons, a technology-driven engineering services firm.