KCTCS RECEIVES HIGH MARKS FROM NATIONAL CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Achieves top five national ranking for enrollment growth and credentials earned

Kentucky’s public postsecondary two-year system has risen from a fragmented group of technical and transfer-oriented colleges into one of the most comprehensive community and technical college systems in the country, according to a new report by the National Center of Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). The report ranks the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) fourth in the nation for total credentials awarded among the nation’s community and technical college systems, and fifth in enrollment growth.

Since its creation, KCTCS has experienced a dramatic increase in annual enrollment from 73,000 students in 2000 to 135,000 in 2013, the time period studied by NCHEMS. According to the report, one of the best ways to measure success is to look at the impact KCTCS is having on Kentucky adults without college degrees. KCTCS now ranks fifth in the nation in terms of improving its reach to young adults (18-34).

One reason for that growth is online education. The report noted the explosion in the number of students enrolled in at least one online course, which showed a little more than 3,000 in 2000 to nearly 52,000 in 2013. This makes KCTCS the largest provider of online education in the state.

Since 2000, KCTCS also has had a dramatic increase in the awarding of credentials with the number of associate degrees tripling and the number of certificates increasing tenfold. In the critical age group of 18-34, the state’s improvement in awarding college credentials has moved KCTCS from 32nd to fourth in the nation.

The recently released report titled “The Kentucky Community and Technical College System: The Rise of a Premier Public Two-Year College System,” shows that KCTCS has realized the vision set forth by former Gov. Paul Patton and other state policy makers when they passed House Bill 1 (HB1) in 1997.

“It has happened in large part because of the sustained commitment to leadership, support and service from the staff at KCTCS; and the diligent efforts to service their communities among the 16 colleges (and their staffs),” NCHEMS reported. “The residents of Kentucky are greatly benefitting from all of their efforts.”

Kentucky was one of the first states to set a goal for college attainment when it did so in 1997. Recognizing that Kentucky was one of the most under-educated and poorest states in the U. S., legislators set out to greatly expand the open access mission and provision of the state’s community and technical colleges.

“Gov. Patton and the legislators who created and passed HB1 had the foresight to understand what would happen to Kentucky’s workforce and economy if education levels did not increase,” said KCTCS President Jay Box. “We took that vision and created a system that has helped improve the lives of 750,000 Kentuckians and increased the number of skilled workers to help recruit and retain businesses throughout Kentucky.”

The report praises the “innovative” work the 16 colleges are doing to serve the needs of Kentucky’s employers and effectively linking postsecondary education with workforce and economic development. Last year, KCTCS served just over 5,500 businesses and trained nearly 50,000 employees.

The centerpiece of the KCTCS workforce and economic development effort is the KCTCS-TRAINS program, which is part of the Kentucky Skills Network, a partnership between the Cabinet for Economic Development, Kentucky Career Center, Labor Cabinet and KCTCS. Through KCTCS-TRAINS, companies are provided funding to defray the costs of training and assessment services for current and potential employees to keep businesses competitive.

NCHEMS also points out that KCTCS leads the nation in its use of data regarding the employment of its graduates. Data compiled by KCTCS for a Bill and Melinda Gates project in 2012 revealed positive outcomes for graduates at all levels and fields of study – each yielding wages to program completers that are above those experienced by working adults who have not earned college credentials.

The report concludes by saying that despite its improvement, KCTCS continues to seek innovative practices and has remained involved in many major national initiatives aimed at improving student success and institutional performance.

“For the first time in history, Kentucky has surpassed the U.S. average in the attainment of associate degrees.”