Beaufort County Community College

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Schools back effort to restore funds

Beaufort County Community College has received support from the Beaufort County Schools for restoration of state funds by the N.C. General Assembly for two programs that allow high school students to take courses at local community colleges free of charge.

In an effort to help the state budget close a $4.5 billion funding gap last year, the state legislature cut most appropriations for Huskins Bill and Dual Enrollment classes at community colleges statewide.

Those cuts have led to a significant decrease in the number of high school students taking community college classes in the last year, according to BCCC President David McLawhorn.

During the Spring 2009 Semester, prior to the funding cuts, 194 high school students were enrolled in classes through the two programs. By the Spring 2010 Semester, that number had fallen to 54, he said.

The Huskins Bill Program is named for the Iredell County legislator who was at the forefront of the effort to allow high school students to take such courses offered as a result of an agreement between a community college and a local school system. The college-based courses are targeted to high school students who receive college credits if they successfully complete the courses.

In the Dual Enrollment Program, a student takes a course alongside traditional community college students. Under this program, a student age 16 or older may enroll in a college course with the permission of his or her high school principal.

Huskins Bill and Dual Enrollment courses are the most cost-efficient way of providing these college courses for students, McLawhorn said.

"If these students don't take these courses at community colleges, they will have to take them at the state's four-year colleges and universities, where it costs a lot more for the state to provide this education to students," he said. "Community colleges can deliver these services at a much lower cost than the university system."

In February, the Beaufort County Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the General Assembly to restore funding for the programs.

The resolution states, in part, "Whereas the Beaufort County School System Board of Education has reviewed the changes per the General Assembly that eliminated the funding for all non-science, math or technology courses offered via the Huskins/Concurrent Enrollment program at Beaufort County Community College; thus negatively impacting the students of our county... Therefore, be it resolved, the Beaufort County School System Board of Education hereby votes to ask the General Assembly to reconsider their previous decision and restore the funding for Huskins/Concurrent Enrollment courses for all appropriate college level courses."

The future funding for these programs continues to be uncertain following the announcement last month by top lawmakers that the state will be $500 million short of its $19 billion budget by the end of June. Income and sales tax collections continue to trail what the legislature’s fiscal staff projected.