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CEOs for Cities—Columbus Talent Dividend Summit

The Columbus Talent Dividend Summit was held on November 18, 2009 with co-hosts Ty Marsh of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Galen Graham of DeVry University, and Katina Fullen of I Know I Can. Other participants included Bill Webster, the Columbus Economic Development Division Administrator representing Mayor Michael B. Coleman, Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Eric Fingerhut, the Ohio Department of Education, and more than 30 business, civic and education leaders, who gathered to strategize how Columbus could increase its college attainment rate by one percentage point.

Carol Coletta of CEOs for Cities led the discussion based upon research findings from CEOs for Cities. According to their research, raising the local college attainment rate by just one percentage point would pump an additional \$1.3 billion into the Columbus economy annually. The Columbus area can reap the rewards of the Talent Dividend by helping just 11,350 people in Columbus earn degrees.

Participants agreed on the importance of the CEOs for Cities research and the potential economic and educational impact on Columbus. While there are many initiatives already underway that will help Columbus to reach the Talent Dividend, there is a renewed sense of urgency to attain these goals. We need to think more broadly and adjust our approach to higher education as well as create greater partnerships with education, business, philanthropic and civic sectors.

Columbus Talent Dividend Strategies

Summit participants identified the following five strategies to achieve the Columbus Talent Dividend:

1. Adult learners are as important as traditional students. Need to re-engage adult learners who have some post-secondary education and encourage those with none to go back to school. The investment in these students is particularly beneficial since working adults living in Columbus are very likely to stay in the community, as opposed to many traditional aged college students who come to Columbus for college, but leave when they have completed their education.
2. Focus on transfer students and other efforts to help students complete their education once they enroll. Improve transfer articulation agreements and get the faculty at schools in Columbus to make more uniform curricula (e.g., the Biology 101 class at Kent is equivalent to the Biology 101 class at Ohio University). This will ease the process of transferring from one institution to another and should positively affect completion rates.
3. Build on internship programs already in place, which will help build greater collaborations with higher education, business and technical institutions, and help students transition to the local workforce once they have graduated.

4. Eliminate the barriers to attaining higher education by offering more need-based financial aid and other programs that tackle affordability. Another solution is dual-degree programs, which allow high school students to earn college credit and in some cases a degree. These programs have tremendous high school completion rates and improve the transition from high school to college.

5. Focus on middle school students and get them thinking early about postsecondary education, especially students who would represent the first in their family to enroll in college.

Next Steps:

Evaluate the current efforts in Columbus and how they will influence each of the strategies listed above. Will they get Columbus to the one percentage point increase? If not, what interventions are needed to make that happen? We can build our priorities around these outcomes.

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