



Eastern-in-the-News



FIRST LADY TOMBLIN PROMOTES COLLEGE COMPLETION TO REMEDY 'EDUCATION GAP'

Moorefield — Feb. 23 — An 'education gap' threatens both our economic prosperity and our national security, and West Virginia's new Acting First Lady has challenged Potomac Highlands educators to "join in" responding to it. This 21st-century gap represents a real menace, Joanne Jaeger Tomblin told an audience of some 100 people earlier this month — and it is growing.

"The United States once led the world in the number of college degrees awarded to individuals - particularly between the ages of 25 and 34," and today, she lamented, the nation's rank has fallen among the industrialized nations to somewhere between 12th and 18th.

"At the current pace, we will rank dead last by the year 2020."

Seeking to prevent that basement finish, the Acting First Lady visited Eastern WV Community and Technical College February 10, to ask Eastern President, Charles 'Chuck' Terrell, to sign his commitment to two crucial projects.

Call to Action

"The first agreement is accepting the College Completion Challenge," she explained to the overflow crowd at the signing ceremony in Eastern's Resource Center. That Commitment, a national "call to action developed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees," aims to increase student completion rates nationwide. It commits the partner organizations to re-double their efforts not only to increase access to college, but to increase student success and college completion as well.



WV Acting First Lady Joanne Jaeger Tomblin (left) looks on as James Skidmore (right), Chancellor of the WV Council for Community and Technical College Education displays the College Completion Commitment freshly signed by Charles 'Chuck' Terrell, President of Eastern WV Community and Technical College.

“The second agreement was developed by the WV Community and Technical College System,” Tomblin said. It documents Eastern’s commitment to the System’s new Master Plan, which includes producing “16-thousand more graduates with college degrees by the year 2015.”

The Acting First Lady has now toured all of the state’s Community and Technical Colleges and has secured each institution’s commitment to both projects.

Aligning the state’s strategy with national priorities, Tomblin pointed out that “college completion has now become a priority for education leaders and policy-makers across the nation. Employers, and many of you here today, need a trained and educated workforce to meet their needs.”

Poised & Positioned

Her thoughts mesh exactly with those of US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, whose *Washington Post* op-ed last month pointed to “the clear national need for more college-educated workers who can successfully compete in the global economy.”

The Acting First Lady, who has served 11 years as President of Southern WV Community and Technical College, emphasized that “West Virginia’s Community and Technical College System is poised, and has the flexibility, to reach adult learners, to provide the training necessary to meet the current needs of business and industry, as well as the skilled workforce necessary for our future.”

Community and Technical Colleges “are uniquely positioned,” she said, “because they provide equal opportunities for low income students. They provide programs for students who enter college and are underprepared for collegiate work, and they can lay the foundation for individuals who are seeking a 4-year education.”

Starts With K - 12

Amplifying her theme, Tomblin pointed out that the state’s community and technical colleges “provide academic access for those students who are historically disadvantaged, and who may not have had the opportunity to succeed in college. And they work closely with employers on programs that enable students to master skills that will help the nation’s economy start to grow.”

At the same time, Tomblin acknowledged that “the community and technical colleges cannot do this in isolation. It is going to take all of WV’s public and private colleges, as well as those of you who are here in K-12 system, to join in this initiative, and for WV to be successful.”

Eastern’s President Terrell agreed. “The earlier our young men and women focus on college the better. One excellent way to increase college completion is for students to take college credits in their high school years,” he noted. “That way, they reduce the number of semesters needed to earn their diplomas, and they cut their tuition costs considerably at the same time.”

Through the Eastern’s Early Entrance and Dual Credit options, as well as through the state’s College Tech Prep and EDGE programs, Terrell pointed out, by the time they graduate high school students can earn several semesters worth of college credit.

Saved \$9-Thousand

“My first college class was an online course in Keyboarding my freshman year at high school,” said Aaron Freeman, who graduated Moorefield High School last June. “I knew that students before me had gone through the same thing, and they were getting classes done while they were still in high school. And I thought that was something I could do and it would help me out in the long run.”

At Eastern, Freeman took College Algebra during his junior year in high school, and then “two 100-level English courses, and a 100-level History” his senior year. Altogether, it saved him an entire semester, and close to \$9-thousand in tuition.

The classes he took at Eastern while in high school presented “the same grade of difficulty as any other college course,” he recalled. That experience made him “feel like I was really prepared for college work, and now I'm flying through my courses.” In his first semester of college after high school, the Yellow Jacket grad earned a 3.7 GPA while taking six classes (16 credit-hours).

“And now, I’m already a sophomore — I’m really glad I could do it,” he said.

Eastern’s Early Outreach

Freeman earned his early college credits with a combination of Dual Credit and Early Entrance classes. But Eastern’s outreach for college completion begins even before high school, especially through the College Tech Prep and EDGE programs, according to Grover Duling, former Dean for Career Studies and Workforce Education at the college, and currently Coordinator of the Potomac Highlands College Tech Prep Consortium.

“If you don’t take advantage of the educational opportunities in America,” he cautioned a gathering of area eighth-grade students last month, “you’re really missing the boat.”

A featured speaker at Keyser Middle School’s 14th annual Eighth Grade Parent Dinner January 6, Duling said, “It’s right at this level that they need to start thinking about what they want in a college, and how college will prepare them for the jobs they’ll need and the lives they’ll lead in the years and decades ahead.”

8th Graders’ Goal

To his audience of Keyser eighth-graders and their parents he pointed out, “It doesn’t necessarily dictate in today's society that you need a four-year degree. 70 to 80-percent of the technical jobs of the future will not require a four-year degree. So you need to be thinking about a goal and a plan. It can change, but you’ve got to have one, because if you don't have one, you’re not going to work towards something.

“And those goals,” he advised, “will require education past high school. They’ll require industry-recognized credentials like an RN, or an ASE certification for an automotive technician, or a CDL license to drive a truck, or whatever else you might get into.

“You're in charge of what the rest of your life is about,” he emphasized. “So you and your parents need to decide what's best for you, what your aptitude is, who you are, and what you want to be.”

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, and fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.