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Higher Education Programs Helping Students Land Careers in the New Economy



Sarah Armstrong Tucker

West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Dr. Sarah Armstrong Tucker is Chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) and Chancellor of the Community and Technical College System (CTCS). She is the first person to simultaneously hold these two roles – and the first woman to serve as CTCS Chancellor. In these roles, Dr. Tucker guides and oversees policies and initiatives for two-year community and technical colleges and four-year higher education institutions. Dr. Tucker is a member of several boards, including the Executive Committee of Fellows for Complete College America, West Virginia Business Roundtable, and West Virginia Jobs Investment Trust Board, just to name a few.

In recent years, West Virginia has made several major economic announcements regarding new investments and expansions that mean more jobs for our people and the ushering in of a New Economy. But, if we want to ensure the long-term success of these economic advancements and secure even more of them, we must provide the educated workforce that business and industries need.

However, West Virginia currently has one of the lowest college-going rates and one of the lowest workforce participation rates in the country. In fact, West Virginia's college-going rate – the percentage of graduating high school seniors who enroll in either a community college or a four-year institution – dipped to 45.9 percent for the graduating class of 2021, representing the lowest rate since our office started tracking this data.

We moved that number up slightly to 46.4 percent for the class of 2022, but there is still much work to do – especially considering that, by 2030, West Virginia needs at least 60 percent of working-age West Virginians to have a post-secondary credential.

“...West Virginia is undoubtedly investing more strongly in our citizens' education and West Virginia's workforce than ever before.”

Over the past several months, I have had the opportunity to meet with high school students, administrators, counselors, and teachers about both the progress and challenges facing students after graduation. This is something I always do, but I've had more of



those conversations than ever before recently because of the low percentage of high school graduates continuing their education.

What we're hearing is that these young people don't know about the economic advancements our state has made. They don't believe job opportunities exist for them in their home state, and many of them also believe that a college education in West Virginia is unaffordable and out of reach.

So, now, it's our job to show them that those career opportunities exist here, and that we can help them get the education or training needed to reach them.

First, in a historic move this year, the West Virginia Legislature adopted, and Governor Jim Justice signed, legislation creating West Virginia's first-ever statewide dual enrollment program. As a result, our state will now fund – for the first time ever – college courses for high school students. Without such support,

what we have historically had is a system that favors our highest achieving, highest performing students – those who could afford the dual enrollment costs and were probably going to go to college anyway.

State-funded dual enrollment will begin as a four-year pilot program, supporting up to an estimated 10,000 students per year. West Virginia's public community and technical colleges and four-year institutions will offer courses in certain designated career pathways, such as health care, information technology, advanced manufacturing, construction, engineering, education, agriculture, and any other program that meets a workforce need in the state as determined by the West Virginia Department of Commerce.

on the path to long-term, successful careers in the Mountain State.

Our dual enrollment program represents the latest investment by the state in making college more accessible and affordable for students. Remarkably, my office now administers more than \$100 million in state-sponsored financial aid each year. This includes the West Virginia Invests grant, our tuition-free community college program; the merit-based Promise Scholarship; and the needs-based Higher Education Grant Program.

Through West Virginia Invests, which was passed by the Legislature in 2019, the top career tracks students are pursuing include nursing, business, health care, criminal justice, information technology,

We also have apprenticeship-type opportunities that are incredibly rewarding for both students and employers. Last year, the state's leading workforce development and educational partnership, Learn & Earn, distributed more than \$3 million to connect students with work opportunities through more than 80 businesses across the state.

Learn & Earn connects employers with students eager to gain valuable, paid experience in their fields of study. The program allows students to take technical courses while gaining paid work experiences, while companies can meet their immediate staffing needs as they build a skilled workforce. Students' pay is shared 50/50 between the state and company. Companies are not required to



Through this legislation, we hope to open new doors to low-income students and those who aren't quite sure about their futures. And, by focusing this pilot program on academic courses linked to the most growing, in-demand jobs in the state, our hope is to place these students

cybersecurity, aviation maintenance technology, welding, and electric utility technology. These are careers available now and careers that will carry forward into the future, and I am so proud that our colleges are providing this workforce for employers.

hire the students upon graduation, but the program currently has a placement rate of more than 90 percent.

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Making the invisible economy visible

Bearing none of the visible hallmarks of earlier economic eras (e.g., agricultural, industrial), the tech economy has been practically invisible to underestimated humans. To secure equity in tech, West Virginia's leading stewards of local economies – from government to business to economic to innovation to workforce to community development – must tangibly offer underestimated humans new economic mobility pathways to tech. These stewards are singularly best able to illuminate the tremendous opportunities in the tech economy and cultivate with Bitwise Industries the most favorable conditions for underestimated humans to compete and win in tech.

The upshot is that the Bitwise Industries story is about equity. Breathing life into the simple equation (equity = ownership), we illustrate that equipping underestimated humans with the skills to gain ownership stakes in tech is a powerful solution for which the time has come. Until now, the tech economy has altogether missed underestimated humans and communities, not only in West Virginia, but in similarly situated places throughout the U.S.

Bitwise Industries provides new ways to change that. The remaining question is whether we have the will? 




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Carol Lane

Strengthening the West Virginia Energy Mix

reactor plant at one of Dow's U.S. Gulf Coast sites through the U.S. Department of Energy's Advanced Reactor Demonstration Program. It will serve as a leading example of how nuclear technology can be applied in the industrial sector to reduce the carbon footprint of industrial products and simultaneously providing safe, clean, affordable electricity.

West Virginia's energy transition can propel the state into a leader of energy production for the rest of the century, retain young people in the state by providing jobs for the next generation workforce, and attract new industry to the state. This is a generational opportunity. Eyes are on all sectors of the economy to make investments today to produce clean and affordable energy while bolstering our competitive and economic edge in the world. In partnership, progress, and proactive efforts, West Virginia is positioned to capitalize on its legacy of a U.S. energy production leader. 



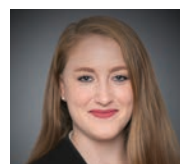
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Sarah Armstrong Tucker

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Through new programming like the historic dual enrollment pilot, to vast financial aid opportunities and longstanding programs, like Learn & Earn, West Virginia is undoubtedly investing more strongly in our citizens' education and West Virginia's workforce than ever before. This is a testament to our state's commitment to a stronger future – and to taking full advantage of opportunities in the New Economy.

Details about West Virginia's dual enrollment program will be announced in the coming months. Information on each of our state's financial aid programs can be found at collegeforwv.com. Information about workforce partnerships like Learn & Earn can be found at wvctcs.org/grants/. 



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**Hannah French
and Kathryn Gioia**

Preparing for the Future with Digital Assets

- Does your Financial Power of Attorney, Will and/or Trust include **language above and beyond RUFADAA**, authorizing your fiduciary access to digital assets stored directly on the blockchain?

These are legitimate issues and considerations that can have a major impact on an account holder and their beneficiaries, and the complicated nature of such digital assets will continue to evolve as they grow in popularity and global acceptance. For real-world examples, considerations, and hypotheticals, visit the Bowles Rice Tax Team blog, *Taxation With Representation*, at www.bowlesrice.com/taxation-with-representation-blog to read the companion piece to this article. 