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Personal view: Data can be key in aiding students' career decisions

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Recently, students across Ohio and the country graduated with precious two- and four-year degrees, the first step toward gainful employment, essentially with a family sustaining wage. Thousands more have earned short-term certificates and other credentials to make them attractive employees. These individuals have invested time and money to obtain skills and training required for employment in industries that are eagerly looking for hard-working, qualified employees.

This investment in education is one of the most important actions an individual can take, because it should lead to a better job. At manufacturing company Automation Tool & Die in Valley City, hiring decisions are critical, and we look to partner with educational institutions like Cuyahoga Community College to develop and employ the best trained individuals. The value of this training cannot be understated. Prospective students must be proactive in deciding which programs and institutions will best help them achieve their goals.

To this end, there is legislation in the U.S. Congress called the College Transparency Act. The bill would create a user-friendly website with information about college costs, graduation rates and post-college employment, with the purpose of revealing what careers are in demand, what programs are best for getting students employed and what wages they can expect once employed.

The data, from colleges and universities and from federal and state agencies, could lead to skilled, motivated workers. There would be a real connection between a selected curriculum and a job in the workforce, and potential students would be able to make choices that reconcile their passions with opportunities — rather than having to choose one or the other.

From a financial perspective, having this information is more important to students than ever before. Ohio ranks 16th on the list of average student loan debt by state. Ohio's class of 2016 has average student loan debt of \$29,579, which, with a 6% interest rate, can mean monthly payments of \$333 over 10 years. To be able to afford to repay this loan, including interest, at 10% (gross monthly income), students will need to find a job that pays over \$40,000.

The College Transparency Act could help change this, by collecting existing information in one place where it can be available publicly. This data would be useful and clear to career-minded students, parents and high school guidance counselors that jobs in the tool and die industry, for example, are in demand, lucrative and provide immediate employment for people with in-demand skills and credentials. The bill also is vital to Ohio businesses that benefit from the existence of a navigable data system that would yield the talent pipeline that growing local industries demand.

In this tight labor market, businesses are struggling to find qualified workers.

If students have the data to make an informed decision, they will consider pursuing fields where employers are hiring.

Not only would that make the toughest decisions for businesses and students much easier, it would go a long way to growing our local economy.

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Inline Play

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