

Ohio Department of Higher Education Chancellor John Carey said Thursday that, as a first generation college student, several people in his life told him that his path through higher education was unattainable or incorrect.

Speaking to college leaders during opening remarks at the “Ohio Strong Start to Finish” learning event at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, he said that this new initiative is aimed at helping students who too often receive that message.

*“I think that Strong Start to Finish sends the message that you are important -- we want to give you tools to pursue your dreams. We’re giving you this attention because you do matter. You do fit into higher education because, many times, we talk to students ... we’ll talk about College Credit Plus and there will be students in that classroom who say, ‘They’re not talking to me, they’re talking about somebody else.’ We’re giving the message to everybody that we’re giving you the confidence and the tools to say this is for you, this is your possibility and we want you to be a part of it,”* Carey said.

The Strong Start to Finish program is supported by the national Education Commission of the States and is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates and the Kresge Foundation. In February 2018, Ohio, along with the City University of New York, State University of New York and University System of Georgia, received a \$2.1 million grant to support the growth and sharing of strategies and pathways that can help students succeed in their first year of college and increase completion rates. **(See The Hannah Report, 2/7/18.)**

This two-day event is the first to bring together the representatives of 12 universities and 18 community colleges in Ohio to share strategies and learn about how best to help students, especially those students belonging to underrepresented groups. Through collaboration sessions and information session on issues like data-gathering and institutional climate, they’ll discuss their own experiences and best practices.

*“We have 30 different opportunities in this room for people to figure out how to implement these reforms and meet the goals of the program -- 30 different opportunities to figure out what other programs, supports and incentives make sense ... I expect that most of you follow similar paths as you approach this work, but I can guarantee that almost none of you will end up following the exact same path,”* said Jack Hershey, president and CEO of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges.

The core goal of the program is help move the percentage of students who complete gateway math and English courses in their first year from 33 percent to 50 percent. Studies indicate that when students fail to pass these courses, students are placed in largely ineffective remediation classes that prevent them from taking other credit-earning courses.

Thirty-five percent of four-year students in developmental education graduate within six years and under 10 percent of two-year students in developmental education graduate within three years. Many may not graduate at all. Bruce Johnson, president and CEO of the Inter-University Council of Ohio, noted that those students who do not graduate end up with more student debt and do not get the return on investment that those who complete and earn their degree enjoy. **(See The Hannah Report, 6/12/18.)**

Chris Mullin, director of Strong Start to Finish, said that states and institutions have a responsibility to help all students across the finish line.

*“We know there is a problem among colleges and universities for students placed in developmental education courses, because once they get in, research shows they barely ever get out. While this is a problem for states, their workforce, their institutions and their graduation rates -- for low-income students, students of color and adult students, it’s a heavier burden to bear, because it’s their future too,”* he said.

He said that Ohio was selected for the grant because it had already shown an ability to scale-up reforms, collaborate among institutions successfully, consider the influence reforms have on policy and vice versa, focus on issues surrounding inequity and consider major changes in management of systems.

*“I have been in your shoes, I understand where you come from. This is really hard work that takes courage -- the courage that you exhibit every day in little ways that people don’t see. We’re to tell you that we do. We know how hard you are working and we appreciate how hard you are working. We’re trying to bring resources to help you continue that hard work,”* Mullin said.