Maximizing Futures. Minimizing Debt!
This Guest Editorial was published in the Mansfield News Journal on Sunday, February 25, 2018. Dr. Diab collaborated with Greg Nickoli, Superintendent, Pioneer Career & Technology Center and Brian Garverick, Superintendent, Mansfield City Schools to complete this overview of our partnerships.

College debt is out of control. Forbes Magazine reports that the class of 2016 had an average student loan debt of $37,142; and that 44 million students and graduates now hold more than $1.3 trillion dollars in debt for their education, which is greater than the credit card debt. In Ohio, the average is $30,239 per student borrower.

We believe this debt is having the opposite effect on graduates than higher education intends. Instead of providing access to meaningful careers and promising futures, rewarding graduates for their hard work, graduates work to pay off their student loans far into their careers, which reduces their ability to support their families and purchase home. It’s counter intuitive.

Here in north central Ohio, leaders in education have been working hard to address these challenges. Every K-12 school, career center, college and university in our region is involved in various ways to provide education for students who are ready for college, cost-effectively. Here are a few examples:

New ways of thinking. New ways of learning.

It began with an experiment to provide an associate degree to high school students dual-enrolled in college during their junior and senior years of high school. NC State partnered with Pioneer Career and Technology Center to develop the program called College-NOW. Last year, 29 students graduated with an associate degree and their high school diploma at the same time. More than 250 students have graduated from College-NOW so far.

A few years ago, the State of Ohio repackaged multiple early college programs as College Credit Plus (CCP), which provides consistent opportunity for college-ready students to take dual enrollment, college-level coursework free of charge. In just the second year of CCP, more than 66,000 Ohio students were getting a jump-start on college, saving more than $144 million in tuition for their families.

New Partnerships provide seamless pathways for students

For fall of 2018, NC State and Mansfield City Schools have been awarded a grant to develop a Graduate Pathways to Success program similar to College-NOW. In this new program, Mansfield students will pursue their associate degree and high school diploma throughout all four years of high school.

In addition, transfer pathways have been developed for students from different institutions to transition to state colleges and universities to pursue Bachelor’s and advanced degrees. All of this would not be possible without the state Transfer Assurance Guides (TAGs) for college curriculum which provides guidelines for continuity of instruction across institutions – so Freshman Composition students in Mansfield complete the same outcomes as students in Akron, Cincinnati and Toledo. More importantly, the credits earned by students in Mansfield transfer between state institutions seamlessly.
Savings beyond Tuition

NC State is currently leading a consortium of 16 institutions in Ohio, including The Ohio State University, to explore the viability of students using Open Educational Resources -- online instructional materials instead of being required to purchase expensive textbooks. This change could provide tremendous savings to students across the state. Early projections show students could save $14 million each year.

Keeping the quality of education without inflating the cost

Through all of the partnerships, one common theme is constant. We believe there really are ways for students to achieve their educational goals without being burdened with crushing student loan debt. However, these new models of higher education will require students, and parents, to think differently about higher education. We’ve been referring to the idea as “Degrees without debt”. Our goal is to keep the cost of education as manageable as possible so that students don’t need to borrow repeatedly to complete their education. Here is an example of a “Degrees without debt” pathway to a Bachelor’s Degree.

A student begins taking classes while in high school as a College Credit Plus student, completing nine credit hours of college coursework before graduating from high school. The student incurs no out of pocket costs.

The student graduates from high school and accepts a Tuition Freedom Scholarship at NC State, completing the next 55 credits without paying tuition. As part of the TFS program, the student does pay for books and lab fees, reducing the cost of your associate degree dramatically. In addition, NC State maintains partnerships with numerous schools where you can complete your bachelor’s degree. Many partners provide additional scholarships as you transfer.

The right education is the first step toward a better career, a higher salary, and a better quality of life. Our goal is to keep the cost of your education as affordable and manageable as possible.

Can you afford college today? Can you afford not to afford college?

College is a great choice if you choose wisely. Unfortunately, too many college graduates end up employed in careers totally unrelated to their degrees. At Pioneer, Mansfield and NC State, we encourage students to explore education with the end in mind. Determine the career you desire, and find out what type of education you need to make your dream a reality.

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ODHE Releases 16-17 CCP Figures

Second Year of College Credit Plus Sees More Than 68,000 Students Saving $144 Million on College Costs

COLUMBUS, OH, November 20, 2017 – More than 68,000 high school students in Ohio took college classes during the 2016-17 academic year, earning college credit while meeting their high school graduation requirements and collectively saving more than $144 million on the cost of higher education.

The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) today released details on the second full year of Ohio’s innovative College Credit Plus program, which allows college-ready students the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school.