

**NOTE:** *“Refocusing our higher education system to better encourage degree completion does more than just help people realize their aspirations and lift Ohio. It also helps prevent the problems that arise when students leave school too soon. Statistics reported recently in The New York Times show that two out of every five students will not graduate within six years, leaving them ill-equipped for a global, high-tech world and not earning enough to repay student loan debts. Ohio's emerging "culture of completion" can help turn this problem around.”*

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# **Fostering a culture of completion: John Kasich and E. Gordon Gee**

What we learn is one of the most important factors in shaping our futures. This is measured most easily in education levels, where college graduates on average receive higher pay and earn significantly more income over the course of their lifetimes than those without two- or four-year degrees. It can also be measured on a macro level, with states seeing stronger economies and communities when their work forces are more highly trained and their higher education systems are aligned with the needs of job creators.

Though the economic recovery is well under way in Ohio -- the state's current 6.8 percent unemployment rate is almost a full point less than the nation's and we are first in the Midwest and fifth in the nation in job creation -- there are still too many Ohioans out of work. One of our challenges is a shortage of skilled workers. For example, right now there are approximately 80,000 jobs open for workers with the right kinds of skills. Filling these jobs would go a long way toward not only accelerating Ohio's recovery, but also brightening the prospects for individual Ohioans, their employers and their communities.

With a higher-education funding system that, for years, has put a higher premium on enrolling students than graduating them, it's no surprise that employers often struggle to find enough skilled workers. It's an outdated approach that won't efficiently deliver a world-class work force and help attract high-wage jobs. In Ohio, we're taking a different direction.

To incentivize colleges to better help students succeed, Ohio will now tie 50 percent of state funding for four-year public universities -- about \$600 million -- to the number of students who graduate with a degree. For community colleges, the focus will be on how many students complete a course or credit.

The effect of this change will be enormous. The interests of students, colleges and employers will now be more closely aligned, and the same incentives which drive employers to seek certain skills and reward employees for acquiring them, will now also reward colleges for playing their part and delivering graduates.

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**Op-ed continued here:**

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