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SOUTHERN STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESS RELEASE

Excellence and Growth Opportunities on Horizon Following Coming Changes

During the Southern State Community College Board of Trustees meeting on November 21, 2024, the Board entertained two agenda items essential to long-term sustainability and the College's mission component of quality. The first item proposed several programmatic changes, while the other involved a resolution to resume full operational use of the College's entire physical footprint at the Early Learning Center in Hillsboro.

Both items reflect directives delivered to Trustees during Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Higher Education Trustees Conference in June 2024 and are repeated consistently by legislators, decision-makers, and the public. Enhancing accountability among Trustees and college leaders by encouraging more questions, relying on data-informed decisions, and consistently monitoring institutional outcomes and viability is essential to long-term sustainability and effectiveness. "These necessary and important priorities represent a direct order to college presidents to keep their Trustees informed, be transparent, and provide insights to mission-driven work," offered Dr. Nicole Roades, President of Southern State. Dr. Roades continued, "This isn't always easy work, but it is necessary. The topics I introduced to our Board during the November meeting are consistent with the calls for accountability heard daily."

In the days following the Board meeting, findings and recommendations stemming from the College's Program Vitality Process were presented and considered by President Roades. Describing "Program Vitality," Dr. Goodwin, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, offered, "Program vitality, a necessary component of academic budgeting and planning, is a process by which the institution can measure the health or "vitality" of its academic offerings. Informed by quantitative and qualitative data, this process is a means of assessing program relevance and viability as an academic pathway."

"As a result of the enrollment, financial, and outcome data presented to me, I have accepted the recommendation from Dr. Goodwin to sunset several underperforming programs," stated Dr. Roades. "While this decision was difficult, it reflects the College's disciplined approach to fulfilling its mission. High quality, or 'excellence' in my mind, is non-negotiable. Achieving this sometimes means resetting priorities and taking a hard look at where resources are being invested and where they are adding the greatest value. This is one of those experiences," concluded Dr. Roades.

Effective Spring 2025, the College will discontinue accepting new students into the following applied associate degree and certificate programs: Medical Assisting, Phlebotomy Technician, Medical Assistant Technology, Law Enforcement, and Paraprofessional Education major. The Early Childhood Education Degree, a strong program at Southern State, remains open for new enrollment. Current students in the impacted programs can complete the degree or certifications and will receive guidance on the steps needed to complete their studies. The Basic Peace Officer Academy is still accepting applications for the January 2025 Academy.

"While we are sensitive to the student and organizational impact of such decisions, we remain committed to channeling time, energy, and resources into supporting local workforce needs while also attracting and graduating students. In particular, we are eager to expand our programming in engineering and manufacturing, enhancing our computer science programming, improving relevancy in education transfer pathways, fully grounding our presence in human and social services education, supporting business,

accounting, and real estate programming, explore ways to and better meet needs in nursing education among other things,” added Dr. Roades.

President Roades explained, regarding the program decisions, “In the case of Medical Assisting, our faculty have committed significant effort over the years to reinvent the program to better meet student needs, but ultimately, it could not maintain acceptable enrollment or graduation rates.” She added, “Similarly, although the Law Enforcement program has historically been popular and of high quality, it has faced significant challenges in recent years. Low enrollments and poor graduation rates, along with growingly unpredictable start dates for the Basic Peace Officer Academy, have hindered its success. The Paraprofessional Education major will be discontinued to allow the College and faculty to focus on developing more relevant pathways for education licensure and growing the remaining Early Childhood Education Degree. These pathways have existed for some time, but renewed investment in highlighting them will enable Southern State to better address teacher pipeline concerns expressed across the State.

In addition to the programmatic changes, the Southern State Board of Trustees approved a plan to begin the process of reclaiming the space currently used by the Highland County YMCA’s childcare center. “While we are very mindful of the implications for the community, we need this space for the College to fully achieve its mission, including the effective operation of our Adult Opportunity Center (AOC),” said Dr. Roades. “Like many families, my own has benefited from childcare services in the past, and I understand the disruption this may cause. I hope the YMCA can evaluate their services and explore options for continuing some of them.” She continued, “It has become clear that the College needs to provide more suitable learning environments for all students, including those seeking Adult Basic Literacy and GED preparation services. Our AOC serves nearly 150 clients and can potentially have a greater impact with adequate space. I am optimistic that reclaiming the entire building shared with the YMCA Childcare program will position the AOC for continued quality growth,” concluded Dr. Roades. The resolution passed by the Board of Trustees suggested a re-occupancy deadline of June 1, 2025, with flexibility for an extension if the YMCA requires additional time for their transition.

In other business, the Board of Trustees approved a purchase offer from the Adams County Regional Medical Center to buy approximately seven acres of excess land at the College’s Mt. Orab location to construct a medical office building. The College agreed to the sale price of \$59,000 per acre, and both parties will begin due diligence to finalize the transaction. The College purchased 63.19 acres for \$3,250,000 in 2011 at the corner of Highway 32 and Brooks-Mallott Road, and in 2013-14, developed part of that land to establish a new campus. Today, this campus plays a vital role in addressing higher education needs for Brown County and the surrounding area.

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