New tax credit expected to increase funding for state's career technical dual enrollment program

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State lawmakers and representatives with the Alabama Community College System predict a new tax credit will help boost funding and enrollment in the state's career technical dual enrollment program for high school students.

"In my opinion, this is the beginning," said Rep. Bill Poole, R-Tuscaloosa.

Poole was among legislators and officials with Shelton State Community College, the Department of Postsecondary Education, and Mercedes-Benz U.S. International who discussed the dual enrollment program Monday, using a lab filled with mills and other precision machining equipment at Shelton as a background.

The bill enacted during the regular legislative session earlier this year would give an income tax credit beginning in 2015 to individuals and businesses that make contributions to cover tuition, fees, books and other costs associated with participation in the Career Technical Dual enrollment program. The act allows the contributors to direct as much as 80 percent of their donations to a particular career technical program or courses at a specific two-year campus. The two-year system will work with business and industry partners, the state's workforce training council and the Regional Workforce Development Councils ensure the donations for the dual enrollment program address regional workforce needs, according to the speakers.

Terry Waters, executive director of economic and workforce development for the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, said taxpayers can contribute as much as $10 million annually under the new tax credit program, which allows them to receive a credit for as much as 50 percent of their total contributions. The tax credit cannot exceed 50 percent of the taxpayers' total state income tax liability or $500,000 in any year. The act caps the annual tax credits given by the state at $5 million. The bill was sponsored during the 2014 regular session by Rep. Mac Buttram, R-Cullman.

Waters, Poole and State Sen. Gerald Allen said there has been an ongoing conversation between two-year officials and lawmakers during the past couple years about the growing need for additional funding for the dual enrollment program, which allows high school students in grades 10-12 to enroll career technical courses at community colleges.
This year, the program was only able to award 2,100 scholarships, Waters said.

"We hope to be able to expand career technical dual enrollment scholarships to 10,000 annually," he said.

In a best-case scenario, the tax credit could lead to as many as 300 to 350 scholarships and waivers per two-year campus in the state, with a third being needs-based awards, according Allen.

Waters said the combination of an additional $5-million line item for the program included in the fiscal year 2015 education budget for the dual enrollment program and the tax credit are expected to allow the program to expand. The $5 million will help buy new equipment and assist with transportation needs in rural areas, Waters said.

"What a difference this program is going to make in Alabama," Waters said.

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For more information regarding Dual Enrollment opportunities for high school students, click the following link http://www.sheltonstate.edu/admissions/high_school_dual_enrollment.aspx