IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER education, how does a board of trustees stay connected to the community and meet its needs? In examining the leadership role of the college, the board of trustees of North Central State College decided to adopt the Carver Policy Governance Model. The overarching principle of this model is framing every discussion, goal, and measure by the development of “ends” policies based on the tenets of “what good, for whom, at what cost?”

The challenges facing North Central State College, located in Mansfield, Ohio, are similar to those facing institutions nationwide: Declining student enrollment, loss of business and industry, changing demographics, and the increased accountability of a state funding model based solely on performance. Our stakeholders helped shape the strategic direction for the college in alignment with the tenets of the governance model, specifically in the areas of student access (for whom), student success (what good), and effective use of resources (at what cost). These efforts revealed the need to expand the access mission, enhance student success, and align the college’s human, fiscal, and physical resources.

An Expanded Mission

**Access:** Past-year enrollment has grown by headcount (3 percent) and credit hours (1 percent) under adverse external conditions that include declining and aging populations, fewer high school graduates, an improving economy allowing adults to pursue jobs instead of education, and increasing competition from public, private, and online institutions. Total early college credits increased by 4 percent. Matriculates to the college with previous college credits increased by 6 percent. Fifty-five percent of NC State’s credit programs are less than three years old, reflecting the changing needs of our community. Through strong community partnerships, the college established outreach centers in two of the counties it serves to facilitate access to underserved and under-resourced first-generation students.

Partnering with more than three dozen high schools, dual enrollment has quadrupled to approximately 1,200 students. Since 2010, the college has served 4,515 unique high school students through some form of early college. These students have earned 63,000 credits, saving around $9 million collectively. If using four-year university costs, the dollars double or triple.

Another access initiative is the Tuition Freedom Scholarship, which provides free tuition up to an associate degree for high school students finishing at least six college credits in dual enrollment with a minimum 2.5 GPA and continuing with the college full time. NC State was the first college in Ohio to offer this program. We awarded these scholarships to between 150 and 200 students in each of the first two years. NC State invested more than $400,000 in the scholarship program in its first year.

**Success:** The Ohio funding formula is now based solely on student completion. The college has done better under the new
formula, which rewards numerous measures. The course success rate continues to be high at 88 percent. The latest three-year success rate for minority students increased by 9 percent, the fall-to-fall three-year entering cohort success rate increased by 1 percent, and the graduation rate of first-time, full-time students for the 2012 cohort increased by 1 percent. Licensure and certification rates are high, with multiple programs achieving 100 percent. Students completing 12 credit hours increased by 5 percent, and those completing 24 credit hours increased 1 percent.

The president's cabinet has authored numerous policies to embed student success in the college infrastructure, including academic advising and planning, early alerts, and financial responsibility. We have expedited inclusion of corequisites instead of prerequisites to accelerate student completion. The Community College Resource Center recognized NC State as one of the first community colleges in the nation to scale up a math corequisite sequence using statistics instead of algebra in 75 percent of the curriculum. Students also may complete Honors College coursework that includes community service.

**Human resources:** NC State works diligently to maintain 50 percent of contact hours taught by full-time faculty. In addition, we are expanding student services, hiring more advisors to maintain a student-to-advisor ratio below 300:1, and providing embedded tutors in classrooms. Working with area employers, we provide hundreds of our students with clinical sites, internships, and apprenticeship opportunities.

**Financial resources:** NC State maintains a balanced budget.

Over the past four years, we increased reserves threefold, from 5 to 20 percent, and the state fiscal viability ratio from 2.7 to 4.0 (a 48 percent increase). We have received more than $15 million in grants, which have allowed us to renovate facilities, update curriculum, and improve information technology.

**Physical resources:** The newly renovated Kehoe Center for Advanced Learning provides cutting-edge learning facilities in support of our expanding business, engineering, and IT programs, including automation, robotics, cybersecurity, and 3-D printing. In collaboration with career centers, we award more than 50 associate degrees to high school students who receive their high school diplomas at the same time. We provide each student with pathways to continue their baccalaureate degrees on campus with partners like Franklin and Miami Universities through 3+1 programs where the third baccalaureate year is offered at the college tuition rate. Recently, the Ohio legislature approved applied baccalaureate degrees for community colleges. NC State will be pursuing these opportunities to further raise educational attainment and meet the needs of the workforce.

These efforts have received significant recognition over the past year. NC State was named “Education Organization of the Year” by the Ashland Chamber of Commerce. President Diab was awarded a U.S. State Department Fulbright international exchange award to explore international education expansion and received an honorary Ph.D. in community leadership from Franklin University. In addition, the college is leading a statewide effort of 18 colleges and universities to deliver Open Education Resources (OER) to reduce the cost of textbooks for students.

All of these are pragmatic examples of the hard work of the dedicated faculty and staff, led by a board of trustees who employs Carver Policy Governance to work collaboratively with the president and empower him to achieve the “ends” within the executive limitations they established. Any college can build upon its existing mission to better serve students — particularly when the board and president remember to ask, “what good, for whom, at what cost?”

Dr. Dorey Diab is president of North Central State College.
Dr. Dwight McElfresh is a trustee at North Central State College and a retired dean from the Founders School of Continuing Education in Ashland, Ohio.