



# A TIME FOR ACTION: Building Upon Erie’s Higher Education Assets To Create A Prosperous Future For Our Region

The following statement expresses a vision for a vibrant Erie region and details concrete actions we can take together to place that future within reach of all residents of our community. The statement has been crafted over a year of dialogue among the leaders of Erie’s four universities—a process catalyzed by the shared view that NOW is the critical time for concrete action to build a future that can sustain job and business growth and open new paths to economic opportunity.

This statement is grounded in firm belief that the Erie region has the strengths and assets to forge its own destiny. The vision and the actions we are committed to take are a bet on the resilience and character of Erie’s people and its businesses. Together we seek to help build a bright future based upon the characteristics and strengths that have made Erie a leading manufacturing center, a destination for travelers, home to financial and health care leaders and a high quality of life community throughout our history.

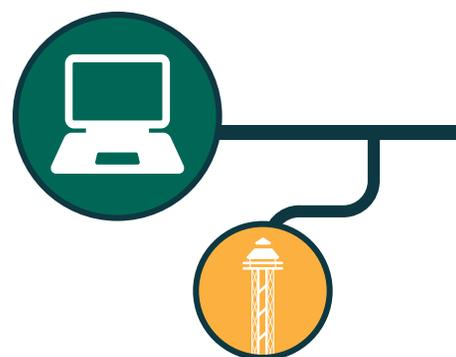
While grounded in a sense of pride over Erie’s historic strengths this statement also recognizes that a vibrant future depends upon taking bold action today. It is impossible to predict exactly what specific industries or occupations might hold the key to Erie’s future a decade from now. However, we can be certain of the elements that will be necessary to ensure that this future is a vibrant one. The three key building blocks for our future will be:

- *The ability to support entrepreneurs growing new companies.*
- *Creating an environment that enables our existing companies to continue to innovate.*
- *Establishing a learning community for our students and existing workers to develop the skills and creativity that enable them to thrive.*

The companies at the forefront of Erie’s economy today must be joined by hundreds of new businesses, many launched by entrepreneurs drawn to Erie by and springing from its educational and medical institutions. It was a startup company that launched the energy revolution with new techniques for tapping oil and gas reserves. New startups are also transforming manufacturing—creating new processes that enable innovators to digitally design and manufacture products. In health care, startups are advancing personalized medicine and creating new technologies that enable senior citizens and persons with disabilities to remain independent. Startups are also developing mobile technologies that are changing financial services and online technologies that are advancing the science of learning and expanding access to education.

Erie’s next great era of economic prosperity and growth may only be one idea away. We can create a unique environment for entrepreneurs to thrive.

The companies in our region that are reshaping manufacturing, health care, energy, finance, security and digital communications must continue to find an environment rich in research so that they can adapt and compete. We can make our region a virtual laboratory for innovation by tapping the collective strength of our institutions in many of the technology areas that are shaping the future. Our greatest asset in this effort is the tremendous energy and resourcefulness of our students. By creating new bridges that link our students to regional employers we can jump start the development of an economy that thrives on innovation.



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Both new and existing employers will need to be entrepreneurial in their outlook and operations and they will need to be able to tap a skilled, educated, and adaptive workforce. This situation demands that we create a learning environment that seamlessly connects business, higher education, training and skill development opportunities and our P-12 system. Creating this environment will require our institutions to develop new educational programs and new partnerships—working both together as universities and with local industry and schools. It must be anchored in a belief that every child can succeed and that no current workers need be forever denied a bright future based upon the neighborhood in which they were born. A culture of creativity throughout our workforce must be the defining feature of a vital and vibrant Erie region.

A brighter future for our region begins with recognition that Erie is a “college town”. We are a region rich in educational opportunities, drawing students and faculty from all over the nation and world. The creative energy and vitality that the over 20,000 students, faculty and staff generate can help anchor our region in an ever changing economy.

- *Nearly four in ten jobs in the region are in the “eds and meds” sector that has been so vital to the resurgence and performance of regions across the country.*
- *Together our institutions provide over a \$500 million annual boost to the Erie regional economy.*

Moreover, our impact cannot merely be measured in jobs or dollars. Together we help enrich the quality of life of the Erie. From the performing arts, to tourism, to sports and recreation, to our close synergy with the region’s strong health care providers, our universities contribute to the fabric of the community.

We are also committed neighbors. Together our students devote several hundred thousand hours each year in service projects in neighborhoods throughout our region.

Erie’s status as a “college town” gives us a head start towards future prosperity. It is the essential ingredient for success in the new economy, providing a leg up in the race for job and business growth. Across the country college towns have outperformed other regions over the last decade because they are effective at attracting, growing and supporting entrepreneurs and because they nurture the talent that keeps existing companies competitive.

As Richard Florida recently noted in surveying the post-recession economic landscape of America—“College towns such as Boulder, Colorado; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Charlottesville, Virginia; Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; and Lawrence, Kansas, number among the nation’s leading centers for start-up activity on a per capita basis. And in general, college towns have combined low unemployment rates with stable economies. The strength of regions this size clearly suggests that the future does not belong to large superstar cities alone.”

It is not just that college towns attract talent to the universities. They directly create startups that make them engines for high quality jobs. The university environment—if connected to and engaged with the broader Erie regional economy—can ignite innovation and growth in sectors ranging from local manufacturing to health care to tourism and the arts. Around the world, from China, India, Africa and the Middle East regions are racing to build or attract higher education institutions that can nurture the talent and industry innovation that they recognize will determine their place in the world economy. Erie already has what regions across the world are trying to obtain.



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Colleges and universities also literally connect their communities to the world through the student and faculty linkages they establish. The global nature of research and education ensures that college towns are linked to the flow of ideas and innovation that are the foundation for a vibrant community. Together our institutions attract students from about 70 nations. We are to Erie’s future what the port and railways were to its initial growth—a vital link to the idea centers of the world that will drive future economic growth.

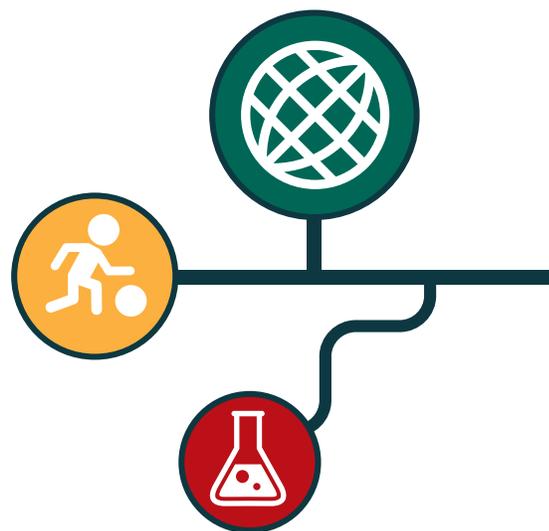
Finally, college towns are at the forefront of shaping a new U.S. economy because they can foster environments that broaden economic opportunity. For example statistics show that workers with a high school education earn higher wages in communities with more college graduates in the workforce than their counterparts in communities with lower rates of college attainment. A strong base of college graduates raises everyone’s wages.

Perhaps the greatest economic challenge before us today is to ensure that America continues to remain a nation that affords many paths to economic opportunity. With strong universities we can, working together, place Erie at the forefront of meeting this challenge.

Erie’s universities are its greatest asset for a future where change is the only certainty. We recognize and embrace the responsibility that accompanies this standing and are prepared to work within individual institutions and together for Erie’s future.

In outlining a shared vision for Erie’s future we also recognize that higher education must be prepared to adapt to changing needs and conditions. Each of our institutions are striving to make education more affordable, to connect even better with the needs of our region’s employers and to build new bridges to elementary and secondary education so that more residents have access to and take advantage of post-secondary education.

We have embraced the imperative for change as leaders of our universities and believe that by working together we can strengthen each of our institutions and our ability to create a vibrant future for Erie. Our individual and collective efforts to instill creative change into higher education will be another contribution to Erie’s future.



# IMAGINING A VIBRANT FUTURE FOR THE ERIE REGION

“Erie is a center for creativity and innovation powered by entrepreneurship in education, business and the arts.”

This is the vision for Erie’s future that we believe holds the greatest promise for a vibrant economy offering broad based opportunity. This is a vision of a future Erie recognized for the creative capabilities of its workers, businesses and institutions and a region where innovation occurs throughout the community—in business, government and education.

The foundation for Erie’s emergence as a center for creativity and innovation involves establishing leadership in five key areas:

**Erie must be a leader in re-imagination and design in advanced manufacturing, health care, arts, education and hospitality.**

Technology and innovation will continue to rapidly transform the industry sectors that are vital job creators for our region. Erie must be a center where new ideas developed anywhere in the world can be rapidly deployed and where entrepreneurs are nurtured and attracted to turn ideas into businesses.

**Erie must be a leader in identifying and applying regional and global ideas to solve problems.**

The ability to identify and apply innovations to solve problems is the currency of global leadership. We must build a regional capacity to tap ideas from throughout our community and across the world and to mobilize to apply those ideas to address regional problems. The ability to solve problems is currency for leadership in today’s world. The challenges we face require new thinking and new approaches.

Our own creativity is our only limit. Erie must become recognized as a leader in creative problem-solving which will draw new resources and talent to the region and make us a beacon for communities like Erie across the world.

**Erie must be a leader in promoting pathways to opportunity to advance social and economic justice for all.**

Ensuring a future with one economy that offers broad based opportunity is the defining development challenge of this era. Erie must lead the way in crafting strategies and actions that address this central challenge.

Each of our institutions are partnering in school to career initiatives to better connect students with opportunities in emerging industries. We are undertaking aggressive efforts to expand literacy programs and ensure that our institutions are a resource for all our region’s citizens. We will build upon these efforts collectively to establish Erie as a leader in opening pathways to opportunity.

**Erie must be defined by agile collaboration among education, government, industry and community partners.**

The ability to adapt to changing opportunities and challenges is a vital characteristic of dynamic, successful and high achieving regions. At the heart of that ability is a capacity to work together, learn together and explore ideas across all sectors of the community.

**Erie must be a leader in recruiting and engaging diverse persons and perspectives to establish and maintain an action oriented community.**

Innovation, problem solving and inclusive collaboration all grow in an environment that is welcoming of new persons and ideas and that is recognized first and foremost as a place where ideas are rapidly acted upon. Our universities can serve as magnets to attract talent from across the globe. Together we must all work to ensure that newcomers to our region are engaged in shaping its future.

We believe that this is a future Erie can and must attain and we are committed to step forward as leaders and institutions to help make this vision reality. When we succeed together to attain this vision, we will establish Erie as a model for the revitalization of communities of 100,000 to 200,000 people. Erie will be a destination not only for its beauty but for the economic and cultural model it holds for regions throughout the U.S. and the world.



# TURNING VISION INTO REALITY: Initiatives To Launch Erie Towards A Brighter Future

Realizing a vision for Erie to be a center for creativity and innovation will require a host of actions and initiatives—many of which are already taking shape across the region. We are prepared to engage in four critical areas that are central to realizing this vision. In each of these areas our institutions have already begun taking action. We are prepared to join together to accelerate and broaden our efforts.

## **Initiative One:** **COLLABORATE TO DEVELOP NEW INDUSTRIES**

Each of our universities has initiated strategies to support the growth of faculty and student companies and to support entrepreneurs in our region. We are prepared to expand and accelerate these initiatives with a series of bold new steps. The four universities will collaborate on the development of joint or collaborative incubators and cooperation among existing entrepreneurship programs to establish a seamless environment for growing new companies. We intend to broadly promote this capability in order to establish Erie as a magnet for entrepreneurs seeking a supportive environment to grow their companies. We will also work together to connect our students and faculty to opportunities for internships and work with start-ups and existing companies seeking to “spin-in” innovation. Together we are prepared to leverage our collective capabilities to make Erie a center for new business creation.

## **Initiative Two:** **PARTNER TO BUILD STRENGTHS IN THE EMERGING TECHNOLOGY AREAS THAT WILL GENERATE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE REGION**

To provide a seedbed for this entrepreneurial growth the universities will collaborate to build upon our existing strengths in emerging technology areas. Our existing industries, the skills of Erie workers and the research and education strength of Erie’s universities leave us poised to be a center for a number of major emerging industries.

We will explore opportunities for collaboration in such fast growing areas as energy, digital media and arts, intelligence, cybersecurity and the emerging breakthrough technologies in advanced manufacturing and health care. This collaboration will involve joint education and research projects, the creation of university/industry networks in the targeted areas, opportunities for collaboration in attracting leading educators in these fields to Erie and the development of unified proposals for new regional investments in research and innovation capabilities in these areas. We will look to create new strategies that connect our students to existing regional firms and collaborate with our elementary and secondary education partners to explore opportunities for developing STEM education and 2+2+2 programs that can develop education and career pathways for students.



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**Initiative Three:**  
**ACCELERATE COLLABORATION TO PROMOTE AN IMPROVED  
QUALITY OF LIFE ACROSS ALL ERIE COMMUNITIES**

These efforts to make Erie a center for entrepreneurship and to place the region at the forefront of new industries will be complemented by joint university initiatives to tap the capabilities of our students and faculty to significantly impact the quality of life of Erie's neighborhoods. Each of our institutions has a number of projects currently underway in this area. Our goal is to enhance and expand these efforts by working together with a particular focus on projects that address health and safety concerns of our communities.

To jump start this collaboration we will launch a Grand Challenges for Erie effort. This effort will bring together faculty and students from different disciplines at our institutions with community members to identify novel approaches to utilizing new ideas and technologies to solve the most pressing community problems our region faces. The ideas and strategies emerging from these Grand Challenges will create dramatic new approaches for collaborative efforts to tackle problems facing Erie.

We will also apply the power of entrepreneurship to helping improve the quality of life of Erie residents. We will organize business plan competitions to recognize the best business ideas that can help address neighborhood and community needs. These initiatives will help ensure that the innovation capacity of our institutions put to work for all Erie residents.

**Initiative Four:**  
**ESTABLISH THE ERIE REGIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING CONSORTIUM**

To strengthen pathways to career education and training the four universities will establish the Erie Regional Education and Training Consortium. The goal of the consortium is to serve as a clearing house for information as well as a one-stop-service center to connect potential learners/employees with job opportunities and learning opportunities to prepare them for careers. The Consortium will engage the four universities, k-12 partners, the Vo-Tech system, the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, proprietary schools, the Northwest IRC and the Erie Community Foundation. The Consortium will work closely with employers to ensure that Erie residents can readily identify and take advantage of training and education opportunities. The Consortium will work closely with employers to ensure that Erie residents can readily identify and take advantage of training and education opportunities.

# HOW OUR ACTIONS FIT INTO ERIE'S BROADER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE

The vision and action plan outlined in this statement reflects what we can do together and in partnership with the region's business, civic governmental and community leaders and organizations. In issuing this statement we are stepping forward to help build Erie's future and extending an invitation for collaboration with all the partners who will have a critical role in realizing this vision.

We are intending to play a stronger role in community partnerships through a wide range of activities that are needed to advance our future—from business and travel marketing, to infrastructure investment to neighborhood and downtown development. We are prepared to support those efforts as we have for years. This statement speaks directly to the opportunity to leverage the unique and powerful asset that the Erie region's universities provide for the future.

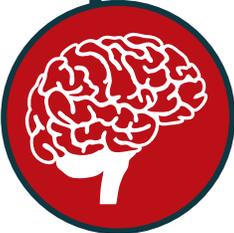
We believe that these efforts will complement initiatives such as Destination Erie. We are prepared to support complimentary efforts and connect our activities to the region's overall economic development strategy.

## NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

We are stepping forward to work with business, government, civic and other educational partners to realize the creation of an Erie that is a center for creativity and innovation. As a first step we will be formalizing our collaboration as a Council of University Presidents. The Council will not be a staff driven organization. Rather it will be a vehicle for advancing the personal and face to face dialogue that has been instrumental in building momentum for collaboration.

We will move quickly to convene key faculty and administrators at our institutions to develop a blueprint for moving these ideas forward. We will create opportunities for our faculty, staff and students to help shape and refine this vision as we tap their ideas and creativity. And we will invite our neighbors, civic and governmental partners and the business community to join with us inventing the bright future that is within our grasp.

Throughout different periods in Erie's history we have had our economic fortune impacted by decisions made in far off places. Perhaps the greatest imperative we face today is the need to recognize that, working together, we do have the power to shape our economic destiny. We believe that the future of the Erie region can be bright and prosperous for all our residents and that tapping the power of our universities is vital to realizing that potential. Our students, faculty and staff are helping shape this future right now. We are committed to stepping forward to do more together.



# OUR UNIVERSITIES HAVE ALREADY STARTED BUILDING THIS FUTURE



Our faculty, students and staff are already putting their creative energies to work to build this future. Some examples are provided here and many others exist and are emerging each day across the four University campuses.

## ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESS SUPPORT

To help advance the growth of new businesses and industries Gannon has launched the Erie Technology Incubator whose purpose is to facilitate the development of advanced technology industries in the Erie Region by providing mentoring and support for entrepreneurs. It does this by nurturing startup advanced technology businesses over a three-five year period. Gannon also is home to the SBDC team of professional consultants that work confidentially with entrepreneurs in Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Warren counties to help their businesses maintain a competitive edge. The Incubator tenants include Gannon faculty and are supported by the creative work of faculty and students from a variety of professional disciplines.

Edinboro has an established partnership with the Edinboro StART Up Incubator which has already launched several successful businesses from student products (one with an Amazon.com top-selling holiday gift) and an Entrepreneurial Learning Center that encourages, advises and supports startup businesses. Edinboro faculty are also in the process of working to launch a faculty animation business through the Incubator that will employ students as interns.

Mercyhurst University is also working to help seed the future industries of Erie's future. Mercyhurst's center for Intelligence Research Analysis & Training brings together the students and faculty of Institute for Intelligence a Mercyhurst University to perform high quality, low cost, open source research and analysis for private businesses and institutions and for governmental agencies through grants, partnerships and contracts. Finally, Mercyhurst's Institute for Art and Culture, (MIAC) is dedicated to making the arts a living presence by offering the highest quality arts programming for the Erie and Mercyhurst University communities.

Knowledge Park at Penn State Erie provides a 100-acre area of campus for the location of knowledge-based & Advanced Manufacturing companies which collaborate with the college's faculty members, staff, and students. Linked with Penn State Erie's *Office of Community and Workforce Programs* that designs and delivers professional and organizational development programming and training for businesses, industries, educators, create the perfect environment for start-ups and entrepreneurs.

## SIGNATURE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

These efforts are being complemented by forward thinking new degree programs. Edinboro has created an Associate of Applied Science in Applied Technology in Erie and Meadville: the program will give students the additional education needed above and beyond certificate-level technical training. Another new program will include work readiness classes, related academic and career coaching, and career development workshops for participants in the grant-funded Northwest Pennsylvania Career Pathways Project. The program is targeted to dislocated workers and persons re-entering the labor force. Edinboro has also created dynamic new programs that blend public safety and new leading edge technologies. These include forensic science, forensic accounting, forensic animation (which help solve a 2012 murder case in Erie), forensic art (e.g. facial reconstruction), and forensic anthropology programs that not only prepare professionals for these fields but also serve Erie county with assistance to the DA's office and others.

Edinboro also offers Associate Degrees in Business Administration, Engineering Technology, Human Services, Liberal Studies, pre-Pharmacy, Preschool Education and Special Education.

# OUR UNIVERSITIES HAVE ALREADY STARTED BUILDING THIS FUTURE



Mercyhurst University has been operating the McAuley College of Associate Degree Studies for just over 20 years. The college offers 26 associate degree programs and four certificate programs to about 1,000 regional traditional age and adult students at much lower tuition rates than charged at Mercyhurst's Colleges of Baccalaureate and Graduate Studies. These career-relevant programs offer a stepping-stone to the work force and for many students to a four-degree as well. Mercyhurst University operates several institutes that connect the life of the university to the life of the community. The Center for Applied Politics provides scientific polling on issues of community interest. The Institute for Ethics and Society works with the Rotary Club of downtown Erie to raise the awareness of ethical issues for regional high school students. Mercyhurst has established the Institute of Intelligence Studies which offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in intelligence studies, a Master of Science degree in applied intelligence, an online Master of Science degree in applied intelligence, and two graduate certificate programs that give students the education they need to pursue a career as an analyst in national security, law enforcement or business sectors. The Institute for Forensic Studies provides high tech analyses to support the efforts of regional and national law enforcement agencies and the Mercyhurst Institute for Art and Culture works with other civic organizations to assure the continuation of a vibrant arts and culture scene that characterize energetic and creative communities. The Public Health program at Mercyhurst is one of the only undergraduate public health programs in the country in a fully accredited, four-year, Catholic comprehensive institution, and it is one of only a handful of undergraduate public health programs offered by colleges and universities in the northeast. The Mercyhurst University Public Safety Institute is the primary provider of public safety training in the region.

Gannon's breadth and depth of health professional programs incorporate a unique integrated health care team curriculum model utilizing their state-of-the-art patient simulation center to education practitioners from the associate degree to doctoral levels. The new School of Communication and the Arts, Business Innovation Center (housing the School of Business), Forensic Investigation Center, Professional Development Schools at St. Peter's Cathedral Center School and in the Erie School District, and Biomedical Engineering Center each represents the consistent learning approach of integration of faculty, students, and curriculum in physical learning environments that link classroom learning with real-life, hands-on experience within their school and out into the community.

Gannon also offers Associate of Science degrees in business, liberal arts, radiological science and respiratory care as well as collaborating with regional health care providers in training opportunities in health care for health care aides, home health aides among others. Associate degree offerings are also available at a significantly reduced cost, on-line and on-site, across the NW Pennsylvania region through Gannon's partnership in the Education Consortium of the Upper Allegheny. Gannon's new articulation agreements with Cathedral Preparatory School and Villa Maria Academy established 1+3 accelerated degree programs have reduced the cost and time to a baccalaureate degree by 25% or more and will be expanded to other schools across the region in the coming year.

Penn State Erie has the only plastics-specific majors available within Penn State and one of only four accredited programs in the United States. PSU has the largest plastics lab dedicated to undergraduate studies in the country, with multimillion dollar state-of-the-art computer, materials, and processing labs. This great asset coupled with the Medical Plastics Center of Excellence (which focuses on education and applied research related to the use of polymers in the medical field, including material testing, computer modeling, and process simulation technology) supports PSU's Open Laboratories program which will provide collaborative spaces that blend academia and industry where students, faculty members, and industry work together seamlessly. The facilities will include specialized labs and equipment aligning research and resources with the region's new product development needs.

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## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDING COLLABORATION WITH P-12 EDUCATION

The efforts we have already launched also extend to aggressive activities to build a better life for all our region's residents. Edinboro has created the First Annual Xavier and Tina Williams Business Academy for students in grades 9-11 held in summer 2013 focusing on team building, business strategy and management, financial regulation, marketing, and financial planning for college, among several other topics. The Academy was designed to encourage the young students to explore possibilities for a future business career and to make college part of their future plans.

Edinboro's School of Education and the Erie School District, among other schools, are working together to bring continuing training and professional development to area teachers who will ultimately help prepare the region's future workforce. Edinboro is also launching the School of Business' Financial Literacy Center, which will host a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) staff member to provide financial literacy outreach to regional schools and the community.

Gannon has a long-standing partnership with the Erie School District leading the GO College program at Strong Vincent High School and supporting East High School and Central Technical School students prepare for college. Full-time Gannon staff and a team of Gannon Student Mentors provide daily on-site mentoring, tutoring, career and academic guidance, and college readiness support, along with campus visits, and activities and service to the region. Edinboro will join Gannon in the GO College supported work at East High School in the coming year.

Gannon's Erie GAINS coordinates strategic initiatives between the University, government agencies, community organizations and businesses to stimulate positive change and improve the sustainability and viability of downtown Erie and the neighborhoods surrounding campus. The initiative will bring greater focus to Gannon's existing efforts aimed at experiential learning, such as internships and co-ops, service-learning

projects, civic engagement, community service, research and programming by focusing on urban development issues including, but not limited to, education, health and well-being, the economy, public safety, neighborhood revitalization and the environment. Intensive partnerships with the MLK Center, Erie School District, and the City of Erie serve as signature programs in this neighborhood development effort.

Mercyhurst's Carpe Diem Academy provides an extended educational day to some 400 kindergarten through 3rd grade students of public schools in Erie's inner city. The program includes literacy education, technology, music, nutrition and exercise. In the Erie Together initiative the Mercyhurst University Civic Institute, GECAC and the United Way of Erie County are working with, and inclusive of, all sectors of the community, to address poverty at both systemic and individuals levels. The goal of Erie Together is to build human and social capital, improve neighborhoods, and enrich lives, so families and the community will become more economically secure. Finally, the Booker T. Washington Center at Mercyhurst makes starting a college education affordable and accessible to members of the Erie community who may have not otherwise felt college was attainable. The Center offers students a total of 60 credits per year or three classes per term. Students can choose to take up to 27 credits before transferring credits to any of the Mercyhurst branches or to another college. A discounted tuition rate is offered and financial aid is available to those who qualify.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education programs continue to be a key focus for Penn State Erie. With a K-12 engineering outreach center and programs like GEARS, which partners with Erie School District afterschool to provide STEM-focused enrichment programs that encourage healthy physical, intellectual, and social development of children and youth, PSU Behrend continues to strive to create pathways to the workforce demands of the future. In addition, Behrend has a number of college transition and certification programs that connects high-school and displaced workers with unique industry specific pathways for high-school and adult students.

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A long time GO COLLEGE supporter, Penn State Erie has also developed a Dual enrolment program that provides exceptional high school students that have completed at least the sophomore year of high-school, the opportunity to take regular college courses.

These initiatives reflect the spirit of innovation and community that have defined our institutions since their creation. We are eager to build upon these efforts with a new generation of collaborative strategies focused on meeting the challenges and opportunities that stand before the Erie region.

