



Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators

Testimony to the Basic Education Funding Commission

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Presented by:

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Good morning. My name is Dr. Darby Copeland, and I am the President of the PA Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA) and Executive Director of Parkway West Career and Technology Center. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Basic Education Funding (BEF) formula, how it can impact the access to Career and Technical Education across Pennsylvania.

Our testimony today focuses primarily on the access and success of career and technical education for students.

Background

Our nation's focus on competition in the global economy has brought numerous federal and state legislative initiatives that have drastically affected public education. The list includes No Child Left Behind, Race To The Top, Every Student Succeeds Act and several versions of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Legislation targeted and continues to focus on improving education and the quality of our workforce. Everyone agrees that our nation's education is essential to the quality of its workforce and career and technical education is essential to the development of workers' technical skills and knowledge. Therefore, the following analogy supports an economic premise for educational improvement: "basic education and especially, career and technical education" is imperative to "workforce development" and workforce development is essential to "economic development", which is vital to achieving a higher standard of living. A robust economy results in a higher "tax base" which in turn provides greater resources for schools and educational improvement. The continuum and link between education and the economy is indisputable.

Career and technical education (CTE) have undergone significant changes in the past few decades in response to the United States' focus on the global economy. To enhance our workforce competitiveness in global competition, CTE's mission is focused on "preparing students for successful careers and lifelong learning." Pennsylvania CTE educators have redirected programs to include a greater emphasis on higher level academics, preparation for postsecondary education, an emphasis on soft skills or Twenty-first Century Skills, and providing technical skill development based on nationally recognized business and industry credentials. In simple terms, today's Pennsylvania CTE high school graduates must be career ready.

Career and technical education have become an important component of educational improvement, adding rigor and relevance to academic and CTE programs of study. In leading high schools across the state and nation CTE has transitioned from an elective program to a career major and part of every student's career pathway to a high skill high wage career. In addition, there is growing evidence that career and technical education is an effective

intervention for reducing high school dropout rates, engaging students in the application of rigorous academics in a technical occupational setting.

Central to the development and delivery of a twenty-first century career and technical education program are high standards, high expectations, and continuous improvement. The process, defined by PA Department of Education standards, ensures that quality CTE programs are developed and delivered throughout the state. Quality career and technical education requires informed leadership, a supportive organizational structure, highly qualified teachers and support staff, and an uncompromising adherence to high standards and expert advice from business and industry.

Pennsylvania's career and technical centers, school districts, community colleges, and state universities collaborate in the development and implementation of Programs of Study (POS) that provide a focus on an educational pathway that is paramount to the success of program graduates. In addition, Carl D. Perkins legislation provides an emphasis on quality CTE, rigorous academics, employer engagement, industry credentials, career pathways, and accountability. Pennsylvania regulations provide a framework for an advisory structure that requires career and technology centers (CTCs) and individual CTE programs to seek support and advice from business, industry, and community stakeholders in all aspects of career and technical education. The state mandated advisory structure is vital to the quality of career and technical education, the school improvement process, and the success of CTE graduates in their chosen career. PA's business and industry employers and their incumbent technical employees are engaged in guiding career and technical educators in the development and continuous improvement and relevance of career and technical education.

High school students in career and technical education learn essential technical skills required for state and nationally recognized business and industry credentials. They also focus on soft or employability skills, and they learn and apply rigorous academics. As part of their career and technical education, students participate in work-based learning and many students enjoy paid internships or cooperative education in a modern workplace. While enrolled in CTE courses at a CTC, students can earn advanced standing in partnership with post-secondary institutions through dual enrollment/credit and they can receive credit for the industry credentials earned in CTE. The credits are the result of articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions that recognize the value of industry credentials and career and technical education. Credit for credential agreements provides a valuable economic benefit to students, parents and employers. The award of college credits for industry credentials, often as high as 24 – 30 credits, encourages students to pursue further education. In many cases, students in CTE programs can leave their career and technical center with enough college credits to be considered a sophomore in college and finish their associate degree in one year and a bachelor's degree within three years of graduating from high school.

The majority of the state's CTCs also serve their communities by providing a variety of career and technical education programs for adults, and entry level employees. Many CTCs provide advanced incumbent workers and customized training programs for local employers. In addition, many career and technical schools have achieved postsecondary accreditation, which is essential for veterans and other adult students to be eligible for loans and financial aid that is essential for preparation in a technical career.

Career and technical education centers and their students face several challenges that inhibit interested high school students from gaining access to career and technical education that is vital to their college and career path. In addition, most CTCs lack minimum funding required to enhance existing programs and under current budgeting practices, are unable to open new programs necessary to support regional workforce and economic development. Yes, some CTCs have been able to modernize and expand program offerings because their member school districts supported bond financing for CTCs with facilities that are fifty years old and instructional equipment that was obsolete. However, the need to provide state-of-the-art facilities, equipment, and programs is the most critical issue facing Pennsylvania's career and technical schools.

First, we will address funding, as it is the most important factor that impacts students' access to state-of-the-art careers and technical education. Then we will address access to careers and technical education; followed by the concerns relevant to facilities. We will conclude with a summary of recommendations for consideration by the Basic Education Funding Commission.

Funding

Career and technical centers in Pennsylvania receive most of their funding from three primary sources. Approximately 3% of a CTC's budget comes from Carl D. Perkins federal funds. Perkins funding is a critical revenue source for our state's secondary and postsecondary CTE schools. Pennsylvania and its CTE schools continued funding under the Perkins Act is dependent on strict accountability in the achievement of performance measures and standards that are reflective of student achievement in high quality career and technical education (CTE).

Across the state many CTCs use much of their Perkins allocation to support enrollment of special education students in academic and CTE subjects. School districts receive IDEA federal funding in support of special education students; however, the money does not follow the students when they enroll part time or full time (all day) at the CTC. The CTCs include the excess cost of providing support for special education students in their budgets which inflates the overall cost of CTE, and a disproportionate amount of Perkins funds are spent in support of special education students; thus, reducing the amount of federal dollars available for CTE instructional equipment and program improvements. Career and technical education is an excellent education option for all students. Ultimately, most school districts support CTC budgets but their primary reason for reducing CTE enrollments is the "high cost of CTE".

With a factor being the lack of dedicated special education funds to provide support services needed to ensure the success of special education students enrolled at the CTC.

The State CTE Subsidy equates to less than 8% (on average) of the cost of CTE, while member school districts' share of the CTCs' budgets has increased to approximately 90%. Due to demographic indicators and decreasing federal funds and less state subsidy per student, some school districts' portion of their CTC's budget can exceed 90% of the total cost of providing career and technical education.

The current method of funding CTCs was determined in the mid 1960's by guidelines from PDE. The state provided a template for the articles of agreement to establish and govern AVTSs, now CTCs. The template identified two costs incurred by CTCs: 1.) **capital costs**, which are funded by the member school districts based on their tax assessed value as determined by the State Tax Equalization Board, and 2.) annual **operating costs**, which are determined by average daily membership (ADMs) at the CTC. The operating cost calculation created a "pay for use" concept. Unfortunately, the pay for use concept has had a devastating impact on CTE enrollments. Many school districts reduce or restrict CTC enrollments, believing they reduce their costs. When school districts employ this logic, they are denying students their right to an education that ultimately leads to high skill, family wage sustaining career. In addition, reducing CTC enrollments increases the cost per student and seldom results in savings for the school district. An unintended consequence of the method of funding CTE in Pennsylvania is the impact on our employers' ability to find highly skilled employees needed to sustain their operation and contribute to the State's economy. Employers provide invaluable support for CTE, but we are unable to meet their demand for CTE graduates.

Career and technical centers are not tuition schools. Their budgets are based on the cost of delivering quality CTE programs (**program-based budget**) and traditional fixed costs. Career and technical education cost more than basic education and that is the primary reason it is offered on a consortium basis at a CTC. The consortia approach also enables the state's CTCs to offer a greater number and variety of CTE courses.

When students have unrestricted access to the CTC the enrollment increases and the cost per student decreases. CTE program budgets represent a capacity to serve students, employers and the economy.

Facilities

The requirements driven by business and industry advice and the need to support state and regional workforce development priorities established a demand to modernize existing CTE programs and add new programs in support of emerging occupations. The need to open new and additional programs presents a financial challenge to CTCs due to the nature of costly occupational specific instructional facilities and equipment. The Act 1 index does not apply to CTCs, but every member school district is governed by the base index which is driven by the

state average wage calculation. Therefore, CTCs cannot increase their budgets higher than the legal limitations imposed on school districts and CTCs cannot claim exceptions that are granted to school districts. CTCs, like school districts, are experiencing unprecedented increases that total more than the allowable budgetary increase under Act 1. This unintended consequence of the Act 1 limit has restricted CTCs' ability to adequately modernize CTE programs and add new programs. The cost of adding one new technical program typically exceeds the allowable index for an increase to the general fund budget. The cost of modernizing existing CTC programs and/or adding a new program is borne by member school districts.

The PA Legislature and PA Department of Ed has provided supplemental and competitive equipment grants and the funding has made a significant difference in resourcing CTC programs, but the amount is less than the amount needed for modernizing some of the more equipment-intensive programs.

The funding has been proven to address critical equipment needs that were not included in the schools' instructional budgets due to budget revenue limitations. For many CTCs across the state, the PDE competitive equipment grants, and the PA Legislature's supplemental funding have provided the only source of revenue for instructional equipment. Without this vital funding, many CTCs would not have been able to buy instructional equipment that is needed to prepare students for high value industry credentials.

In addition to equipment many CTCs need funding to address facility renovations and upgrades. The environment to education and mirror an industry setting is critical to CTE students' success.

Access

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, school districts determine which students are enrolled in career and technical education. The process of selecting students and when they can attend a CTC can vary from school district to school district. The process is ultimately controlled by the school district. There can be many factors or criteria involved in the selection process or it can be very subjective and arbitrary. The guidance office is usually the primary and possibly the only source of information about CTE and the CTC. Marketing materials and activities about CTE and the CTC are often limited because the money usually comes from member school district tax supported dollars and marketing expenditures are included in the career center's general fund budget. School districts rely on the CTC to provide information about CTE, but they also approve the CTC's budget, so the amount of money budgeted for CTE information and marketing is conservative. Employers, students, and parents often say; "CTE is the best kept secret", and that reflects our ability to market career opportunities in CTE.

Student access to career and technical education has been restricted for a number of years for several reasons. In some instances, it is a direct result of cost cutting measures by school districts. Some school districts have decided to limit the number of students they send to CTCs to reduce their budgetary costs.

In other situations, school districts have reduced staff as a money saving effort and as a result, school counselor positions have been eliminated and/or have gone unfilled. School counselors have a difficult assignment addressing the wide variety of tasks they perform on a daily basis. In addition, most counselors lack expertise in workforce demographics and emerging technical careers; as a result, many students do not receive adequate career guidance. Without career guidance, students fail to take advantage of the offers at their CTC and the impact is a lack of adequate CTE enrollments that are needed to meet the workforce demands of area employers.

The reduction in counselors has the greatest impact on the least fortunate students, both academically and economically disadvantaged. They are typical of the profile of most students enrolled in career and technical education. Yes, CTE serves a wide variety of students with diverse abilities and interests, but a great number of disadvantaged students depend on career and technical education for their (only) entrance to their career pathway. Many disadvantaged students are unaware of the postsecondary and career opportunities available through CTE, and they often get minimal specific career information from their counselor. The increased demands and reduction in counselors and the general lack of knowledge about industry credentials, emerging career and educational opportunities at a CTC by school district counselors has been well documented. The combination of reduced counseling staff and their lack of knowledge of career and postsecondary education opportunities has had an unfavorable impact on career bound students, all of whom can benefit from career and technical education.

Recommendations

The quality of career and technical education and its ability to support Pennsylvania's workforce and economic development has been compromised because of the deterioration of the federal and state funding for CTE, the cost of career and technical education, and the rising cost of basic education at school districts. The method of funding career and technical education in Pennsylvania places the majority of costs on school districts.

Maintaining the stable base for Basic Education Subsidy (BEF) would result in higher CTE access and a greater number of graduates would be available to sustain economic growth in Pennsylvania. Economic growth results in a higher standard of living, which produces a greater tax base for the State and local school districts. Career and technical education is recognized by business and industry as a vital component of the workforce and economic development in Pennsylvania.

We recommend the PA Legislative Supplemental Funding for CTE instructional equipment be appropriated at the same or higher level.

We recommend the Pennsylvania Legislature provide additional funding to support modernizing and/or the development of new CTE programs in high priority occupations as identified by the PA Department of Labor and Industry.

We recommend funding be established to increase the availability of career counseling and information to all Pennsylvania students.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.