

Majority Policy Committee
PA House of Representatives

Hearing - Assessing the Challenges Facing Pennsylvania Businesses

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August 21, 2012

Representative Maloney and Members of the House Majority Policy Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Challenges Facing Pennsylvania Businesses. I have worked for more than 30 years in a variety of capacities in education and workforce development. Over the years I have observed firsthand the impact of state policy on economic workforce development .

There are many challenges faced by Pennsylvania's business community. What I continually hear as the number one challenge facing local business and industry is the ability to employ individuals with the knowledge, skills and work ethic needed to support their enterprise. There appears to be a significant mismatch between the skills that many job applicants possess and the skills employers are looking for. So, if we really want to attract new companies, retain existing companies and support the growth of local business, we need to rethink state policy as it impacts on both public education and workforce development.

Many of the jobs right here in Berks County that are going unfilled require advanced technical skills coupled with a strong academic foundation. Employers tell me they need workers with a strong work ethic who are highly skilled and possess the academic background necessary to continue to expand their technical expertise and advance into supervisory and leadership positions within their organizations.

All of this starts with having in place a strong career and technical educational program at secondary level. Pennsylvania has a quality CTE system in place, but it has limitations and must be improved. For one thing, we must establish direct connections with postsecondary education so students can continue their career program beyond high school. Students (and their parents) must see there is a clear pathway toward earning a two (2) and/or four (4) year degree from CTCs. Students must be able to progress seamlessly through their educational program without duplication of coursework. Therefore, we need to break down the barriers that exist among institutions so everyone in the business of education and training is working as equal partners with a focus on clients. Current state regulations and policy make such partnerships difficult. For example, when dual enrollment funding was available it could not be used to support technical courses.

Another factor important to success is attracting today's youth into these advanced technical programs. This must be a state and regional priority. The current mindset that career success can only be achieved by completing 4 years of academic courses in high school followed by going directly into a 4 year degree program must change. This culture is a direct impediment to workforce and economic development. More detrimentally, this mindset has created a one trillion dollar debt service in financial aid for higher education. Ironically, too many of those students who incurred that debt do not possess the skills required in today's job market and will now have little discretionary income to fuel economic growth into the foreseeable future.

Funding for CTCs must change. The cost of having a student attend a CTC is an additional expense and financial burden for local public school districts in Pennsylvania. Changes in CTC funding along with financial incentives are needed to attract more students with academic proficiency to enroll in and complete technical education programs. By attracting more qualified students into advanced technical programs we will create a pool of talent for local industry which will grow the private sector, drive economic development and, in so doing, create jobs.

The good news is that Berks County has made strides in this direction. We have a community that values career and technical education and local institutions that are demonstrating leadership and a strong desire and commitment to work together. Consequently, much work has been

accomplished in building non-overlapping curriculum tied directly to entry level, high priority jobs with advancement potential. While much work remains to be done, a blueprint has been created and programs are currently being implemented.

One very good example of that commitment is Berks County's "Technical Academy", a new partnership between the county's CTCs and community college.

This Technical Academy, while still in its infancy stage, is preparing students for entry into careers in:

- Advanced Materials and Diversified Manufacturing including jobs as:
 - Electrical Mechanical Technicians
 - Robotics Technicians
 - Maintenance Mechanics
 - Precision Machine Operators; CNC Programmers and Operators
 - Welders
- Business and Information Technology including jobs as
 - Systems Software Engineers
 - Computer Systems Analysts
 - Network Administrators
 - Computer Programmers
 - Entrepreneurs

Future plans include expanding the Technical Academy to prepare students for careers in:

- Health Care Services including jobs as
 - Registered Nurses
 - Medical and Clinical Technicians
 - Certified Nursing Assistants
 - Physician Assistants
 - Computerized Medical Records Technicians

It is my hope that I have provided some insight into some of the challenges career and technical education faces in supporting local business and industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing.