

Testimony to the House Republican Policy Committee
Supporting Pennsylvania's Career and Technical Schools'
Key to Pennsylvania's Economic Vitality

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Good Morning. I am Dawn Kocher-Taylor, the Administrative Director of Lenape Technical School in Ford City, Pennsylvania. I appreciate Representative Evankovich's invitation to speak in regard to a vital component of our Commonwealth's economic vitality; Pennsylvania's Career and Technical Schools.

Career and Technical Schools have changed significantly since the days when we were called "Vo-Tech's. Now more commonly known as Career and Technical Centers or CTC's, we serve over 100,000 students, annually in shared time and comprehensive facilities, developing the technical expertise of our learners, their ability to apply academic concepts to technical processes, 21st Century Skills, such as critical thinking and teamwork, as well as the "soft skills" they need, such as being prompt, dependable and loyal, all contributing to a productive work environment. The best way to realize the method in which today's career and technical education can unlock doors for workers, families, employers and communities is to look inside our doors.

Just a glimpse of what you will see includes:

- **Allied Health students** taking a patient's vital signs in preparation for their PA Nurse Assistant Exam, not on another student but on a mannequin that has a heartbeat, breathes, and coughs! The student then records the results on an electronic screen that simultaneously charts aspects of patient care and records them on a computer network making them accessible on other computers, including that of the instructor.
- **Sports Medicine students** can be seen partnering with the physical education instructor to create profiles for students in the PE class that include BMI and personal fitness plans.
- In another classroom, **Bio-Medical Technology students** and an English class read an article on genetic engineering and debate the ethical aspects of the process.
- In a physics class, the **Environmental Controls and Natural Resources students** are studying alternative energy as they construct a wind turbine on the campus that generates electricity to heat the school greenhouse.
- On the nearby tennis court, **CAD/Pre-Engineering students** are test driving a hovercraft that they designed and built using plywood, modified leaf blowers and a lawn chair. (I should mention that during the test-drive they realized they had not incorporated a steering mechanism)
- Behind another door, alternative fuels are the topic. One group of **Auto Tech students** are working with a science teacher and her class to make biodiesel fuel using the discarded cooking oil from the Culinary Arts lab, while another group converts a pick-up truck to operate using compressed natural gas.

- **Mechatronics, Engineering, Machining and Welding students** collaborate not only with classmates but members of local 4-H Clubs that attend other high schools, as well as a home-schooled child to form “Incognito Robotics Team”. Last year they built and programmed a robot that shoots and retrieves basketballs. The team then partnered with other schools to form teams and compete on the court of PITT’s Peterson event Center.

The students behind these doors choose to extend their high school experience to include career education. They are engaged in meaningful activities, reading technical material, thinking critically, applying mathematical concepts, and mastering highly technical skills sets. Our students compliment their high school diploma with industry recognized certifications such as OSHA, CPR, NIMS, AWS, A+ and Net+, State Nurse Assistant Certification, PA Cosmetologist Licenses and Pharmacy Technician Certification. They often walk out the doors of the technical centers with an impressive portfolio, a semesters worth of college credits, and a plan that involves work and post-secondary education to expand career options.

Pennsylvania’s Career and Technical Centers are developing a workforce that meets the needs of our business and industry partners today, and workers who recognize that learning is a lifelong process and is necessary to prepare them for the jobs of the future. Our graduates help Pennsylvania businesses compete in the global marketplace.

While the opening the classroom doors reveals a promising future in the eyes and hands of our students, there is frustration in the office of the CTC Administrator. We need your help to continue our work preparing high school and adult learners for college and career. We need to promote educating young people, their teachers, and parents, regarding High Priority Occupations, such as those in manufacturing, where opportunities exist for employment at home in PA, with family sustaining wages and opportunities for advancement. (Manufacturing Advisory Report)

We need you to help modify our State's perspective on what defines success, and to recognize achievement can be measured by more than a standardized academic exam. We need a system that recognizes growth of students while enrolled in a CTE Programs and that also recognizes their ability to pass a written and demonstrative certification exam, prior to graduation that has value to employers. In the case of Lenape, our juniors did not meet the State targets on the PSSA exam in 2011-12, however, ninety percent of our graduating seniors passed an industry certification exam at a competent or advanced level.

Most of all, we need your help in changing the way Career and Technical Education is funded in Pennsylvania. Funding for CTE is very different than for school districts. Revenue for Career and Technology Centers is provided predominantly by two sources: The State of Pennsylvania and by participating school districts. Pennsylvania provides vocational subsidy and grants. The school districts provide funds, based on student enrollment. At Lenape Tech the state pays roughly \$400,000 in subsidy and \$250,000 in grants. The

participating districts paid roughly \$6,000,000. The largest source of revenue to operate CTC's comes from the participating school districts. The guidelines that establish how we divide the \$6,000,000 among school districts are called Articles of Agreement. These agreements vary from school to school, but for the most part, school districts are billed for their portion of the revenue, based on student enrollment at the CTE School.

As you can see, this funding arrangement creates a disincentive to send students to CTC. Compare it to your electric bill, the more you use the more it costs. When your budget gets tight, you look for ways to reduce electrical consumption. Much like your electric bill, when school district budgets get tight, they look for ways to reduce their financial burden. I am not suggesting a student, committed to attend a CTC, is denied access. Most districts I have worked with greatly value CTC and send students that can benefit from participation in our programs. But, Act 1 has greatly impacted school districts. Schools have tightened their belts and become more fiscally efficient. School Districts, facing an Act 1 mandate, typically ask CTC to keep expenditures within the Act 1 guidelines. In a spirit of cooperation, most CTC's comply with the request. But, when a district increases enrollment at a CTE school, they will subsequently be facing a larger bill due to increased student participation and that increase does not fit well into an Act 1 budget framework. If we value the benefits CTE brings to the educational system, we need to relieve school districts of the strain a CTE program brings to their budget.

I would ask you consider a revision to the current method of funding Career and Technical Education Schools so that the Commonwealth's CT Schools are able to provide the programs that students and employers need without creating an unfair hardship on school districts.

Thank you for your continuing support of our efforts, such as our eligibility for the Tax Credit Program. I appreciate you having me here today and your consideration of the perspectives I have offered. Are there any questions?