Majority Policy Committee
PA House of Representative

Hearing – Student Opportunities in Career and Technical Education

Testimony of Kurt Lynch
Director of Vocational Education
Schuylkill Technology Center
Mar Lin, PA

February 24, 2014

Representative Reed, Representative Knowles and members of the House Majority Policy Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about ***Student Opportunities in Career and Technical Education (CTE)***. I have worked for more than 20 years in a variety of capacities in Career and Technical Education. I have seen firsthand cases of student success due to Career and Technical Education.

Every year approximately 650 students from twelve school districts participate in an approved CTE program at Schuylkill Technology Center (STC). STC provides these students with both real world experiences along with academic core content. For many of these students what STC provides has changed their lives and has provided a positive real world experience.

Pennsylvania has provided many students with a great career and technical education and continues to do so. But there are many challenges ahead and stigmas that need to be overcome. Parents and community members need to realize that a student can attend a CTE and still go to college. Many students face tremendous obstacles just to get the chance to enroll in a CTE and this hinders our educational process.

Helpful Strategies in Preparing Students for Careers:

"Today's economy demands a better educated workforce than ever before, and jobs in this new economy require more complex knowledge and skills than jobs of the past." (College & Career Readiness & Success Center, 2013) Some of the steps to achieve this goal include making teaching and learning in secondary schools more rigorous, engaging, and relevant; ensuring that more students are college and career ready; increasing high school graduation rates, especially for lower performing students; providing opportunities for youth to learn about and experience careers; and smoothing the transition to postsecondary success. While addressing these issues will require significant change across the entire educational system, increasing opportunities for students to participate in high-quality technical education is an existing comprehensive strategy that impacts all of them.

CTE programs provide students with opportunities to acquire the competencies required in today's workplace—such as critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, innovation, teamwork, and communication—and to learn about different careers by experiencing work and workplaces. CTE is no longer just about teaching students a narrow set of skills sufficient for entry-level jobs; it is about preparing students for careers.

High-quality CTE programs and pathways ensure that coursework is simultaneously aligned to rigorous academic standards and postsecondary expectations and informed by and built to address the skills needed in specific career pathways. CTE pathways and programs use applied, contextual learning to help students see the relevance of what they are learning and its connection to career opportunities and life goals. These pathways and programs also can provide innovative options for supporting students with different learning styles. The evolution of CTE is making it a more popular and viable option for students of all abilities.

Furthermore, research on high-quality CTE programs and pathways shows that these programs reduce dropout rates; encourage participation in postsecondary education; and enable students to earn dual enrollment credits and industry-endorsed certificates.

Schuylkill Technology Center and its implementation of high quality CTE programs:

1. All programs as STC are BCTE (Bureau of Career and Technical Education) approved and follow the POS (Program of Study). The POS is based on national research, prepared by a team of secondary and post-secondary educators and business professionals from the trade area, updated every three years, includes industry certification and college credit. The POS gives the curriculum credibility and is not just a local curriculum.
2. Schuylkill Technology Center connects to business and industry via the OAC (Occupational Advisory Committee). The OAC is made up of local business professionals that drive programmatic change within the Schuylkill Technology Center.
3. The Schuylkill Technology Center offers a wide number of postsecondary articulation agreements. Through these agreements students are eligible for over 926 articulated credits with post-secondary institutions. Forty percent (76 students) of the graduating class from 12-13 went on to post-secondary education. These articulated credits are provided to students at no cost and provide students with opportunities they normally would not have.
4. The faculty at STC is provided with a curriculum template that prescribes minimum requirements for the planning and instruction. This template requires integration of PA Core Standards; therefore a very strong focus on academics along with the technical content.
5. Instructors are held accountable for high stakes testing (NOCTI). Instructors focus on NOCTI tools such a task link reports, pre-tests and post-test scores to enhance their individual curriculum.
6. Schuylkill Technology was a leader in the development of a county wide counseling plan. The counseling plan is a delivery system to inform districts, parents and community leaders the benefits of SOAR, the POS and CTE programming. It is also a partnership between STC and the districts.
7. Schuylkill Technology Center has adopted the RtII model of student intervention. STC was one of the first half year programs to develop an RtII plan to aid students who are having academic or career related curriculum problems.

Items that the state does well when providing career and tech education:

1. The **SOAR** program (Students Occupationally and Academically Ready) is a great advantage for Career and Technical students. The program allows students who complete a POS to 100% to take advantage of nine articulated college credits.
2. **NOCTI** (National Occupationally Competency Testing Institute) **–** The PA specific tests are directly correlated to the POS; therefore CTEs have a relevant curriculum to meet PA industry

needs and relevant test to measure student achievement. We are held accountable for results. We have NOCTI reports that provide data on student performance; therefore, specific targets are provided to instructors and students to help students improve.

3. **APE** (Approved Program Evaluation)- A specific list of criteria upon which all PA CTC's are measured to maintain program quality – helps us focus on areas needing improvement and also acknowledges what are doing right.
4. **TAP –** extensive program to focus on research based instructional practices that improve student achievement. Staff development including MAX teaching reading strategies, teacher effectiveness training, Professional Learning Communities, etc. Thru TAP Distinguished School Leaders (DSLs) provide great foresight and outside reviews of the programs.
5. **Career Guidance-** BCTE provides an extensive website and resources to help students, parents and districts prepare for and select CTE.
6. **Equipment Grants-** The state provides competitive grants for CTCs to acquire equipment.
7. **PILs-** Professional Inspired Leadership programs that focus on NOCTI score analysis, Teaching Effectiveness, Curriculum Supervision, SAS, etc.
8. PDE has provided aid with the county wide guidance plan with Charles Sabulski and Mike Thompson.

What can be done to improve CTE:

1. Continue with the items mentioned, these efforts have drastically improved student performance.
2. Allow CTE students to use the NOCTI test in place of other high stakes tests. NOCTI can be a bridge to college credit and add value to a student's education.
3. Help us change the image that CTE is the old CTE, especially with District Administration and parents by providing a state wide marketing campaign in conjunction with state level business alliance to support CTE.