

## **Pennsylvania House Majority Policy Committee**

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Growing Pennsylvania will only occur when businesses, educators, economic developers, and stakeholders focus on incremental changes and improvements. Employers grow the economy. We must respond to their needs, which Penn College does in two distinct ways: providing a pipeline of graduates in degrees that align with employer needs and offering lifelong training opportunities for incumbent workers.

Employers hold the key to growing Pennsylvania's economy, and we – education, economic development, government – must do our part to support them in the most fitting ways. Myriad issues impede growth, including uncertainty, supply chain constraints, fiscal management, lingering pandemic impacts, and limited access to a skilled workforce. Just as there are multiple contributing factors creating the issues faced by employers, there is no single solution to the workforce dilemma.

I'll focus on the workforce piece to that solution and the role Pennsylvania College of Technology plays in moving the needle in one critical area that negatively impacts the ability of companies to grow and ensure that the Commonwealth remains competitive.

What is causing the workforce problem? According to a recent report by Emsi, "The Demographic Drought," the causes are many. As of March 2021, 19 million Americans filed for some form of jobless benefits, with a majority of claims specifically for pandemic relief assistance. This, despite a record 7 million-plus job openings during that same time period. In normal years, 2 million baby boomers retire; in 2020, more than 3 million did. Since 1971, the fertility rate in America has been below the replacement level of 2.1 births per woman. Fewer people are attending college. All of these factors contribute to our current predicament. It is more important than ever to invest in education and training that aligns with the needs of employers.

At Penn College, our unique educational model offers a way forward. Companies are clamoring for our graduates, and they compete for a limited pool. The College's overall graduate-placement rate exceeds 96% and is 100% in many majors over the last three-year period for which data is available (2017-20). We continue to hear of the need for more healthcare personnel and skilled workers in manufacturing and other technical fields – what we like to call the essential occupations – in which our graduates are making a difference and taking leading roles. Among them: IT, nursing, welding, plastics, management, automotive, construction, and more.

According to the Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte, by 2030, across the U.S., we are expected to see shortages of more than 2 million manufacturing workers. The American Association of Colleges notes that the U.S. will need more than 200,000 nurses a year until at least 2026. Accordingly, we have ramped up our outreach to students in high schools and career and technical education centers, but the challenge remains attracting students to the pathways leading to these high-demand, well-paid, and upwardly mobile careers.

Gone are the times when many employees worked for the same company for decades. Our graduates leave Penn College with a solid foundation for an ever-evolving career, regardless of the sector in which

they land. Whether a high school student chooses the path of a degree or certificate or goes straight to work, they cannot escape the need to learn continuously throughout their career.

While routine, repetitive, low-skill work is being replaced by robotics and automation, new, higher-value work is taking its place. Automation creates many new career opportunities, but most of them require education and training. To program, operate and maintain this advanced equipment and machinery takes a much higher skill level. These needs present some of the most promising career paths for future graduates.

I work in Workforce Development at Penn College. We have a long history of partnering with companies to train incumbent workers. Our goal is to tackle the workforce issue from a lifelong-learning perspective. Many of our client companies employ our graduates. These graduates know they can contact staff on our campus to target a specific training need for their current employers. We send Penn College faculty and staff onsite to train employees, we invite them to campus, we deliver remote training, and we customize programs specific to a company's needs.

How do we accomplish this? Our current focus is on apprenticeship training. We sponsor seven apprenticeship programs registered with the state Department of Labor & Industry with two more under development. We are the only entity in Pennsylvania to have been awarded a U.S. Department of Labor Scaling Apprenticeship grant, known as MIDAS, that is poised to support training for more than 3,200 apprentices over five years in advanced manufacturing occupations like CNC, mechatronics, industrial manufacturing technician, robotics and automation maintenance technician, and plastics process technician. Our blend of delivering technical instruction with the companies' documented hands-on training ensures a consistently trained workforce for participating companies.

The Clean Energy Center at Penn College is a nationally recognized U.S. Department of Energy legacy center, providing training and technical assistance to home energy professionals, commercial building operators, government, utility companies, and other industry partners in the building performance field. We opened our new office in Latrobe in April with the aim of expanding the Center's offerings into western Pennsylvania.

Penn College also serves as the statewide facilitator of WEDnetPA, a program helping companies cover a portion of the cost of worker training. This investment in Pennsylvania's workforce accounted for \$10 million last year. Some 737 companies benefited from WEDnetPA, and the funding supported training for more than 20,000 employees.

We have a proven track record of addressing the workforce challenges confronting Pennsylvania's companies. Our skilled, job-ready graduates immediately begin contributing when they are hired, while our workforce development efforts help companies solve their skills-gap issues through apprenticeship and other customized training programs. With your ongoing support and continued advocacy for Pennsylvania College of Technology, we will continue to provide education and training programs that will fuel much-needed growth in the Pennsylvania economy – now, and in the future.