



**Testimony of the
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Public Hearing Regarding
Career and Technical Education**

**Presented to the
Senate Subcommittee on CTE**

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By

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Good morning, Chairman Aument and fellow members of the Senate Education Subcommittee on Career and Technical Education. My name is Brian Pegg, and I teach automotive technology at Central Westmoreland Career and Technical Center. In addition to teaching, I serve as the vice president of PSEA's Department of Career and Technical Studies (DCTS) Executive Board which represents the more than 2,300 career and technical educators within PSEA. The DCTS board is composed of educators from across Pennsylvania representing various career and technical education (CTE) cluster programs including Agriculture, Business, Health Occupations, Family and Consumer Science, Technology, and Trade/Industrial Education. On behalf of DCTS and PSEA, thank you for inviting us to testify today.

According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, in just a few years almost two-thirds of the jobs in the nation will require postsecondary education or training - which includes opportunities both within the postsecondary education system and within the business world through programs such as registered apprenticeships. CTE is at the core of preparing our students for the 21st century workforce - all of which demands higher-level skills and knowledge.

Throughout the past year, the PSEA-DCTS Board has spent a significant amount of time identifying, from the educator perspective, the issues and barriers that exist for CTE in Pennsylvania and potential solutions that may be offered to help address those challenges. My testimony will focus on these challenges and solutions for your consideration in your ongoing deliberations.

Ensuring Student Access to CTE programming

Currently, students can access approved programs in a Career and Technical Center (CTC) or in a traditional high school. There are 84 CTCs in Pennsylvania – 13 of which are “comprehensive,” offering both academic and technical education courses – and 136 high schools offering 1,720 approved programs to more than 66,000 students across the commonwealth. While we should be proud of this framework of offerings for students, there is more that can and should be done to expand programming and ensure students have genuine access to quality CTE.

While several challenges exist for ensuring student access to CTE programming, perhaps the most universal is the continued lack of awareness and misperception by students and their families about what CTE is, its viability as an educational option for any type of student, and what CTE can mean for their future livelihood. In the past, and even to a certain extent today, there has been a stigma associated with CTE. Students enrolled in CTE programs may have felt or in fact, had been, isolated outside of traditional academic programming. That is changing, however, and the world of CTE offers the best of both academics and technical knowledge, skills, and experiences to help ensure students are truly college and career ready. Through various policymaking efforts at both the federal and the state level¹ much work has been done to redefine CTE with an increased focus on academics and technical training – providing students the ability to earn meaningful industry credentials, engage in academically and intellectually rigorous learning experiences, and develop transferable skills.

It is time to embrace the opportunity of CTE and move away from the days of stigma and misperception. With that in mind, PSEA encourages you and your colleagues in the General Assembly to work with the PA Department of Education and other state agencies, preK-16 educators and administrators, business and industry leaders, and other key stakeholders like PSEA to develop and implement a coordinated statewide public awareness campaign focused on educating students, parents, and the public about the value and impact of CTE. PSEA stands ready and eager to partner in that endeavor.

As CTE educators, we see firsthand the world of opportunity CTE programs provide for individual students, and we know a CTE education provides the foundation of prosperity for whole families and communities. Parents, students, school administrators, and even our fellow educators can benefit from enhanced awareness about the importance of CTE in Pennsylvania. Further, to fortify ourselves against the past practice of “tracking” – that is, an adult’s preconceived judgments about a student’s abilities and subsequently forcing students into “tracks,” career counseling must be provided for all students equally, and high- quality

¹ Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

professional development opportunities should seek to annul any implicit bias that may remain in the educational community.

It is critical that students are empowered to make informed choices about what is best for them immediately post-high school including college, employment, or service. Students need career guidance and support throughout their educational career, to give them the information they need to make such a decision about any of these viable options. In testimony PSEA provided in 2016 to the House Select Subcommittee on this topic, we suggested that career counseling must be available not only in high school, but also, and more importantly, in the earlier grades so students and their families have a better understanding of the many career options that exist. It is our hope that policymakers and education advocates can work together to identify ways to maximize tools and resources related to emerging career and educational opportunities so students and their families can easily access them.

Consistent career counseling and awareness for students is an important indicator of school quality and PSEA supports the inclusion of “career readiness” measures for both school reporting and for school accountability. The effectiveness of public schools should be measured in multiple ways. For too long, in assessing the performance of our schools, we have placed too much emphasis on standardized test scores and college enrollment rates. A student’s demonstration of career readiness should be considered an equal measure of school performance. Elevating the importance of career readiness in this way serves to make CTE more of a priority for public education and creates further incentive for schools to highlight various post-secondary pathways and provide the necessary guidance and preparation for students.

PSEA is heartened to see CTE emerging as a bipartisan, proactive, priority across Pennsylvania. To help nurture this enthusiasm and ensure the sustainability of high-quality programming for current and future students, we urge policymakers to engage education and industry stakeholders in a thorough review of the commonwealth’s current funding system for CTE and develop recommendations for improvement in funding these crucial programs.

While PSEA strongly supports an increase in the state subsidy for CTE, we also recognize that the issues of funding and student access are much more complicated than simply investing more

funds. The financial, programmatic, equipment and capital needs associated with CTE programming – at a CTC or a high school – are varied and complex, but also have a direct impact on whether students can access programs that are equipped to industry standards and are the best fit for them and their future.

My experience as a CTE educator has made clear to me the undeniable deficiency in the current CTE funding structure. The reality on the ground is that students have price tags on their heads and there is an inherent disincentive for school districts to send students to a CTC. Consider these facts:

1. The state CTE budget line has been flat-funded at \$62M since FY2010-11. The overall high for the program was in FY2008-09 at \$63.7M.
2. Federal funding for CTE through the Perkins grant has been level-funded, and Pennsylvania's specific allocations have decreased due to loss in population.
3. While the Act 1 index does not directly govern CTC budgets, CTCs cannot increase their budgets higher than the legal limitations imposed on school districts and CTCs cannot claim exemptions that are granted to school districts.
4. A CTC and its sending school districts operate under local Articles of Agreement which delineates each district's student enrollment in the CTC as well as the funding formula between the sending district and the CTC.

The impact of these funding realities is evidenced in various ways. One example of such impact is that school districts sometimes reduce enrollment in their CTC to control or cut overall district costs. This reduction in enrollment not only negatively impacts student access but also directly impacts the quality of programming that can be offered by the CTC. Another example of the impact of the funding structure is that CTC officials are constrained in their ability to enhance or modernize existing programs or to offer new programs that respond to industry demands and emerging workforce needs.

These realities also raise many important questions:

- What should a CTC do when local industry requests the support of a new program, but the program exceeds the allowable index for an increase to a district's budget?
Pennsylvania's CTE programs need to be responsive to new and emerging businesses and industries.
- If CTCs need to update or repair structures, develop new programs, update equipment to industry standards, or hire new staff – what financial resources do they have to do that?
- What happens when the number of CTC applicants exceeds the available slots allotted to a sending district? How are students chosen? Are certain students given priority?
- If a student is enrolled in a CTC and also has an IEP, does the sending district or the CTC bear the cost of special education supports and services?
- Is there consistency across the state in how students who are home-schooled or enrolled in cyber charter schools can access CTE?
- Does the current funding structure create unnecessary tension between sending districts and CTCs?

There are no easy answers. But as we collectively work to address these important questions as part of a thorough review of the current funding system for CTEs, PSEA urges you to consider the challenges and potential solutions within the framework of the following objectives:

- Ensure access for students in any geographic location to a varied array of programs of study;
- Ensure funding for new programs in innovative careers that require large upfront investments for startup; and
- Ensure adequate and mission-based dispersal of CTE funds to the appropriate entity.

Public education's role in workforce development

Pennsylvania has done tremendous work to establish a strong foundation of high-quality and relevant CTE programming for students, including: Programs of Study, support for high priority occupations, articulation agreements between Perkins secondary and post-secondary schools, recognition of industry certifications and credentials students can earn, and the ongoing establishment of career pathways. But to ensure all students are prepared for postsecondary

success and that local and regional workforce needs are met, more must be done. As we work to establish meaningful career pathways that are relevant to Pennsylvania’s ever-changing workforce and economic needs, PSEA offers the following recommendations for your consideration:

- 1) Conduct a thorough review and analysis of industry certifications or credentials to determine those most relevant to workforce needs and postsecondary success. Consider the following criteria as a basis for further evaluation:
 - a. Applicability of the credential to multiple pathways within a career cluster;
 - b. Extent to which the certification or credential is “stackable” (*seamless pathway from secondary to postsecondary where at each stage of pathway student builds upon previously learned knowledge and skills to demonstrate ongoing mastery*), or can be considered “capstone” (*represents culmination of acquired skills through completion of particular program of study*);
 - c. Transferability (credits or hours) of the certification to postsecondary institutions and/or transference to quality employability (above entry-level positions). Options may include expanding the current articulation agreements between Perkins-funded secondary and postsecondary institutions including community colleges (ensuring students receive at least nine credit hours) or incentivizing “2+2+2” articulation models that allow students to progress seamlessly from the secondary CTC, complete their community college degree, and ultimately complete a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution.²

- 2) Review the current academic and technical courses and time requirements for CTE students to complete their programs. Identify opportunities to provide more flexibility for students to meet the minimum time requirements for completion, while continuing to ensure high-quality CTE programming.

² Example of a 2+2+2 program: <https://www.racc.edu/services/bloomsburg>

- 3) Require all secondary CTE programs to provide the opportunity for students to earn industry-recognized credentials or certifications that are meaningful for postsecondary and employment success.
 - a. For example, in the construction industry, a 10-hour OSHA card or credential issued from the PA Builders Association is greatly valued by contractors searching for employees. Ensuring students have access to meaningful credentials like this one which bears value for the respective industry, can provide students with additional marketability for entering the workforce and may translate into higher earnings over their lifetime. In addition, the credential gives the employer confidence that the student is entering the job “work ready.”

Ensuring high-quality career and technical educators

Supporting the recruitment and retention of talented, knowledgeable CTE educators is essential to the quality of the system statewide. Teacher shortages across Pennsylvania continue to be a growing concern. According to PDE, PA has seen a 55 percent decline in undergraduate education majors since 1996 and a drop of 63 percent in newly certified teachers since 2010. CTE educators are no exception to this alarming trend.

Ensuring student access to excellent educators with varied backgrounds and industry experience is critical. In addition to industry expertise for vocational certification, individuals must be trained in pedagogy, possess the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support their students, and have opportunities to collaborate with their fellow educators. PSEA urges the subcommittee to explore the issue of pathways for both CTE and vocational certification in greater detail, and we commend Senator Aument for his leadership on this issue.

Pennsylvania’s ability to have well-prepared vocational educators in classrooms now and in the long term, depends on all of us prioritizing the issue now. The question facing us is how to streamline high-quality preparation for individuals with industry experience and ultimately increase the pipeline of the most qualified to teach. The pathway for obtaining a vocational, industry-expert certification is more cumbersome than it needs to be. Often the individuals pursuing a vocational certification are industry experts who are likely pursuing education as a

second career or mission-driven work. These individuals must gain the necessary pedagogical skills to effectively teach their students and manage the classroom – but there may be options for modernizing how they acquire those skills both before and during their teaching than the options that are currently offered. Some of the existing challenges include:

- 1) Only three universities offer a vocational certificate for educators (Temple University, Penn State University, and Indiana University of Pennsylvania). Thus, flexibility and options for those seeking vocational certification are limited.
- 2) To achieve a Vocational II certification, individuals must secure 78 credits in no more than eight years –while working a full-time job under an Intern certificate. Previously, teachers were only required to obtain 60 credits for a Vocational II certificate but PDE changed its interpretation of the regulation roughly seven years ago to include an additional 18 credits. It remains unclear why this change was made and how it promotes educational excellence.
- 3) Currently, an applicant for certification on this path must have a high school diploma, and two years of relevant work experience in their field to qualify to take the Occupational Competency Assessment. From there, applicants can obtain an Intern certification and then be eligible to teach. One area of improvement our members feel very strongly about is that relevant work or trade experience should be increased from two years to four years to ensure the quality, relevance, and longevity of the work experience prior to an applicant’s entrance into the classroom.
- 4) The number of CTE-specific teacher preparation programs in PA are decreasing meaning there is no pathway for students to be taught by certified educators in certain industries in the future. Technology Education teacher programs, a vital program that is needed to provide the “T” in STEM education, is now only offered at two state universities in the commonwealth. Also, Family & Consumer Science teacher education programs are now limited to two state universities in the commonwealth.

In closing, thank you again for offering PSEA and our Career and Technical Educators the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. We look forward to working with you, your colleagues, and other key stakeholders on advancing a 21st Century CTE agenda for Pennsylvania.