

Chairwoman Culver, members of the Senate Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work to train students for rewarding careers in Pennsylvania.

My name is Curt Funkhouser, and I serve as the Administrative Director of the Columbia-Montour Area Vocational-Technical School (AVTS), a Career and Technical Education (CTE) center that serves students across multiple rural districts in Pennsylvania.

Our mission is to serve as a high-quality secondary education system that prepares students for a specific career, postsecondary education, military service, and lifelong learning.

We equip our students with the technical, academic, and employability skills necessary to succeed in the modern workplace and further education and training.

Our school is an extension of the educational programs of the six participating school districts, including Berwick Area School District, Bloomsburg Area School District, Central Columbia Area School District, Danville Area School District, Millville Area School District, and Southern Columbia Area School District. Columbia-Montour AVTS serves approximately 600 students.

Technical education at the Columbia-Montour AVTS offers students a range of educational options. We provide students with a selection of 17 training areas to choose from.

Ninth-grade students begin an exploratory program, rotating through four training areas throughout the year. Then, in tenth grade, students select one training program.

We align our programs with key regional industries, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, construction trades, and information technology. We want to ensure that our education is relevant to the businesses in our community.

Employers in our area rely on us to provide a skilled workforce that supports local economic growth.

It's our job to provide tactile training that prepares students for today's jobs, enabling them to build a career locally.

We appreciate everything the legislature has done to recognize the importance and value of career and technical education.

Our lawmakers recognize that there are multiple pathways to prosperous careers, and the increased focus and investment in our facilities and programs have helped expand access for more students while making our training innovative and relevant.

However, some policies can strengthen career and technical education in Pennsylvania.

### **Increased Funding for CTE Programs**

We encourage the legislature to increase the CTE subsidy to accommodate the rising enrollment of students and to offset the associated operational costs. Enrollment growth is a sign that more students are interested in pursuing career and technical education and understand the value of their careers. Still, without more funding, we will not be able to serve every student.

## **Increased Equipment Grant Funding**

We want our students to use the most up-to-date equipment in the field to receive proper training for jobs that require skilled workers. We need a dedicated funding stream for equipment upgrades. Industry partners expect us to train our students on modern equipment, but on our own, we often cannot afford the kind of innovative equipment our businesses use.

## **Building a Pipeline of CTE Educators**

Throughout Pennsylvania, there are challenges in finding workers to fill critical jobs. We are trying to solve this problem for local businesses, but unfortunately, we face a similar dearth of educators. We encourage the legislature to explore ways to help us cover tuition for intern certification credits and eliminate burdensome certification requirements, which would help attract skilled professionals into teaching roles.

Additionally, recognizing industry credentials in place of Occupational Competency Assessments (OCA) would open new pathways for skilled professionals to become educators.

## **Streamlining State Requirements**

Excessive administrative burdens divert time and resources away from students. Aligning required state reports and simplifying end-of-program assessments would free educators to focus on student success.

Career and Technical Education is a proven pathway to economic opportunity, especially in rural communities where our businesses need workers to drive economic growth and help build careers.

With the right investments and policy changes, we can expand access, modernize facilities, and ensure every student has a pathway to a fulfilling career.

## **Lack of Awareness and Perceived Stigma**

Many students, parents, and even educators lack awareness of the high-paying, in-demand careers available through Career and Technical Education (CTE). A perceived stigma still exists, labeling CTE as a pathway only for students not planning to attend college. Solution: Implement statewide CTE awareness campaigns to ensure that parents, school counselors, and students understand the full range of opportunities available, including dual enrollment, apprenticeships, and postsecondary pathways.

Thank you for your time and support of career and technical education in Pennsylvania.