

Skilled Workers Needed:

Ensuring Investments in Career and Technical Education

Each spring across Pennsylvania, hundreds of thousands of public school students don a cap and gown and collect their high school diploma, the culmination of years of hard work during their secondary education.

Many students will begin the next chapter working toward a four-year degree, or by joining the military, and thousands of other students will have already earned higher education credits, completed a pre-apprenticeship or gained on-the-job skills before graduation, thanks to the career and technical education (CTE) path they chose in high school.

Students who attend one of the state's career and technical education centers (CTCs) are job-ready and prepared to enter the workforce that awaits them, which, in Pennsylvania, presents numerous options across a variety of fields.

Unfortunately, a lack of sustained investments in career and technical education funding, and more broadly, basic education funding, has caused limited access for students who wish to enter the workforce immediately following graduation.

“For Pennsylvania to be an economic competitor, employers must first be able to find skilled employees to fill positions that will sustain their business and contribute to the state’s economy. Career and technical education programs like those offered in York County prepare students to meet workforce demands, and continued state investments are critical to ensuring students get the skills they need to enter the workforce.”

– Deborah Rohrbaugh, Associate Director,
Kinsley Education Center, York



LACK OF CTE FUNDING LIMITS STUDENT ACCESS

Governor Wolf and the General Assembly recognize the value of investing in career and technical education and, over the past several years, both the Senate and House have thoroughly explored this topic and made important policy recommendations covering a wide array of solutions.

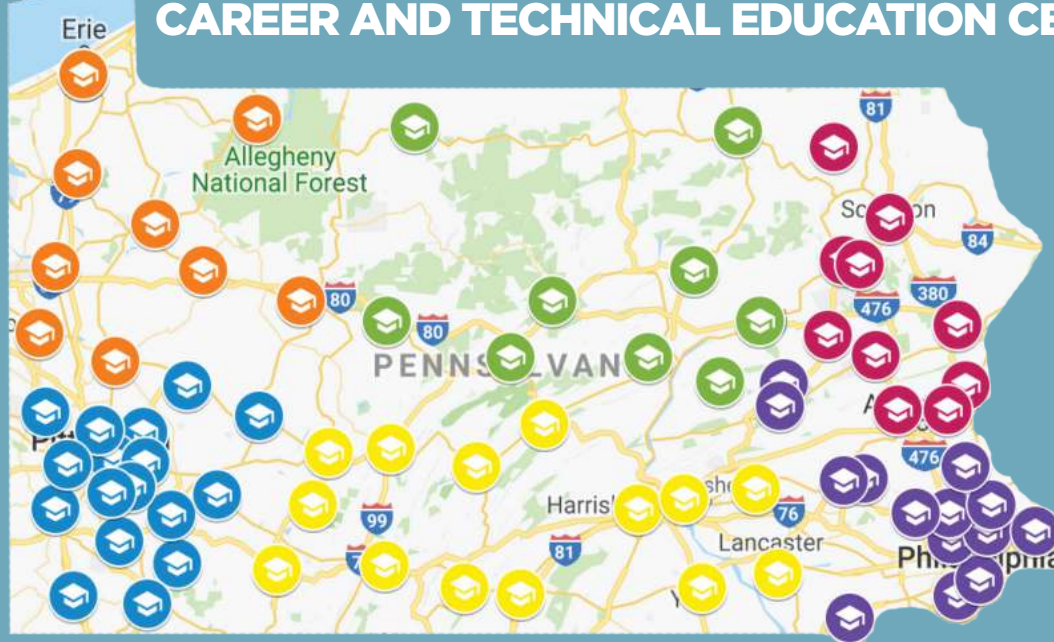
However, it wasn't until the 2018-19 state budget – for the first time in nearly a decade – that Pennsylvania policymakers increased funding for career and technical education. While investments were included as part of a broader initiative advanced by the Governor known as the PAsmart initiative, \$10 million was specifically allocated for the Career and Technical Education Subsidy, driving the funds directly to CTCs and school districts with these programs.






Business leaders, county economic development organizations, local workforce investment boards, and other stakeholders acknowledge that not every student will choose the same path after graduation and view career and technical education as a necessary component of Pennsylvania's public education system.

Access to career and technical education is determined by the home school districts that send students to each CTC, and they also determine the number of students allowed to enroll. The process for deciding who can attend varies by district.

Pennsylvania currently has 74 career and technical education centers that educate approximately 55,000 students across the Commonwealth.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION MAP OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTERS¹



-  Northwest Pennsylvania CTC's
-  Southwest Pennsylvania CTC's
-  Central/North Central Pennsylvania CTC's
-  South Central Pennsylvania CTC's
-  Northeast Pennsylvania CTC's
-  Southeast Pennsylvania CTC's

Unfortunately, CTE is not available to all students who want to attend because many school districts simply cannot afford to enroll all interested students in those programs. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, there are 13 school districts in Pennsylvania that are not affiliated with a CTC and do not offer career and technical education themselves or contract with other districts for these services. To compensate, some school districts have internal career exploration programs that allow students to research certain career pathways, but it is not guaranteed that these offerings will include technical or hands-on experience as part of the curriculum.

The state Career and Technical Education Subsidy represents less than 8 percent of the total cost to fund career and technical education and federal Carl D. Perkins funding covers roughly 2 percent of a CTC's budget. **That leaves member school districts paying approximately 90 percent of the overall budget to send students to CTCs.** At a time when many school districts in the state are continuing to struggle to meet basic education costs, this portion of the tab they are expected to pay for CTE is an added burden. In addition, competitive equipment grants of up to \$100,000 (requiring a \$50,000 local match) are available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education but help defray only a fraction of costs associated with providing a quality CTE experience.

Career and technical education is an integral part of the state system of economic and workforce development.

However, the Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators believes the lack of significant state investments, coupled with CTE costs and the rising cost of basic education at school districts may compromise CTE quality and its ability to support Pennsylvania's workforce and economic development. The method of funding career and technical education in Pennsylvania places the majority of costs on school districts, and the lack of adequate career and technical education subsidy has caused school districts to reduce enrollments at CTCs. The current level of state subsidy for CTE may serve as a disincentive to allowing students to enroll in career and technical education.²

“Students with access to career and technical education – like that offered by Centre County’s three career and technical education centers – will enter the workforce motivated and prepared to contribute to our economy. We need to ensure that students who choose this pathway to the postsecondary and career opportunities that await them can access career and technical education, because CTE is essential to meeting today’s workforce demands.”

– Vern Squier, President and CEO, Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County (CBICC)

CTE HELPS STUDENTS DEVELOP SKILLS EMPLOYERS SEEK

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a strong interest in promoting a competitive workforce equipped with the technical skills desired by employers, and the state's system of career and technical education and workforce development programs, offered by secondary and postsecondary entities, is central to achieving this goal of ensuring that prospective employees can meet this demand and pursue meaningful careers.³

However, budget constraints on school districts mean fewer students have access to career and technical education. This is troublesome because data show that career fields requiring CTE backgrounds are growing in demand.

CTE prepares students for a range of in-demand jobs that can offer pathways to middle-class careers in new media, health care, construction, today's high-tech manufacturing sector and even the law.

Career and technical education students gain soft skills to acquire positions across 15 career clusters, and as leading educators recognize, CTE does far more than that. For many students, applied learning—or real-world use in actual jobs of math and other STEM competences and the ability to write and communicate well—is a powerful educational approach. This incorporates learning-by-doing, project-based learning, peer learning and the kind of work-based learning growing across Pennsylvania in pre-apprenticeships, internships and summer jobs. These learning methods resemble how people learn skills on the job, so it is hardly a surprise that they are effective in developing the skills employers seek.

In Pennsylvania employers are continuing to struggle to find qualified employees to fill vacancies, and yet, these positions go unfilled because prospective workers do not have the educational or professional background demanded by today's economy. This disconnect between the needs of employers and the skill set of prospective employees, often referred to as a "skills gap," threatens to hinder the growth of the state's economy, impacting industry and regions across the state and discouraging employers from hiring.⁴

The state must be equipped to meet the demand to sustain economic growth and competitiveness.

FASTEST GROWING OCCUPATIONS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Audio & Video Equipment Technicians (Career Cluster: Arts, Audio/Video Technology & Communications)



Computer Numerically Controlled Machine Programmers (Career Cluster: Manufacturing)



Life, Physical & Social Science Technicians (Career Cluster: Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics)



Paralegals & Legal Assistants (Career Cluster: Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security)



Web Developers (Career Cluster: Information Technology)



CTE INVESTMENTS ARE GOOD FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S ECONOMY

The \$10 million investment in the Career and Technical Education Subsidy was an important first step in the 2018-19 state budget, as was the PAsmart initiative seeking to make CTE and guided career pathways education more universal through work-based learning such as pre-apprenticeships, internships, co-ops and summer employment.

Prioritizing CTE funding will ensure that all students who wish to be career-ready after graduation are prepared to enter the workforce and that no student lacks appropriate access to these programs. **As such, an additional investment of \$10 million in the CTE subsidy is needed as part of the 2019-20 state budget.**

This is an important slice of state dollars supporting public education. On a broader level, increasing the amount of basic education funding in the 2019-20 state budget will help alleviate

additional financial pressures faced by school districts that struggle to fund CTE programs. Significant steps have been made in this area in the past several state budgets but additional investments – specifically \$400 million in the 2019-20 budget – are needed to adequately fund public schools in the Commonwealth.

Access to training with industry-grade materials and equipment is a necessary component of many technical education programs.⁵ Funding for equipment grants available to CTE programs must remain a priority.

Workforce development is key to Pennsylvania's economic development. By investing in career and technical education, Pennsylvania students will be better prepared to enter the workforce following graduation.



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