

Testimony to the
House Education Select Subcommittee on
Technical Education and Career Readiness

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A. W. Beattie Career Center is located in the northern section of Allegheny County. The Career Center serves the school districts of: Avonworth, Deer Lakes, Fox Chapel Area, Hampton Township, North Allegheny, North Hills, Northgate, Pine-Richland and Shaler Area. Our student enrollment consists of tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students, with a limited number of post-graduate students completing certification hours. The Career Center is classified as a part-time half-day program with students enrolled in an AM or PM session and the other half of the day with their high school.

Integrated into our curriculum is an extensive externship component that consists of: job shadowing, clinical experiences, internships and Cooperative Education employment. Our students participate in a highly engaged student volunteer program and our students assist Junior Achievement of Western PA with a number of programs offered at the elementary and middle school level.

The Career Center in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh's Confucius Institute offers Mandarin Chinese Language to school district across Allegheny, Beaver and Erie Counties. Graduate volunteer instructors from Wuhan University offer Mandarin at four instructional levels via distance learning from A. W. Beattie Career Center.

We believe that A. W. Beattie is on the cutting edge of Career and Technical Education as we prepare our students for their "NEXT STEPS".

Background:

Career and Technical Education (CTE) has undergone significant reshaping in the last twenty years in response to the United States focus on the global economy. There has been a revision in legislation targeted to improving the focus on education and the quality of our workforce. Everyone agrees that our nation's education is essential to the quality of its workforce and the integration of career and technical education is paramount to the development of a student's technical skills and knowledge to become productive employees and remain Pennsylvania residents. Therefore, basic education and career and technical education is a joint venture that is imperative to "workforce development". Workforce development is the catalyst for economic development, which is vital for Pennsylvania residents securing a higher standard of living. The results of solid economic development enhance the regional tax base through growth and will aid in the development of educational resources to support student skill development. The link between a successful economy and education and the economy is imperative.

Within A. W. Beattie Career Center we have realized and recognized that we have the responsibility to demonstrate that our programs are meeting rigor and relevance that prepares students for success. In cutting edge high schools across the nation CTE has transitioned from a pure elective to a career major. Locally, we within CTE struggle with parents understanding the value of a student's career pathway within CTE. At A. W. Beattie we have developed the motto of "Creating NEXT STEPS to Your Future", preparing students to be college and career ready. Parents still believe that it is either college prep or career development.

CTE needs to be universally viewed as part of the college and career prep track. Each of our program offerings maintains college articulation agreements with a variety of post-secondary institutions that offer industry skill certifications through bachelor degrees. Our post-secondary articulations range from three to twenty-two credits and adhere to our Program of Studies (POS). With the steep cost of today's post-secondary education, parents should be looking for options that lessen future student debt. Parents need to understand that we are required to develop and deliver twenty first century college and career ready technical education programs that have high standards, high expectations, and are under continuous revisions. The implementation of the CTE Comprehensive Planning structure ensures that CTE's are reviewed. Ensuring all CTE programs meet the PA Department of Education guidelines of continually improvement. The continued quality of career and technical education requires a supportive learning community, knowledgeable leadership, with qualified and dedicated staffs throughout, and an understanding of processes and policies.

Rigor and Relevance:

Today's CTE student must be prepared for their "NEXT STEPS". The idea that students should only leave the high school setting with a general diploma is fast disappearing. CTE students are able to earn industry standard credentials that are required for entry level employment positions and beyond. Our HVAC students, as an example, have the opportunity to earn their OSHA-10 Safety Awareness Certification, along with their EPA 608 credential for the handling of refrigerant

gas. These industry credentials are the pathway to employment while in high school and upon completion. Industry credentials provide the student the advantage, by providing the "NEXT STEP" to their career development process and demonstrate to an employer the students understanding of the skill set needed to be career and college ready.

The students also participate in an end of program assessment, referred to as the NOCTI exam (National Occupational Competency Testing). This written and hands on assessment gauges a student's ability across a national referenced set of industry specific skills. Over the last three years the senior class scored at the 94% Competent or Advanced level on the written assessments and an 84% Competent or Advanced level on the hands-on performance assessments. These achievements along with implementation of the Program of Studies (POS) rigor enable students to achieve advanced college standing as they enter post-secondary studies. For some of our students that has led to a sophomore level status after the completion of their first semester at the post- secondary level.

This year we were fortunate to offer Health and Nursing Sciences dual enrollment program with grant assistance through the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board. Beattie has 32 students participating in a three credit medical terminology class through CCAC, where the students will have the opportunity to document their achievement on a college transcript. The funding for this activity came through a Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board and focused on student gaining industry credentials and college dual enrollment credits.

Additionally, through this funding opportunity we have been able to engage approximately 17 students in stipend job shadowing or employment opportunities over the last 10 months and approximately 45 students will have the cost of an industry related credential paid for upon successful completion.

Pennsylvania maintains a structure of Occupational Advisory Community members (OAC) that guide our instructors with the integration of industry standards into our instructional curriculum. This vital linkage to the industry sector meets multiple times on a yearly basis to ensure that curriculum and equipment are current to industry standards. Many of these individuals and their employers support our students through the variety of externship opportunities that we offer. These relationships are also a source of the many donations of materials we receive to support the hands-on component of the daily instruction. This vital structure of community and industry partnerships is a guiding force behind a solid and dedicated CTE Center.

Student and Parent Awareness:

I believe that a day does not go by in the CTE realm that we do not find ourselves discussing a misconception of Career & Technical Education. With the positive impacts of advanced college credits, industry certifications, outstanding graduation rates, and solid employment upon completion of our programs, there still are misconceptions that we must address.

Across our little Southwest pocket, the Career Centers have actively engaged the resources of each other and discuss various way to address the same misconceptions we face. The problem

is the misconception among parents. Parents, not all, still believe the old style of CTE is the norm, that only students that cannot be successful attend a career center. There is a disconnect on awareness of needed career skill to be prepared for today's economy. The integrated components of math and science alone in today's high tech products such as the automobile and your home HVAC system require that technical expertise.

Example: The new CTS Cadillac has incorporated into the suspension system a pothole avoidance system when the suspension sensor determines a variance in the road system, the sensor locks the suspension to lessen the impact of a potential issue. At the same time the system is monitoring the speed of the vehicle and initiates the same procedure for the rear suspension before it encounters the hazard so the tire flows over the variance.

Imagine the STEAM skills required to repair just this issue from a vehicle collision.

Through the outstanding efforts developed through the Chapter 339 school counseling plans, school districts are strengthening their partnership with their CTE to provide student career awareness around the fifth grade; this needs to become a commonwealth wide initiative. CTE's and school districts working together should be promoting their best practices and sharing resources to prepare all students for college and career readiness. The competition level should be about engaging students, not who is the top school district.

Students and parents struggle where to locate information related to employment. There needs to be an honest and open discussion of all possibilities as students make educational decisions about their future. Information sharing needs to be an honest sharing among education and employment stakeholders. Parents do not understand the 1-2-7 paradigm of employment that is reflective of one advanced degree position supported by two mid-level degree positions that require support from seven technical level positions; that usually requires less than a Bachelor's degree, but some type of certification or recognized credential. The support of the business community to effectively communicate entry level positions and career employment ladders will improve the knowledge gap of parents and students. The assistance of a statewide public awareness campaign of the benefits of an integrated CTE curriculum would assist in changing the misconceptions of the old CTE.

Labor data demonstrates that in many employment sectors we are lacking a qualified workforce today. How are we going to fix those positions and any newly generated opportunities without preparing qualified students today?