

Testimony of Dan Fogarty
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Berks County Workforce Development Board
House Subcommittee on Career and Technical Education
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My name is Dan Fogarty, and I am the Director of Workforce Development and Chief Operating Officer of the Berks County Workforce Development Board. On behalf of the Board, I want to thank the subcommittee for this opportunity to offer testimony regarding the good work our local board is doing in regards to career and technical education.

For those with the proper education and training, 2016 is a great time to begin a career in Pennsylvania's key industry sectors, and you don't need a four-year degree to get started. This is certainly true in Berks County. Over the past five years, we continued adding jobs in both the Advanced Manufacturing and Health Care sectors. Today, I will focus my comments on the attractive opportunities in manufacturing sector, as it remains Berks County's largest sector by employment and by economic impact.

Berks County's manufacturing employers provide highly competitive, family-sustaining wages and benefits to more than 30,000 employees and their families in the region. Within this sector, technical skill and education requirements are projected to continue to increase. Our largest employer in Berks County, East Penn Manufacturing, employs over 7,000 employees and is in a period of sustained growth. East Penn reports that their manufacturing operations are highly sophisticated, with automated equipment built upon complex computer-controlled networks. The people who run and maintain their manufacturing operations require a higher level of technical skills. While these are the types of candidates that our career and technical centers and Reading Area Community College (RACC) are providing to East Penn Manufacturing through initiatives like the Industrial Maintenance/Mechatronics program, there are simply not enough people pursuing these types of careers.

Despite continuing productivity improvements, manufacturing employers need talent to replace their aging workforce. It takes 2-4 years to train entry-level workers for skilled manufacturing occupations. We are making progress, but we need to continue to build interest in careers in advanced manufacturing, particularly among school students and their parents.

Fortunately for businesses in Berks County like East Penn Manufacturing, local education, economic development, workforce development and government leaders recognize and have responded to their needs for technical skills and education. We have sustained a five-year public awareness campaign, Careers in Two Years, aimed at youth, parents and educators. The Berks County Workforce Development Board recently provided funding from the Commonwealth to the Greater Reading Economic Partnership to update campaign materials and widen the focus to out-of-school young adults and returning veterans.

We have a great public school system in Berks County, especially our elementary and intermediate schools. However, in the 21st century competition is international, and now good careers

require entry-level candidates with at least 11th grade math, reading and writing skills. To be competitive and continuously improve, even entry-level employees need to have analytical and complex problem-solving skills. Too many Berks County workers -- even many with high school diplomas -- lack proficiency in core skills. There is not a lot that employers can do in the short-term to make up for these deficiencies.

Young adults often pursue a four-year college education only to learn they may not necessarily find an interesting career with family-sustaining wages. This is not just a local or statewide problem, but a national problem. Two weeks ago, I attended a presentation by a national education expert at the State Workforce Development Board meeting who shared that 15% of taxi cab drivers in the United State have at least a Bachelor's degree and that 25% of retail workers do as well. Many of these under-employed college graduates wish they had known about other opportunities. To confront this issue and educate the public about alternatives to conventional four-year degree programs, Berks County is working with employers to develop affordable pathways to skilled technical jobs. Berks County has a fully aligned infrastructure already in place, including two CTC's with strong technical programs and RACC's Schmidt Technology and Training Center, and resulting in attractive career pathways that appeal to Berks County employers. This work has now been completed, and each year more students get started on this career path through our Technical Academies in Mechatronics / Industrial Maintenance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the subcommittee on the role of the Berks County Workforce Development Board and career and technical education.