



Testimony of William Thompson  
Executive Director  
Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Development Board  
House Subcommittee on Career and Technical Education  
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My name is William Thompson and I am Executive Director of the Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Development Board serving the residents and businesses of Westmoreland and Fayette Counties.

I have spent over 30 years of my career in the public workforce system. I have spent the majority of that time in executive level positions. From this vantage point, technical and career education has always been the number one issue that local businesses have expressed as a trend they would like to see accelerate in our public schools.

As you are aware, with the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) are in the midst of transition. LWDBs will continue to have responsibility for the role of convener, and strategic leader of the workforce development system stakeholders. The Boards will have revised structure. They are still business-led Boards with membership from the education community, public sector and other community groups.

Our Board is a 501c corporation chartered with the fiduciary, policy and administrative functions in cooperation with our County Commissioners. We have located our office, as well as two of our PA CareerLinks<sup>®</sup> Centers, on the campus of Westmoreland County Community College.

The decision to locate on the Community College campus was based on the importance the Board places on connecting the existing workforce with the career and technical skills needed in our local economy and in today's labor market.

The goal of providing quality technical education and career readiness for students is an initiative that has been at the forefront of the Board's actions. The significance has been reinforced by labor market data, business council policy statements, and economic development studies and in research based organization publications. (See Footnotes)

A workforce that is trained in the skills needed to grow and advance our local economies is critical not only across the Commonwealth but of particular importance to Western Pennsylvania.

The rest of my testimony today will address the Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Development Board's initiatives to improve Technical Education and Career Readiness in our local schools.

#### Engaging Business, Education, Community Members across Westmoreland and Fayette County

In 2010, the Workforce Development Board convened, a county-based Town Hall meeting, to discuss career & technical education and identify action steps to connect best practices with opportunities for all students. The process led to direct WIOA investments and tax credit legislation benefiting career and technical schools.

The Board provides direct financial support to expand work-based learning, (internships, job sharing, and summer employment), career exploration camps, professional development, Southwestern Pennsylvania BotsIQ and Fluid Power Challenge. BotsIQ has grown from six CTC Centers with 50 students to over 67 high schools reaching over 1,000 students. The project mission is to build the current and future workforce needed by the manufacturing industry. Fluid Power Challenge is a competition that challenges eight grade students to solve an engineering problem using fluid power. Last year, 10 Westmoreland-Fayette schools participated in the challenge. All of these opportunities are supported both with WIOA funds and a PA Dept. of Labor and Industry Business-Education Partnership Grant. The Board staff and PA CareerLink<sup>®</sup> staff actively participate in career readiness activities led by individual school districts and local chambers.

The board is an active member in County-based collaborative activities that address career and technical education. In Westmoreland County, we are a charter member of the Westmoreland County Forum for Workforce Development a membership organization of all 17 school districts, three Career & Technical Centers, post-secondary institutions, economic development, chamber of commerce and local businesses. This larger partnership has made technical education and career readiness the number one priority for the organization's agenda.

In Fayette County, the Workforce Board co-chairs the Fayette Business-Education Partnership. The Fayette Chamber of Commerce and the Fay Penn Economic Development Council make up the rest of the leadership team. The Fayette Business Education Partnership is comprised of Fayette County public schools, Penn State Fayette, Eberly Campus, and the Career & Technical Center. The group has been a leader in 8<sup>th</sup> grade career fairs, Fluid Power Challenge, entrepreneurship programs and a platform for sharing best practices.

### Conclusion

In light of the needs of the modern economy, Career and Technical Education can no longer be on the periphery of the education system's agenda. The system must encompass technical and career education as an avenue to help students achieve success as productive citizens and future members of our workforce.

Local Workforce Boards with sufficient resources can be an important member of larger partnership of industry, education, economic development and business affiliated organizations that view technical & career education as a key component of economic growth in our local communities.

Our contribution can be executed in several ways:

1. Engage more employers to connect with implementation of technical and career education programs.
2. Link schools officials to work experience opportunities for their students
3. Engage the public sector to promote technical & career education to parents and students as a viable means of student success.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on the role of Workforce Boards.

Footnotes: National Research Center for Career & Technical Education, [www.nrccte.org](http://www.nrccte.org);  
Pathways to Prosperity, [www.gse.lsu.edu](http://www.gse.lsu.edu);  
Inflection Point: Supply, Demand and the Future of Work in the Pittsburgh Region, [www.AlleghenyConference.org](http://www.AlleghenyConference.org).