

Testimony in support of Straight A Fund  
Ohio Senate, Finance Subcommittee on K-12 Education

Charles A. Speelman, Superintendent  
Tri-Rivers Career Center  
Home of RAMTEC

Chairman Hite, Vice Chairman Sawyer, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Straight A Fund that has been proposed as part of the Governor's biennial budget. My name is Charles Speelman, and as the Superintendent of Tri-Rivers Career Center, I would like to thank you for the General Assembly's support of the Straight A Fund in the last biennial budget and I want to encourage you to support to current request for the continuation of the Straight A Innovation Funding.

In round two of the funding cycle last year, Tri-Rivers Career Center, as lead district, applied to the Straight A Fund to replicate our "best practice" RAMTEC training model on a statewide basis. RAMTEC stands for Robotics & Advanced Manufacturing Technology Education Collaborative. After receiving the award of Straight A Grant Funds we have been able to add many world-class companies to the list of strategic partners. Currently several billion dollar manufacturing and business partners have aligned with the RAMTEC model. Interestingly, 5 of the 7 companies have their world or U.S headquarters in Ohio. Manufacturing industries are critical to Ohio and supporting these industries through our educational institutions are essential to Ohio's Economic & Future Development. Ohio currently ranks third in the nation behind only California and Texas in manufacturing output with over 80.7 billion dollars in output, which accounts for a stunning 95% of Ohio's exports, which is 16.7% of Ohio's Gross State Product.

Last year there was only one school in the nation that had high school students graduating with industry recognized and certified Robotic Operation and Programming Training, and that school was Tri-Rivers Career Center. As part of the RAMTEC Straight A expansion, we will have 8 additional sites that will be coming online to help address the skilled trade shortages that exist within the manufacturing trades. The results from this past year have been astounding as we are training educators, students and incumbent workers from across the state. We need a different approach if we are going to address the over 80,000 current unfilled skilled trade jobs that exist within manufacturing throughout Ohio. RAMTEC recently received the 2014 Excellence in Ohio Workforce Development Innovation Award by the Ohio Economic Development Association, for the most outstanding Workforce Development program in the state. When is the last time that a program funded and expanded through the Ohio Department of Education received an award for Economic Development? What needs to be realized that this has turned from an expense to an investment in our states future.

As a result local business and industry is visiting our center when they are looking to locate, relocate or expand within our area. Every community and state is trying to attract business and industry with the best package of tax abatements, special funding, free dirt and the like, but we have decided to provide the best trained workforce available and it's working. Soon we will be announcing a major new industry moving to our area that will include over 250 skilled jobs and they cited the RAMTEC & Tri-Rivers Career Center as a major factor in choosing our area.

I don't believe we have an education problem across our state, but I do believe that we do have a misalignment of our educational resources. As you know, in career tech we work every day to ensure that our students are both college and career ready, and appreciate that partnership we have with the state and the Straight A Fund to make this happen. Current job postings show that 30% of the current available jobs require a 4-year degree or more, while only 15% require a high school diploma or less, that means the majority of available jobs require training or certifications beyond most current high school programs. Many of these jobs fall in the skilled trade areas being taught in these innovative programs like RAMTEC across the state. As education and business work together to address these shortages it's important to bring all parties to the table and share these resources. We can't wait for the problem to get worse before finding a solution and that solution is going to have to involve getting students interested and exposed to these skilled trade at a younger age, which is another component of our straight A fund. We look forward to continue to work at the speed of business and hope that this committee continues their support of the Straight A Fund.

Chairman Hite, thank you for your time. This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.