

**Testimony of
Dave Powell
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Before the House Finance
Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

Hearing on
Project Lead The Way Programs
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Good Morning members of the committee, my name is Dave Powell, and I am the Director of Plant Engineering and Compliance Programs for American Electric Power here in Columbus. One of the best parts about my testimony before you today is that I am purposefully keeping it short and sweet—because the speakers testifying right after me have a very impressive story to share. These students and their former teacher are the real deal.

I also serve as Chairman of the Executive Council for Project Lead The Way Ohio. I have volunteered in this capacity for over 13 years. The Project Lead The Way Executive Council is a group of business and industry leaders who have come together to work with educators across Ohio to promote the growth and sustainability of Project Lead The Way programs. Since the Executive Council was formed, we have grown from 14 programs in 2004 to over 500 programs today, serving about 1/3rd of all local school districts in Ohio.

Project Lead The Way is having a tremendous impact by helping prepare an excellent workforce in the State of Ohio. As an engineer, I am compelled to take action when I read reports that the United States is in the middle of the pack of 65 industrialized nations in science and math preparation of our high school students. Neither the United States, nor the State of Ohio, can afford to lose our competitive advantage in STEM fields with the ever-increasing rate of technological change. In fact, it has been reported by the US Department of Commerce that

STEM-related jobs will grow by 17%, compared to 9.8% for all other occupations.¹ It is imperative that we improve the college-and-career preparation of our students, and Project Lead The Way has the answer.

Starting at an early age, and continuing throughout their K-12 career, Project Lead The Way students can earn skills in biomedical science, computer science, and engineering coursework. As the birthplace of aviation—in Ohio, we have a strong focus on making sure that students have the opportunity to earn skills in aerospace engineering, aviation, and technology.

The skills that students earn through Project Lead The Way translate into very good, well-paying jobs, and professional careers. Using aerospace engineering as an example, the annual mean wage for aerospace engineers in Ohio is over \$107,000 annually—over \$50.00 an hour. We are the #4 state in the nation for employing aerospace engineers—competing with more heavily populated states such as Florida and Texas.²

As you see in your legislative briefings, that is why business, industry, higher education leaders, and K-12 educators have all offered their full support and endorsement for expanding Project Lead The Way programs across Ohio. More students need access to these excellent learning opportunities so that employers can recruit and hire more Ohioans.

I want to be very clear that business and industry leaders in Ohio need many more workers with the advanced, real-world skills that Project Lead The Way programs will help students earn. We have already seen success when state leaders such as yourselves take bold action to align K-12,

¹ http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/stemfinaljuly14_1.pdf

² <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes172011.htm>

post-secondary, and ultimately workforce needs. And now we have an opportunity to accomplish even more.

From a business perspective, the return on investment of a Project Lead The Way program is crystal clear. Students graduate high school better prepared and more interested in pursuing high-wage, high-demand careers.

I have seen firsthand the tremendous impact this program has had in our local communities. I will never forget a graduation luncheon in Lawrence County, when parents were in tears thanking us for the Project Lead The Way program because their child was the first in the family to attend college. I will also never forget a sophomore at Akron Garfield High School who was able to precisely communicate concepts of statics and strength of materials that I did not learn until my sophomore year at THE Ohio State.

Throughout Ohio as we are meeting here today—some students have amazing learning opportunities through Project Lead The Way. Now, we have an opportunity to take another step in the right direction and support further expansion of Project Lead The Way programs so that more students will have access to life changing learning opportunities.

PLTW has clearly delivered on their mission to provide students with academic and applied learning courses that prepare them for college and career. And this nonprofit organization is clearly committed to, and invested in Ohio.

I am proud of the support that our business and industry partners have already made, and will continue to make, in Project Lead The Way. With your support, I am certain that the sky is the limit for what we can accomplish by working together.

The students and their former teacher following me have a powerful story to share. I am thrilled I did not have to testify after them.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here and for providing this opportunity to highlight a very good opportunity for our state. We appreciate your leadership and everything you do for the State of Ohio.