



**Ohio Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee
Hearing on Senate Bill 178 (Dept. of Education & Workforce)**

Joint Proponent Testimony of the Ohio Association for Career-Technical Education (Ohio ACTE) & the Ohio Association of Career-Technical Superintendents (OACTS)

November 29, 2022

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer our perspective on SB 178—legislation that proposes restructuring the Ohio Department of Education in order to elevate, emphasize, and expand Career-Technical Education (CTE). We submit this proponent testimony on behalf of the Ohio Association for Career Technical Education and the Ohio Association of Career Technical Superintendents. These Associations not only represent the state’s 89 career-technical schools, but also its 49 Ohio Technical Centers (OTCs)—which focus on short-term adult technical training to meet Ohio’s diverse, regional workforce needs.

To understand the relevance of SB 178 to our schools, teachers, administrators and students, one must first consider the history of CTE in Ohio as well as the current educational framework. The state established its nationally recognized career-technical education system over fifty years ago under the leadership of Governor Jim Rhodes and Ohio Department of Education Director Byrl Shoemaker. Working closely with policymakers, educators and administrators, Governor Rhodes, Director Shoemaker and the state legislature formed the initial 49 Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs) which are still in existence today. Their innovative vision called for the JVSD to efficiently coordinate CTE programs across its member area school districts, and to deliver quality, relevant technical training. Under this organizational structure, all Ohio students are guaranteed access to in-demand career-technical programs that will prepare them for higher education or any number of prosperous careers.

As Ohio grew over the years policymakers continued to build on this solid foundation in an effort to further improve CTE. The educational framework has evolved to now include 89 “Career Technical Planning Districts” (CTPDs)—regions established strategically throughout the state to ensure every student continues to have access to CTE opportunities. Each CTPD utilizes one of three “delivery-models” (i.e., type of school): 1) JVSDs, also known as Career Centers, which serve several member school districts as outlined above; 2) Comprehensives, which are typically large, traditional school districts with sufficient student enrollment to independently offer their own career technical programs; and 3) Compacts, which are groups of school districts that share delivery and costs for career technical programs through service agreements.

Ohio’s unique, robust, and highly coordinated infrastructure is the national model for high school and adult career-technical education and is consistently acknowledged, studied, and praised for its success—especially in recent years, as states across the country grapple with unprecedented education and workforce issues.

Success never comes easy, and our operations require significant effort and constant attention. Each CTPD employs a diverse array of staff—including teachers, administrators, and office personnel—to move CTE forward in the region and deliver educational, workforce, and economic benefits to students and businesses alike. Their tireless work requires strong state administrative support, as well as the ability to react quickly to an ever-changing workforce and policy landscape. To that end, we have been pleased with the assistance of our partners at the Ohio Department of Education and its office of Career-Technical Education. Our collaboration and communication have improved significantly over the years and ODE’s CTE personnel remain an incredibly helpful resource. But there is always room for improvement—especially as government leaders seek to greatly expand career-tech statewide. Hence our support for SB 178, which would place a higher emphasis on our sector by developing a Division of Career-Technical Education within the new Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) that stands equal to its proposed counterpart, the Division of Primary and Secondary Education.

As CTE administrators will likely explain in SB 178 testimony, there are currently several layers of “decision-makers” within the current agency hierarchy that fall between our school administrators and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The State Superintendent must also report to the State Board of Education, which works with the Governor to set education policy. SB 178 eliminates much of this bureaucracy, establishing one Deputy Director for the new Division of Career-Technical Education who would interface with the Governor and sit on his Executive Workforce Board. At the same time, this individual would work directly with our schools to implement and strategically expand CTE programming and otherwise better educate students about CTE opportunities / potential career pathways.

We welcome this timely legislation as it aligns with the current Administration and legislature’s overarching goal of growing career-tech and otherwise enhancing workforce and economic development across the state. We thank members of the legislature (and bill sponsor Senator Reineke) for the proposed elevated status and spotlight on our students and schools.

We note our testimony is limited to addressing the agency restructuring provisions of SB 178, given our area of expertise as CTE educators and administrators. We also seek to emphasize that partnership between the two Divisions throughout implementation of this proposed restructuring is very important, as the quality of career technical programming offered within all 89 CTPDs aligns directly with the state’s current goal for students to be enrolled, employed, enlisted, or engaged in a meaningful, self-sustaining vocation within one year of high school graduation. The CTE community is cautious that its support of SB 178 is not seen as a threat to K-12 education—rather, it is an opportunity to elevate our voice and unique educational opportunities, and ensure CTE is viewed on the same level, and as essential, as all other academic offerings for students in Ohio. In fact, career technical education and academics are not mutually exclusive; the ideal educational opportunity for students would support both facets equally.

Thank you for considering this important legislation at an incredibly significant inflection point for state education policy. We would be happy to address any questions at the committee’s convenience.

Maggie Hess, Executive Director
MHess@OACTS.com