



**Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
State Operating Budget (HB 33)
March 22, 2023**

**Testimony of the Career-Technical Education Associations
(Ohio ACTE, OACTS, Ohio CCS)
Brian Bontempo, Superintendent, Auburn Career Center**

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Brian Bontempo, Superintendent of Auburn Career Center, and I am testifying on behalf my school, the Auburn Career Center (primarily serving Lake and Geauga Counties), as well as the state's 89 career technical schools—including its 49 Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs), 24 comprehensives & 16 compacts, and 52 Ohio Technical Centers (OTCs)—all of which are represented by the Ohio Association for Career Technical Education (Ohio ACTE), the Ohio Association of Career Technical Superintendents (OACTS), and the Ohio Association of Comprehensive and Compact Career Technical Schools (Ohio CCS). Collectively, these associations represent the entire career-technical education (CTE) community in Ohio, including its schools, educators, administrators, and the students they serve.

Ohio offers career-tech through 89 "Career Technical Planning Districts" (CTPDs)—regions established strategically throughout the state to ensure every student has access to CTE opportunities. Each CTPD utilizes one of three "delivery-models" at the high school level: 1) Joint Vocational School Districts (JVSDs), also known as Career Centers, which serve several member school districts and provide career technical programming to those member districts; 2) Comprehensives, which are typically large, traditional school districts that are big enough to independently offer their own CTE programming; and 3) Compacts, which are multiple school districts that share delivery and costs for career-tech through service agreements.

Auburn Career Center is located in Concord, Ohio and serves 10 member districts across 3 counties. We have 23 high school programs and have seen substantial growth over the last five years as the advantages of Career Technical Education become more evident and the NE Ohio Region supports and elevates the importance of skilled trades. Auburn is also a thriving (adult ed.) Ohio Technical Center (OTC), serving adults in 5 counties with programs focusing on the major workforce areas of Manufacturing, the trades, and healthcare. Just this year we have worked with nearly 30 businesses for customized training programs and many more across the Northeast Ohio region. We are invested and well connected to our workforce community. Programs such as "Earn and Learn" in partnership with Lincoln Electric, an apprenticeship program with the Alliance for Working Together (the manufacturing sector partner for our region) highlight how we work with regional businesses to meet their workforce needs. Additionally, we were recently awarded a grant from Ohio Office of Developmental Disabilities to develop a program for recent graduates to earn a credential and enter the workforce. Through these strong long-standing partnerships with business and industry, students are offered internships, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities that benefit the local community as well as the state and regional economy.

I would like to begin by emphasizing that this is one of the most positive state operating budgets for high school and adult career technical education in Ohio's history. The CTE community and its leaders are once again energized by the emphasis placed on our sector, and the overwhelming support from state and local policymakers and our communities as a whole. What an exciting time to be a CTE student, educator, or administrator!

As part of the state operating budget bill (HB 33), our schools continue to focus on the following issues to further strengthen CTE in Ohio:

1. **Funding for CTE Facility Expansion:** We are incredibly grateful that the DeWine-Husted budget proposal contains \$200M over the biennium to support CTPD facility expansion. As we have emphasized over the last several years, a clear impediment to the growth of our sector is simply our limited building capacity. CTE facility needs are unique given the extensive space necessary to conduct training across numerous different career-technical programs—all of which require large equipment. The cost associated with any capital project (new build or renovation) is consistently high. To maximize the state's investment in CTE infrastructure, HB 33 proposes a grant program focused exclusively on facility expansion that is open to all career-technical schools (JVSD, Comprehensive, or Compact). Many of our schools have shovel ready building construction projects that will ensure these dollars have a demonstrable impact and are immediately put to good use.
2. **K-12 School Funding Formula:** Like our traditional district partners, we support Ohio's current k-12 school funding formula—also known as the “Fair School Funding Plan”—which the legislature adopted during the last operating budget cycle. As this Committee knows, the formula includes a six year “phase-in” that facilitates gradual implementation over the course of three biennial budgets, and we are encouraged that the DeWine-Husted budget proposal continues the phase-in by funding years three and four. We do, however, recommend that policymakers address the following formula-related issues unique to career-technical education supplemental funding, which we believe will help our schools continue to expand over the long term and serve an ever-increasing number of high school students:
 - Fully Allocate CTE Funding: In order to facilitate long-term CTE programming expansion across Ohio, we would recommend legislators fully allocate CTE supplemental “weighted” funding under the FSFP and remove the remaining phase-in. Weighted funding refers to the most valued category of supplemental dollars career-tech schools receive under the formula, used to purchase the expensive equipment and supplies necessary to operate CTE programs. We recognize that HB 33 contains a number of highly beneficial programs (described below) that allow our schools to apply for varying types of funding assistance. But fully allocating our weighted funds would produce a steady increased stream of equipment dollars our schools and administrators could depend on each year—which in turn would facilitate better long-term expansion, planning, and implementation.
 - Establish State Share Floor for CTE Funding: Unlike STEM and Charter Schools, career-tech schools' weighted supplemental funding is still subject to the “state and local share.” And many of our schools—in particular the Compacts and the Comprehensives—are greatly impacted by the low state share of their member districts. For example, out of the 102 traditional school districts served by Compacts / Comprehensives, 61 fall below 50% state share, which means the state funds less than half of the overarching equipment and supply costs for their CTE students. As a JVSD, my state share is 34.2%, which is an impediment to future growth. In order to remove disparities between different types of

schools and facilitate the long-term growth of our sector, we would recommend legislators set a floor of 50% for the state share percentage that applies to CTE supplemental “weighted funding.” We note that precedent exists for this change: the FSFP already sets a floor for the state share on transportation funding (37.5% in FY 24 and 41.67% in FY 25).

3. **Grant Funding for Equipment / Supplies:** We are thankful that the Executive Budget proposal also contains \$100M to assist all schools (including charter and STEM schools) with the purchase of CTE equipment and supplies. These resources will be incredibly valuable and in many cases will be used in conjunction with the \$200M in facility expansion dollars to ensure the growth of our sector and to jumpstart our ability to serve more students across our CTPD.
4. **High School Industry Recognized Credentials:** We are similarly excited that the DeWine-Husted budget proposal renews existing programs aimed at increasing the number of industry-recognized credentials earned by Ohio high school students. Specifically, HB 33 maintains funding to reimburse schools for the cost of issuing credentials, as well as funding to operate the existing Innovative Workforce Incentive Program (IWIP)—which offers \$1,250 for each qualifying credential earned by a student in the preceding school year. The budget also includes up to \$10M in each fiscal year to support a Work-Based Learning Incentive Program, which will promote student interactions with business and industry to foster engagement in career fields as well as alignment with educational programs.
5. **Adult Diploma Program:** We are pleased to see the Executive Budget proposal continues to fund the highly coveted Adult Diploma Program, which provides job training and an alternative pathway for adults (age 20 or older) to earn a credential in conjunction with a state-issued high school diploma. We hope to increase utilization of this program in the years ahead.

In addition to the clear value that CTE brings to Ohio in terms of population retention, employment opportunities, economic advantage and value, it brings a vast and powerful impact for students by giving them confidence self-esteem, opportunity, and potential for a great future. In my 30 plus years as an educator, I have witnessed some great work by adults both in and out of the classroom. I believe CTE fosters an environment where students can succeed due to the combination of hands on learning and the amount of time spent with a reliable, caring teachers. The data on attendance, discipline, and graduation rate all support what we do in Career Tech. Why? What is it about this learning model?

To answer these questions I look back to the beginning of my education career when I was a teacher and a coach. Now, as a Superintendent in my sixth year at the Auburn Career Center, I often reflect on great coaches I encountered and how the Auburn Career Center teachers share many of those same qualities. Our instructors are the closest examples to coaches we have in public education because they are experts in their craft and spend hours with a student every day for two years working with the student to achieve a common goal: the mastering of an in-demand vocational skill. In pursuit of this goal they build a relationship grounded upon hard work, support, encouragement, and even competition at local, regional, and state levels. Through this relationship trust between the student and instructor is built just as trust is built between a player and coach, and most importantly the student is put in a position to succeed in the classroom, in the workplace, and in their personal lives.

In closing, CTE is good for the Ohio economy, the workforce, local communities, educators, families, and clearly for students. The CTE community will continue to demonstrate great return on investments. Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions from the committee.