

**Ohio Senate
Education Committee
HB96 – Biennial Budget**

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony for HB96. I respectfully submit this testimony to restore the Executive Budget's proposed funding and policy for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development. As a career-technical superintendent, I have studied and witnessed the impact of early awareness and exploration on students as they set their career path for the future. This awareness allows students to select optimal courses and exploratory experiences before graduating high school. This course and experience sequencing align the students' interests, skills, and aptitudes towards potential occupations, which saves our schools, students, parents, communities, and State government time and money.

Cuyahoga Valley Career Center employs Career Specialists who work in each of our partner school districts. Working closely with the counseling staff and administration, these specialists provide awareness activities to elementary students, exploration to middle school students, and planning for high school students. These individuals ensure that a dedicated person is available to assist students with their career planning. These specialists conduct job-site visits, mock interviews, job fairs, and more to give students insights on job requirements, salaries and benefits, growth projections, and promotional opportunities. Continuing the career exploration and awareness funding ensures these moments are accessible to more students, more often. An example of each level of career development is described below.

Career Awareness: Bath Elementary in the Revere School District recently held a fantastic 5th Grade Career Day. Nancy Vondrak, CVCC Career Specialist, organized the day, during which students had the opportunity to interview professionals from various career fields, including health care, law enforcement, and information technology.

Career Exploration: R.B. Chamberlin Middle School in the Twinsburg School District participated in Career View Exploration Month. This initiative ignites curiosity about career paths and helps students envision their futures. CVCC Career Specialist Toni Cluse held Lunch-n-Learns each day of the month, where each student explored two careers. One innovative technology student raved about is the Career View XR headsets, which allow students to enter the work environment utilizing virtual reality goggles.

Career Planning: Garfield Heights High School students visited MAGNET, Northeast Ohio's Sector Partnership Lead, for the Elevate 12 Program. Career Specialist Michelle Hasman planned the visit, during which students explored careers in manufacturing technology. The hands-on day included manufacturing a model car, which the students raced as the final activity of the event. These seniors will participate in a six-week paid summer internship with MAGNET to jump-start their manufacturing careers.

The career exploration and awareness funds have allowed CVCC to add additional hours for the Career Specialists, purchase training kits such as Vex Robotics, and offer field trips to students of all grades to visit local businesses and experience the work environment firsthand.

From a policy perspective, investing in early career development supports Ohio's broader education and workforce goals. Students who engage in structured exploration are likelier to stay on track, pursue valuable credentials, and succeed beyond high school. National data shows that early alignment between student interests and career pathways increases completion rates and postsecondary outcomes.¹

This work is also a workforce strategy. Helping students identify their strengths and interests earlier helps fill pipelines into high-demand fields such as health care, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, and construction. Without this funding, the opportunities to make those connections, especially in underserved districts, are significantly diminished.

Sustaining the Executive Budget's investment ensures that students across Ohio continue to benefit from consistent, high-quality exploration experiences and that we don't lose the momentum schools have worked hard to build.

Restoring this funding is a commitment to students, communities, and the future of Ohio's workforce.

I would welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as you continue to consider this vital investment. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for additional information.

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¹ Ohio Excels, *Reality Check: The State of Education in Ohio*, 2024.