

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget. My name is Dr. Brian Bontempo, and I serve as Superintendent of The Auburn Career Center in Northeast Ohio. I also have the privilege of serving as the current President of the Ohio Association for Career and Technical Education, an association that represents nearly 7,000 career-technical educators across the state.

When the Career Awareness and Exploration Funds were introduced in 2021, Auburn Career Center had a vision: to spark interest and build foundational skills in career-technical education (CTE) for local middle school students. Part of that vision included training middle school teachers in hands-on, introductory CTE skills, while also building awareness among business and community leaders about the value of CTE.

Using the funds, we purchased equipment to support math and science-based lessons in our middle schools and employed a dedicated staff member to deliver instruction in partnership with local middle school teachers. As a result, we successfully introduced students to key concepts like measurement and CPR. Even more importantly, the partnering teachers gained hands-on instructional experience, and students earned industry-recognized credentials—often their first introduction to this concept. Each student received a certificate documenting the credential earned.

This experience not only opened students' eyes to new career pathways, but also gave teachers new tools and helped parents see the direct connection between classroom learning and future careers.

This school year, we expanded the initiative further. We assigned an administrator to work with all ten of our partner school districts, guiding them through a process to either develop new elective courses or revise existing ones to align with Auburn Career Center pathways. This was a significant undertaking, resulting in 60 new middle school career connected learning classes launching next year. We estimate these courses will impact more than 3,300 students.

These developments would not be possible without the Career Awareness and Exploration Funds. The resources have supported course alignment, teacher

professional development, strategic budgeting and planning, equipment acquisition, and continuous quality monitoring.

This multi-year process represents a strategic and sustainable investment. The long-term result: nearly every middle school student in our region will have access to a meaningful career connected learning experience before entering high school. This helps students make informed decisions about their futures, while also giving local districts and Auburn Career Center critical data to guide program expansion.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important investment in Ohio's future workforce.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

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