

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for HB96. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of restoring the Executive Budget’s proposed funding and policy for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development. As a career-technical educator, I have seen how critical it is that students from all backgrounds and communities have access to early career exposure and planning.

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding provides the structure and support needed to bring high-quality career exploration activities to all students—including those in smaller districts, rural areas, and underserved communities. Without this investment, many students would simply not have the chance to discover pathways that match their skills, interests, and goals.

At the Auburn Career Center, we have used Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding to build a sustainable and scalable regional initiative called Auburn Electives, which now serves more than 3,300 students in grades 7 through 10 across ten associate school districts. This initiative has established a lasting footprint of over 70 newly developed vocational middle (VM) courses that give students their first structured, meaningful exposure to career pathways—including health science, engineering, manufacturing, information technology, and construction. These courses are intentionally designed to reflect the rigor, relevance, and real-world applicability of our two-year high school CTE programs, helping students make informed academic and career decisions earlier in their educational journey.

Auburn Electives has created structured career exploration opportunities in districts where such programming was previously limited or unavailable prior to high school. This partnership has done more than expand access—it has empowered school districts to rethink how they offer electives and design course pathways, leading to the modernization of their curriculum to better reflect industry needs and student interests. Districts are now aligning middle school elective offerings with regional workforce priorities, giving students earlier access to experiences that are both engaging and career-connected.

This initiative has been made possible and sustainable through a four-year financial commitment from Auburn Career Center to each partner district, ensuring both long-term viability and shared ownership. In addition to funding, we’ve provided robust instructional supports that include:

- Curriculum alignment tools connecting Auburn Electives to grades 6–10 math and science standards,
- Employability skill crosswalks and model lesson plans supporting real-world skill development, and
- Pathway-aligned curriculum supports that help districts bridge middle school offerings with high school CTE enrollment.

This funding has allowed us to do more than expand programming—it has helped us **transform the culture of career education in Northeast Ohio**. CTE is no longer a reactive choice made in high school; it's a **purpose-driven opportunity** that begins early, builds over time, and positions students for lasting success in both postsecondary education and the workforce.

Without continued investment in Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding, forward-thinking, student-centered models like Auburn Electives would not be possible.

Research shows that early, consistent exposure to career pathways helps students stay engaged, graduate on time, and pursue additional education or credentialing.¹ Ensuring every student has access to these experiences, regardless of where they live, is vital to Ohio's future workforce and economy.

I urge the committee to restore the Executive Budget's proposed funding so that students in every corner of Ohio can explore possibilities, unlock their potential, and build a future that is right for them.

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



David A. Leone

Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Auburn Career Center
dleone@auburncc.org



Matthew R. Bryan

Director of Career Development & Enrollment
Auburn Career Center
mbryan@auburncc.org

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