

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for HB96. I respectfully submit this testimony in support of restoring the Executive Budget's proposed funding and policy for Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development. As a career-technical educator, I witness daily the difference it makes when students are introduced early to the idea that their education is connected to their future. This funding is not supplemental—it is foundational. It creates structure and access for students to explore meaningful career paths that align with their skills, interests, and goals.

Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding plays a critical role in helping students discover purpose, identify potential pathways, and stay engaged in their education. The ability to explore careers in a structured, supported way helps students make informed decisions about their coursework, high school programming, and postsecondary plans. These opportunities often begin with simple but powerful moments: visiting a job site, engaging in a hands-on project, interacting with an employer, or participating in a classroom activity linked to a real-world career. With this funding, those moments are accessible to more students, more often.

The Career Awareness, Exploration, and Development funding dollars have been critical to the expanding Career Technical Education to the middle grade levels at South-Western City Schools. Due to the funding support, SWCSD has added five middle school CTE courses serving 4,352 students. These courses include Design and Modeling, Interactive Media Design, Exploring Careers, Intro to Coding, Intro to App Development, and Medical Detectives. These courses provide hands on activities in career-related fields, include business and industry partnerships, and allow students real world experiences with career exploration. The funding was utilized to support curriculum, install industry relevant equipment, and fund field trips and career exploration events.

By exposing our middle school students to hands on career exploration, it has strengthened our enrollment into our career technical courses and pathways at the high school level. SWCSD has seen an increase of more than four hundred students taking a CTE course and/or participating in a two-year CTE pathway. This then leads to increased engagement with business/industry partners resulting in an increase in work-based learning and post program placement. To date this year, SWCSD students have earned over 40,000 work-based learning hours with many students continuing to work during the summer between their junior and senior year.

From a policy perspective, investing in early career development supports Ohio's broader education and workforce goals. Students who engage in structured exploration are more likely to stay on track, pursue credentials of value, and find success 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, education, 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. It ensures that we don’t lose the momentum schools have worked hard to build.

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

I would welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as you continue to consider this important 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.