



**House Economic and Workforce Development Committee  
Hearing on SB 1 (Department of Education and Workforce)  
Proponent Testimony of Kevin Kratzer, Superintendent  
Southern Hills Career & Technology Center  
March 28, 2023**

Good afternoon Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chair Santucci, Ranking Member Uppchurch, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee. My name is Kevin Kratzer and I am the Superintendent of Southern Hills Career and Technical Center and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts today regarding Senate Bill 1. Southern Hills CTC serves the five school districts in Brown County as well as Bright Local Schools, located in southern Highland County. I am currently in my 28<sup>th</sup> year working in the field of education, and my 12<sup>th</sup> year as Superintendent of Southern Hills CTC.

Career and Technical Education has long been the ‘best kept secret in education’, but thankfully that is no longer the case. At Southern Hills CTC and across Ohio we are seeing a dramatic increase in student enrollment as students and families alike have come to realize that one does not have to attend a four-year university to be successful in life. As this mind-set has evolved, it seems quite appropriate that our state structure of Ohio’s education system evolve as well. For this reason, it is my opinion that the component of SB 1 that proposes an adjustment to the structure of the Ohio Department of Education to include a Deputy Director for an independent Division of Career and Technical Education is a positive move that will help to elevate our sector as the worthy pathway into the world of work that it has always been.

Twelve years ago, when I began my tenure at Southern Hills CTC we were serving approximately one-fourth of the students in our Career Technical Planning District (CTPD). Today we serve nearly 50% of the students and hundreds more through our satellite offerings held at the associate district’s campuses. This shift, while significant, has not been matched with anything near the same level of importance from the Ohio Department of Education. The rapidly growing world of Career Tech has often been an afterthought of the Ohio Department of Education and the real losers from this mindset have been the students, families and business partners that we in the field work to assist every day. Through this proposed restructuring, Career Technical Education will have a true seat at the table.

Career and Technical Education has many stakeholders: the students we serve, their families, the business partners we work with on a daily basis, and our community at large. At Southern Hills CTC we see it as our mission to ensure we meet two key responsibilities for every student that chooses our school – to do what is necessary to help them graduate from high school, and to ensure they are workforce ready when they cross that stage. Workforce development is the key reason Career Technical Education exists, and in a time where “Help Wanted” signs hang in every business window you pass, it seems absolutely critical that CTE be positioned within Ohio’s educational system as an equal and appropriate educational pathway for the students in our great state.

Students that choose to attend Southern Hills CTC, or any other CTE option across Ohio, are getting the opportunity to learn real-life job skills, working in real-world job settings, using the tools and technology that are necessary to be successful in the twenty-first century. I am fortunate to have a fantastic group of local business owners and elected leaders that understand the importance of what CTE brings to the community and the local economy, and it is from them that I get almost daily reminders about how much we need more of what Southern Hills provides – young people that leave high school with a skill and a true understanding of what it takes to be successful in the world of work. Through Senate Bill 1 we have an opportunity to create a division of leadership that can focus on CTE and all of the nuances that surround it and make it different from traditional K-12 education. The most glaring of these differences being the connection that we have with the business community, and within that, the critical need to be flexible and responsive to the ever-changing workforce and economic environment. ODE, in its current capacity, is a large bureaucracy that moves at a glacial pace as compared to the workforce needs our business partners contend with each and every day. As a Career and Technical Education provider, we must be able to meet those needs in a timely fashion, and we all too often find ourselves hamstrung by the current system.

As a life-long resident of Ohio and a career educator, I could not be more optimistic about our future. We serve great kids who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, are tech savvy beyond most of our wildest dreams, and welcome the challenges the future holds. In closing, and in the words of Mike Rowe of *Dirty Jobs* fame, “as long as Americans remain addicted to affordable electricity, smooth roads, indoor plumbing and climate control, the opportunities in the skilled trades will never go away”. For that reason, and many more, Ohio should move forward with SB 1 and any other appropriate initiative that helps Career and Technical Education continue to grow and prosper.