



Career and Technical Education is Essential for our Economy Post-COVID-19

Career and Technical Education (CTE) provides a unique combination of academic, technical, and hands-on skill-building that prepares a student to either immediately enter the workforce or better define career plans as they enter post-secondary education. Each year thousands of Pennsylvania students will have already earned higher education credits, completed a pre-apprenticeship, or gained on-the-job skills before graduation, thanks to the CTE path they chose in high school. Unfortunately, not all students who are interested in CTE have the opportunity to participate. Between local education agency decision-making, coupled with a lack of sustained state investments, districts may limit the number of students they send to a Career and Technical Center (CTC).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought forward a new set of challenges for CTE programs, which worsened the issue of student opportunity and access. In addition, the workforce suffered a blow from the public health crisis, highlighting the importance of front-line workers in essential industries such as child care staff, nurses and health care workers, and commercial transportation – all of which are fields trained by CTE programs.

These current challenges underscore why we need increased state investments in our state budget's basic education funding and CTE subsidy lines: to promote greater access to programming, restore the workforce, and boost our state economy.

CTC Administrator Survey Shows Impact of COVID-19 on CTE Program Delivery

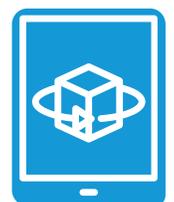
In February of 2021, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators, surveyed 76 CTE programs, focusing on understanding the pandemic's direct impacts. In total, 36 CTE programs representing 44 counties participated in the survey. Several trends emerged as primary challenges for CTE in responding to the pandemic, including:

- **Staffing shortages** – While not a new issue to the education sector, the pandemic has exacerbated challenges with maintaining staffing ratios that include teachers, substitutes, administrative staff, and maintenance staff.
- **Administrative headaches** – While submitting school safety plans is common practice, CTCs, which accept students from multiple local school districts, have had to draft their own plans *and* adhere to those of the home districts of the



students they serve. In the event of closures, altered schedules or transportation plans due to COVID-19 at the home school district, the CTC must accommodate each district's frequently changing situation.

- **Critical resources** – From lack of technology and internet connectivity to the transition from primarily hands-on to virtual learning, and access issues to personal protective gear, challenges remain even as CTCs transition back to hybrid or in-person learning.



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- **Reduced enrollment** – Enrollment continues to decline, with factors such as fear of in-person attendance, low interest in some program areas, or districts limiting student access and opportunity playing a role.
- **Access to equipment** – In a virtual environment, access to industry-required equipment for hands-on learning was limited. Further, some equipment could not be shared by students due



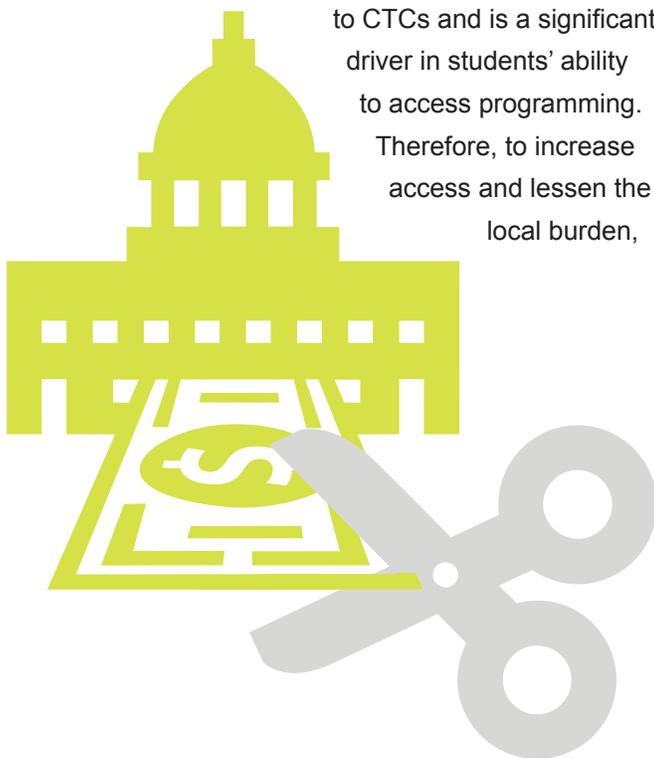
to safety measures, which impacts the ability of all students to complete coursework. CTC's had unexpected expenditures in purchasing additional equipment to ensure student safety.

- **Funding** – While there has been some relief through federal funding for CTE programs, it does not address ongoing costs. Additionally, state funding was flat-funded in the last two fiscal years, meaning no increased investments for programs to adequately address needs that the pandemic has compounded.



A Bright Spot of State Support for CTE Fades

The state's share of the cost for a student to access CTE programming at a career and technical center represents less than 8% of the bill. Federal Carl D. Perkins funding only covers roughly 2%. That leaves member school districts at the local level paying approximately 90% of the costs to send students to CTCs and is a significant driver in students' ability to access programming. Therefore, to increase access and lessen the local burden,



the state must increase its share by investing more in the Career and Technical Education subsidy line (SCTES) in the annual state budget.

After a decade of stalled growth, momentum for increased state investments was recognized in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 budgets with a combined \$20 million investment. This funding was split, with \$17 million driven through the SCTES and \$3 million into the equipment grant line. However, this came to a screeching halt in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budgets when Gov. Wolf made no call to support CTE, and the legislature ultimately flat-funded CTCs at the 2019-20 level.

The last two cycles of failed investments are particularly disappointing when both basic education and special education continue to receive investments. Policymakers voiced bi-partisan support for career and technical education yet failed to act during the pandemic.

Despite Historic Support from Congress, Federal Funding Doesn't Address Long-Term Access Issues in PA

While there have been several rounds of historic levels of federal stimulus funding provided to education since the start of the pandemic, most of these dollars were driven directly to school districts with minimal support provided directly to CTE. In perspective, to date, CTE in Pennsylvania has been the recipient of \$74 million in federal funding. While this amount is appreciated during these unprecedented times, the total amount of education funding received by the commonwealth over the same period was \$7.77 billion.

Details of federal funding for CTE include:

- In March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included \$30.75 billion in federal funding to states for education purposes, with \$628.2 million specifically earmarked for Pennsylvania between the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds and Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds. A portion of GEER funding was provided to CTE in August of 2020 in the amount of \$10.5 million. This represents less than 2% of the overall education allocation. The purpose of the funding was to support the effective continuity of education programs, such as summer and other expanded programming, and industry credential assessments for students enrolled in CTCs negatively impacted by COVID-19 mitigation efforts. 
- In December 2020, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act was signed into law, providing states with \$81.88 billion in education relief, including \$2.42 billion specifically allocated for Pennsylvania between ESSER and GEER funding. The General Assembly and the Governor enacted Act 1 of 2021 in February 2021, which distributed \$20 million of the GEER II Funds to career and technical education centers. This represents less than 1% of the edu- 

ation allocation. Similar to the CARES Act funding, uses for the funds were broad and addressed learning and safety needs due to the pandemic.

- The American Rescue Plan was enacted in March 2021, which provided an additional \$122 billion to K-12 schools nationally, with \$4.9 billion allocated for Pennsylvania. While the plan did not include GEER funds, approximately 2.5% of ESSER funding was statutorily required to go to specific education entities. In June 2021, the legislature and Governor Wolf signed Act 24 of 2021, which outlined the distribution of this funding, including \$43.5 million in equipment grants to CTE, amounting to less than 1% of the overall education allocation. 

While the infusion of federal funding was integral for supporting CTE, the amount pales compared to the financial responsibility shouldered by public school districts. Additionally, this federal funding is a one-time allocation and does not address the ongoing costs faced by CTCs. Because CTCs provide specialized services and equipment, federal funding does not fill the gaps necessary to sustain programs and increase opportunities for student access. Further, it fails to address the issue of access to CTE for students and does not provide a financial incentive for districts to send students.

State Support is the Key for Student Success and a Strong Economy

Increasing access to career and technical education means training a new generation of commercial transportation workers, health care workers, and child care workers – front-line heroes and essential workers during the pandemic. A failure to adequately fund CTE is a failure to support our workforce and our economy more broadly.

While federal support has been welcome and is appreciated – ensuring that CTE programs are safe during the pandemic – these dollars do not address the ongoing, systemic funding issue we face in Pennsylvania. We



must prioritize both basic education and CTE funding in the upcoming FY 2022-23 state budget. Increasing basic education funding will help ease the burden of costs for local school districts and incentivizes them to expand student access to career and technical education.

With no state investments over the last two fiscal years, supporting a \$25 million increase for the CTE subsidy line is critical to ensure Pennsylvania is back on track for building a vibrant workforce that can strengthen our economy and help us recover from the pandemic.



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Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children is a partner of the nonpartisan PA Schools Work Campaign

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