



Career Tech Education Critical to the Future of Ohio

Ohio's continuing economic improvement has revealed a very apparent and disturbing flaw in our state's workforce—the increasing gap in available jobs and the skilled workers companies need to fill those jobs. The overall positive trends we have seen in Ohio are good news for families and job seekers. The state saw 112,000 jobs created in 2014, with an overall unemployment rate just over 5 percent to begin the new year. The manufacturing industry alone saw over 16,000 new jobs across the state. Still, more work needs to be done to help propel us back to the level of economic success we saw before the recession.

One of the key components I believe will help push Ohio to reach greater economic heights in coming years is the vibrant state of career technical education. This sector of education has undergone a renaissance within the state in the last couple of years. Never before have we seen a form of education that so effectively prepares students with the skills they need to succeed in the modern workforce. We must continue to shed the negative image that these schools held in the past and see them for what they are: preparation for a successful career in the skilled workforce.

For example, many people believe that attending career tech schools, such as Vanguard Sentinel Career and Technical Centers in Fremont and Tiffin, will limit their ability to continue their education or get a high-paying job. This is simply not true! A substantial majority of students enrolled in career tech programs go on to attend two- and four-year colleges and universities or private training programs, often equipped with significant advantages over their peers who attended traditional high schools.

Imagine the benefits a student studying to become an engineer would have if he or she had a background that included hands-on experience in a manufacturing facility. Or, the advantage extensive experience in a local hospital or clinic would provide for a student pursuing an opportunity in the healthcare profession. Local career tech centers or career compacts shared by a consortia of local districts can help students achieve this. Students can choose one of 16 main career clusters, most of which are connected to in-demand jobs currently available in the state.

Upon completion, they have many options to grow in their specific career field. Students can choose to attend the aforementioned institutions of higher education to attain additional knowledge and skills before entering the workforce. Or, with the proper certifications and skills, students can choose to pursue a job in their field earning an above-average wage with minimal student debt. At a time where our young people are saddled with debilitating loans and education expenses, this is an extremely cost-effective option for students to acquire the skills they need to seek and hold gainful employment for years to come.

I strongly urge parents, educators, and especially students to explore the different options an education in the technical track can provide. If we can equip our young people with the proper skills and training to connect to this modern economy, Ohio will be better off now and for many years to come.