

Reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act:
Education for the 21st Century Workforce

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Dr. Frank Blankenship

Columbiana County Career and Technical Center, Lisbon, OH

Assistant Superintendent and Vocational Director

Testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss with you the importance of the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. As assistant superintendent and vocational director, I am responsible for overseeing career and technical education in Columbiana County, Ohio's most northern county in its Appalachian region. Located in the small town of Lisbon, the Columbiana County Career and Technical Center enrolls 400 students in grades 11 and 12 from all County school districts who are intent on completing a career and technical course of study.

Our students have shown significant achievement gains in both academic and career and technical studies over the past several years, gains which are measurable and data-supported. However, it wasn't always this way. Faced with declining enrollment, our school improvement leadership team reviewed the results of the FY2000 Secondary Workforce Development Report issued by the Ohio Department of Education and discovered that only 65% of students who completed our program achieved the graduation academic achievement standard. In addition, only 42% of the program completers achieved the benchmark on the Ohio Integrated Technical and Academic Competency assessments. Thus, we knew we needed a school improvement process that would provide some structure to assist us in increasing student achievement. The leadership team selected the Southern Regional Education Board's "High Schools That Work" program to guide our school improvement efforts. HSTW, which focuses on combining challenging academic courses and rigorous career and technical studies to raise the achievement of secondary students, has provided a results-oriented focus for reform while also providing a system of staff accountability. An on-site, HSTW Technical Assistance Visit, held every two years, gathers information related to the current operations of our school and sets forth challenges for our leadership team to undertake over the next two years. The data gathered during these visits has helped our staff determine the success of our reform efforts by measuring students' achievement gains.

HSTW has also helped us target our reform efforts where they are most needed. Rewriting all courses of study to reflect academic and career and technical standards, and creating syllabi for all courses to provide structured information to students and parents are just two suggestions offered for us to consider. However, realigning all academic courses to meet the content standards approved by the Ohio Department of Education

presents the biggest ongoing challenge for our teachers. This has required systemic changes in the delivery of instruction. Our academic teachers now deliver instruction with contextual strategies rather than with contextual content. We no longer teach “machine trades math.” We now teach trigonometry with a “machine trades context.” We believe this type of instruction better serves our students and makes us more accountable to parents, higher education and the business world.

At the Columbiana County Career and Technical Center Career, career and technical pathways of study are offered in the clusters of Trade and Industry, Health Services, Information Technology, Agriculture, and Family and Consumer Services. These career pathways of study focus on industry-based competencies which are measured by administering certification exams. Examples of certification exams taken by our students include American Welding Society certification for the welding and metal fabrication career path, state licensure exams for the cosmetology and health services career paths, and A+ and Cisco Networking certifications for the information technologies career paths.

Currently, we have sixteen articulation agreements with seven academic and technical institutions. These agreements afford students opportunities to earn post-secondary credits upon completion of computer networking technologies, interactive media, health services, automotive services, early childhood education, culinary careers, and careers for teachers programs of study. Four of these programs are sanctioned tech prep programs. These universities, community colleges and technical schools have reviewed our secondary courses of study and determined the correlated coursework that students will be credited upon entrance to the respective post-secondary institution. These industry certification and post-secondary articulation opportunities allow students from the Columbiana County Career and Technical Center to enter the workforce and/or continue a program of study with credible skills and qualifications that should ensure them success and immediate productivity. While these opportunities are many, the goal of the Career and Technical Center is to continue to expand articulation and certification opportunities to allow our students unlimited post-secondary options. The benchmark that we have targeted for post-program placement is 95%. This means that 95% of career and technical program completers are enrolled in higher education, technical education and/or employment related to their secondary field of study. The 2003 program completers had a post-program placement rate of 91%. As a result, the staff is currently making plans to restructure a Job/College Fair which is held at our Center to allow greater participation of schools and businesses as well as students.

Each student who completes a career path program of study receives a career passport that includes a résumé, technical certifications, licenses, endorsements and an “I can” list of major technical and employability competencies in their career field. These passports are used by the students as portfolios to gain entry into their next phase of life.

“I can” lists are recorded accomplishments of students that are monitored by the career and technical teacher over the two years students are enrolled in the program of study. For example, in the health services career path of study, student competencies are

measured in areas such as medical terminology, medical law and ethics, clinical chemistry, microbiology, computer literacy, teamwork and professionalism. Under the “first aid and medical emergencies” category, students must be able to identify emergency procedures, perform first aid, maintain cardiopulmonary resuscitation proficiency and respond to medical emergencies. Thus, potential employers will have a greater understanding of students’ capabilities after reviewing the “I can” lists as presented in the career passport.

All students who complete a career path course of study must participate in Ohio’s Integrated Technical and Academic Competency assessment program. The competencies assessed by the ITACs are reflective of the “I can” lists included in the career passports. Students who master the “I can” lists have been able to meet or exceed the benchmarks on the ITACs. Students in all but one career path program of study met their respective career path ITAC benchmark during the 2004 assessment. This is an improvement from the 2003 assessment, when two career path programs of study failed to meet the established benchmarks. The pass rate on the ITACs has risen from 58% in 2002 to 76% in 2003 to 80% in 2004. We believe that our effort to reflect industry standards in career path courses of study—which have been overhauled over the past two years—is the main cause of this dramatic improvement in student achievement. The alignment of what is being taught and what is being assessed allows the measurement process to be authentic.

Completion of a career path program of study earns a student a Certificate of Completion in his or her career and technical field. However, a student may earn an Honors Certificate of Completion if he or she has maintained a 91% average in the career path program of study, a 95% attendance rate, and met all of the benchmarks on the ITAC assessment. Ten percent of the program completers earned honors certification in 2003 and sixteen percent earned honors certification in 2004.

The majority of students who attend the Career and Technical Center also receive instruction in academic studies at the Center. All students take English, mathematics, science and social studies in both the Junior and Senior years on a 4x4 semester block schedule. These students are “cluster scheduled” into their academic classes to facilitate the use of contextual learning instructional strategies. Cluster scheduling results in students from the same career area of study being placed into the same math and science classes. For example, students from any of the trade and industry career area could be scheduled together, allowing instructors to relate the math and science concepts to the application in the career area during the instructional process. Learning math and science in this context also enhances students’ understanding of these subjects. A randomized selection of program completers that participated in the High Schools That Work assessment in 2002 showed an increase in mean reading score from 255 to 287, an increase in mean mathematics score from 290 to 299, and an increase in mean science score from 273 to 302. These scores compared students from 2002 who were not cluster scheduled to students from 2002 who were cluster scheduled.

Getting students to read has been a major focus of our staff. Classrooms have a library of journals and other materials to encourage students to read throughout the day, not just

when they go to the media center. Teachers honor students' choices of what to read, whether it is an auto service manual, a dirt bike magazine or a classic novel. When the teachers found that many of the reluctant readers preferred nonfiction books and articles, they asked for more nonfiction and informational reading materials. Multiple copies of the local newspapers are also available for the students. By giving students a choice of reading materials and reminding them of the necessity of being able to read to be successful in the real world, students are beginning to develop an interest and gain a sense of appreciation and satisfaction for the process of reading rather than perceiving reading to be just another school required activity.

Of course, it is important to allocate resources to facilitate the types of systemic changes our career and technical center has been implementing. While the staff has certainly been willing to implement new strategies for delivering instruction, training is a critical component for successful staff transition to creating contextual learning classroom environments. Purchasing additional learning materials, textbooks, computers, software and equipment is also important as our staff upgrades programs to reflect both academic and industry standards. The Columbiana County Career and Technical Center receives \$225,000 annually from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Act to help support the changes in secondary education being implemented. While we would certainly still attempt to accomplish the same educational goals without Perkins funding, I do not believe that we would be able to be as results-oriented without these resources.

I thank you for the opportunity to share some of the exciting educational practices being implemented in a small rural, Appalachian county career and technical school and I urge to you support the reauthorization of the Perkins Act to allow our school, as well as others, to continue the journey of changing the methods of delivering career and technical education to better prepare our students for the Information Economy.