



**Testimony Presented to Pennsylvania Board of Higher Education  
Regional Public Hearing at Penn West University, Edinboro, Pennsylvania  
By Donna Cooper, Children First Executive Director  
May 13, 2025**

I am here to respond to Goals 1- 4 by focusing on specific and actionable reforms that will increase the share of high school students engaged in career-related learning who successfully enter and rapidly complete post-secondary learning programs.

Only 7% of PA's secondary education students are enrolled in high school CTE programs in part because parents worry these programs limit post high school options. Your plan can send a message to parents, by policy and by directing the use of resources, that their child will get an affordable post-secondary training experience and a good job because their child availed themselves of career-related learning in high school.

I urge you to include clear and distinct objective that supports the creation of a post-secondary statewide course content intermediary that efficiently manages industry-led hubs that align and, where necessary, builds content for all post-secondary high-priority occupation programs currently preparing students for work and are already the focus of some high school CTE programs so that that students can rapidly complete post-secondary training and enter the workforce.

Further the plan should include a strategy that would include an objective that incentivizes post-secondary CTE programs to streamline course completion requirements that are built on what students are learning in the High Priority Occupation/CTE programs currently offered in our high schools.

In fact, some secondary education CTE courses could and should be considered credit-bearing. I urge this plan to establish a goal of boosting the share of credit transfer from CTE high school programs to post-secondary programs. To start, an objective might be completing a full inventory of courses in upper classes of CTE programs that are sufficiently rigorous and warrant post-secondary credit.

I would also urge the plan to delineate a process to create credit standards for work-based learning in secondary and post-secondary settings that are aligned so credits are transferable

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and there is sufficient transparency for parents and children to understand how important work-based learning is and that it counts.

I urge you to be explicit in requiring post-secondary education programs to collaborate with and augment the CTE employer advisory councils for the purposes of scaffolding work-based learning options in Grades 11 and 12, and post-secondary. Creating one venue for this work has enormous capacity to efficiently improve the capacity of employers to offer work-based learning options available and improve the quality of those options.

I encourage the Board to examine the important data generated by the Strada Foundation that shows that the Commonwealth is far behind competitor states with regard to workplace learning systems but more importantly for insights for putting systems in place that can make PA the top state for work-based learning that works and counts.

I urge you to realize that your plan is not being considered or acted upon in isolation from other educational reforms. For instance, your plan could establish goals and objectives that maximize the credits transferred from high school CTE programs to the post-secondary system. In fact, a bold plan will include goals that align incentives or performance-based payment metrics in ways that advantage credential, or degree completion before high school graduation for students in a vast array of CTE courses of study.

Finally, some secondary education CTE courses could and should be considered credit bearing. I urge this plan to establish an entity or process that intentionally focuses on credit transfer from CTE high school programs to post-secondary programs. This entity should be charged with inventorying upper class CTE courses to identify all courses that are worthy of post-secondary credit and to do so with haste.

More generally, I encourage this Board to consider recommending a significant adjustment to how state aid is allocated to post-secondary institutions with the goal of aligning state funds to the schools that most economically give students the opportunity to earn a two- or four-year degree or industry credential. The current method of allocating state funds, in fact, does the reverse by giving institutions where each credit is more expensive, more state aid per student compared to where credits can be earned at a lower cost.