



Area Technical Centers: Supporting Postsecondary Skill and Credential Attainment in Ohio

Lumina Foundation’s Stronger Nation initiative finds that just half of Americans hold a credential beyond high school.¹ There is great disparity by race and education level in who has access to the skills and credentials needed to transition into new careers or advance in current ones. In response to this need, Lumina Foundation set a national goal of equipping at least 60 percent of the working-age population with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025, challenging each state to set its own postsecondary attainment goal; — and most have. States have many resources they can leverage to achieve their postsecondary attainment goals, including area technical centers (ATCs).

ATCs can play an important role in helping learners equitably access and attain postsecondary education and related credentials of value. ATCs are institutions that are focused on Career Technical Education (CTE). They serve learners from across multiple geographies, offering sub-baccalaureate-level education and training. These institutions are nimble enough to respond to changing labor market conditions and provide learners with the skills they need to obtain credentials leading to high-wage, in-demand employment. Ohio has one nation’s most robust — and complex — CTE delivery systems. Illustrative of this complexity are the state’s ATCs. Serving both secondary and postsecondary learners, an ATC in Ohio can be one of a variety of secondary career tech planning districts types or a postsecondary Ohio technical center (OTC).²

OHIO’S ATCS: SERVING SECONDARY LEARNERS

In the 1970s, the Ohio Department of Education instructed school districts to form career tech planning districts (CTPDs). The demarcation of a CTPD was largely defined by population, with each CTPD required to deliver secondary CTE instruction. Within the CTPDs, three distinctly different delivery methods — comprehensive districts, compact districts, and

OHIO CTPDS AT A GLANCE

91 CTPDs including:

- 24 comprehensive districts
- 16 compact districts
- 49 JVSDs
- 2 correctional institutions

More than 35,000 CTE concentrators (approximately 20% of the graduating class)

Sources: <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/State-Funding-For-Schools/Career-Technical-Funding/Ohio-CTPDs.pdf.aspx>

<https://perkins.ed.gov/pims/DataExplorer>

joint vocational school districts (JVSDs) — were established. The inclusion of a given school district within a particular CTPD was driven by a vote of the district’s residents, subject to the approval of the district’s local board of education. CTPDs serve as administrative entities, though each has a lead district responsible for CTE delivery and implementation across the CTPD.³ In correspondence with state legislation that requires every Ohio student in grades 7-12 to have access

to 12 CTE programs across at least eight of the 16 Ohio-approved career fields,⁴ every local school district in the state is part of a CTPD of some kind.⁵ According to statute, a CTPD must have 2,500 students in grades 7-12; the type of CTPD they fall into is largely decided by the districts the CTPD serves.⁶ Table 1 details the three types of CTPDs and their differences. The map⁷ illustrates how these different types of districts are dispersed statewide.

TABLE 1

Type of CTPD	Overall Composition	Governance	Funding
Comprehensive (24 statewide)	Entirely encompassed within one district; learners participate in CTE either at their home high school or a separate CTE-specific building.	Local school board and local superintendent are responsible for operations.	Local tax base of district, additional state and federal subsidies.
Compact (16 statewide)	A group of school districts working together to deliver CTE; learners participate either half the day in their home school and half at the CTE-serving school or full time at the CTE-serving school.	The district encompassing the CTE-serving school is responsible for its operation; one lead district is responsible for federal and state CTE accountability measures.	Local taxes of participating districts, additional state and federal subsidies.
JVSD (49 statewide)²⁴	Operate as a separate and distinct school district within a geographic region; learners attend from a non-CTE-focused district in that region either full or part time.	Each JVSD has its own separate school board composed of representatives from each associated school district who are appointed by their local school board; a school board-appointed superintendent oversees operations.	Local taxes and levies as approved by voters in each associated school district, some per-person funding that travels with each learner from the home district for participation, additional state and federal subsidies.

Source: https://webapp2.ode.state.oh.us/ctpd_region/definition.asp

OHIO'S ATCS: SERVING ADULT LEARNERS

Adult CTE, known in Ohio as adult education and workforce training, is primarily delivered through Ohio technical centers (OTCs), which are distinct from the community college system. OTCs primarily focus on career and credential attainment, while community colleges primarily focus on degree attainment. In many cases, OTCs were founded at about the same time as the CTPDs and are often physically co-located. Originally housed under the Ohio Department of Education, the oversight of OTCs and adult education and workforce training was shifted to the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) in 2009. The goal was to establish the OTCs more firmly as postsecondary institutions and, in part, to consolidate all adult-focused education under ODHE. Today, the 52 OTCs are co-governed and, with few exceptions, co-located with CTPDs, providing instruction and training to adult learners with the goal of learners achieving a certificate, an industry-recognized credential or state licensure. Because they are typically co-located with CTPDs,

At Great Oaks Career Campuses in Southwest Ohio, the JVSD and OTC are co-located and co-governed. The Board of Directors at Great Oaks governs both the JVSD and the OTC and the superintendent, Harry Synder, serves in that role for both entities. The state, however, views Great Oaks Career Campuses (the JVSD, with four separate campuses) and Great Oaks Adult and Continuing Education (the OTC) as two separate entities. In this example, Great Oaks Career Campuses can apply for funding for capital projects and equipment as one entity, encompassing both the JVSD and OTC; at the same time the Great Oaks Career Campuses (the JVSD) and Great Oaks Adult and Continuing Education (the OTC) are also able to apply for and retain funding that is unique or specifically earmarked for each campus type.

OTCs are similarly distributed across the state; as such, every Ohioan has access to an OTC. The vast majority of OTCs (46 of the 52) are located within JVSDs. At the state level, however, OTCs are governed and financed through ODHE, and CTPDs are under the Ohio Department of Education. OTCs are accredited by either the Council on Occupational Education or the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges,⁸ making them eligible for federal financial aid authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.⁹ Approximately 15,865 adult learners were enrolled at OTCs in FY19.

STATE POLICY AND FUNDING

This multi-faceted policy and governance structure offers benefits and challenges to equitably supporting learners. First, the separate yet co-governed relationship between CTPDs and OTCs creates a unique interaction between the state and local education agencies. This structure also allows the OTC, which primarily serves adult learners, to be more responsive to the workforce development needs of business

and industry while using the same facilities, equipment, instructors and administrative supports for the secondary system without the need for duplication. This structure allows an institution to focus on the needs of learners at all levels and removes other financial burdens that would limit its ability to equitably serve its learners.

This system does create certain challenges, however. OTCs' priorities are often driven by the secondary-

structured boards of education. The boards that oversee OTCs are the same as the secondary boards of education, and those boards are composed of locally appointed representatives from the school districts in the CTPD. While this policy seeks to create equity of input among the served districts, it also means the OTC, which serves primarily adult learners, is governed by a school board that was established to meet the needs of secondary learners. Similarly, because each representative on governing boards of JVSDs is appointed by an incorporated school district rather than elected, the board of a given JVSD/OTC is not accountable to local voters for how decisions are made or how local dollars are allocated. Consequently, boards may make decisions that are more beneficial for the associated local districts and not the OTC and its students.

The majority of CTPDs, especially JVSDs, receive most of their funding for secondary CTE from local taxes via separate CTE levies. The state allocates approximately \$79 million annually to support CTE at the secondary level.¹⁰ A state-legislated funding formula provides CTPDs with additional funding based on full-time equivalencies (FTE) for five different categories of high-wage, high-demand programs; the CTE programs that fall into category one receive the largest state subsidy, whereas categories four and five have significantly fewer dollars allocated per FTE. This structure incentivizes CTPDs to offer CTE programs aligned with the needs of their community's employers and workforce partners. JVSDs, as a distinct school district, are also allocated funding through:

- opportunity grants;
- additional aid for special populations, including special education learners, economically disadvantaged learners, and learners with limited English proficiency; and
- graduation bonuses.¹¹

CTPDs also receive federal funding to serve their



Five CTE Funding Categories

Category 1: Workforce Development (WFD) in Agriculture and Environmental Systems, Construction Technologies, Engineering and Science Technologies, Finance, Health Science, Information Technology and Manufacturing Technologies

Category 2: WFD in Business Administration, Hospitality and Tourism, Human Services, Law and Public Safety, Transportation Systems and Arts and Communications

Category 3: Career Based Intervention Programs

Category 4: WFD in Education and Training, marketing, WFD in Academics, Public Administration and Career Development

Category 5: Family and Consumer Science Programs

Retrieved from https://webapp2.ode.state.oh.us/ctae/cert_letter/letter_20.asp

secondary learners from the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V). Secondary learners who participate in CTE at a school that is not their “home” school bring a percentage of their per-student allocation to the CTPD. This structure creates some competition between the home district and the CTPD, as they are competing

for the same student's dollars, thus potentially limiting the CTPD from equitably serving all students who want to attend.

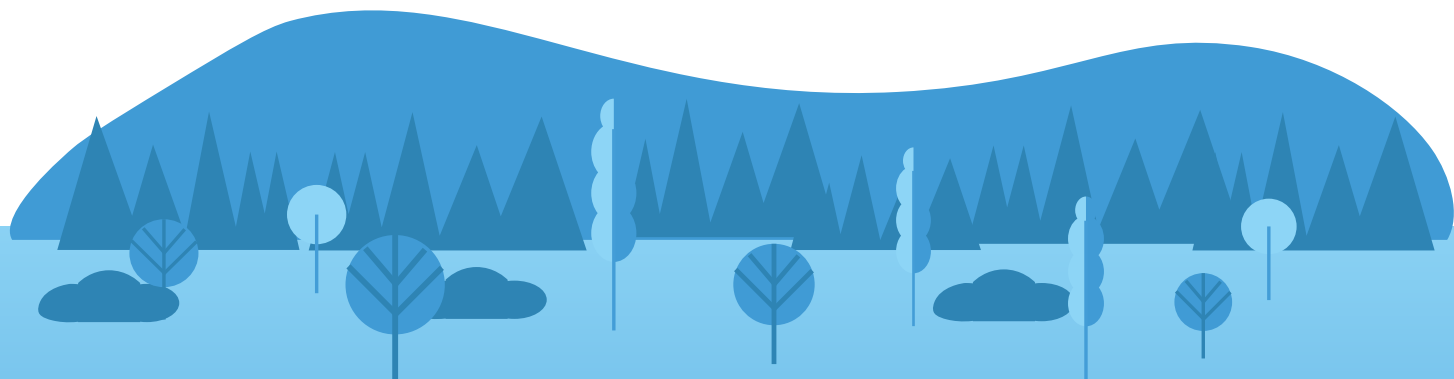
OTCs rely largely on state funding to serve Ohio adult learners; FY19's biennial budget allocated \$43 million, \$10 million more than in previous years.¹² This allocation is distributed via a performance funding model averaged over three years and based upon four criteria: program completion (25 percent weight), student retention (20 percent weight), positive post-completion placement (50 percent weight), and credential attainment (5 percent weight). This model, advocated for by the OTCs, incentivizes the positive placement of learners (employed, continuing education or joining the military) six months post-program completion, which many OTCs view as their primary goal. This weighting formula has stayed consistent since its introduction in 2015, which has allowed OTCs to stay well funded over time, despite external economic hardship. OTCs are eligible postsecondary recipients for Perkins V funding. Each OTC is an eligible training provider under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and can subsequently receive WIOA Title I funding. Finally, adult learners pay a nominal tuition (on average, \$2.00 per credit hour) determined by the local OTC, based on a per-hour model. Because OTCs are nationally accredited, learners can use federal financial aid. This support removes financial barriers to access and allows adults to equitably afford programming at OTCs. If not earmarked, funding received by an OTC

is spent at the discretion of the superintendent and respective board and can be spent on the corresponding CTPD.

THE ROLE OF OTCs IN POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT

In 2015, Ohio passed legislation that established a postsecondary attainment goal, called Complete to Compete Ohio, that 65 percent of working-age Ohioans would have a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary workforce credential of value by 2025.¹³ By 2018, however, only 49.2 percent of Ohioans had earned a credential or postsecondary degree, which was lower than the national average.¹⁴ In August 2020, the Complete to Compete Ohio steering committee launched a statewide action plan that seeks to increase postsecondary educational attainment and achieve the state's goal.¹⁵ Unfortunately, in this plan, OTCs are mentioned only once in passing, and "career technical schools" are mentioned twice, with no mention of CTPDs broadly or JVSDs/compact districts/comprehensive districts more specifically. Despite this omission, the state has a number of programs that seek to leverage the educational benefits of CTPDs and OTCs to help achieve Ohio's postsecondary attainment goal.

Ohio has a large-scale, statewide articulation and transfer agreement called Career-Technical Credit Transfer (CT)²¹⁶, established in 2007, that seeks to enable more secondary and postsecondary students to seamlessly transfer to another postsecondary institution.¹⁷ The (CT)² program is largely built around Career-Technical Assurance



Guides (CTAGs), which link the most commonly offered CTE pathways statewide to articulated credit at public Ohio postsecondary institutions.¹⁸ This codified, statewide program ensures that learners who receive a technical certificate do not face any barriers to transferring or to continuing their education. Also supporting this work are the six Ohio College Tech Prep Regional Centers, which serve as liaisons between CTE institutions and other postsecondary institutions to create and increase opportunity and access to career pathways that could lead to college credit. Many OTCs operate programs in collaboration with a community college in their region, specifically designed for the learner to spend one year at the OTC and a second year at the community college. This partnership can continue to reduce competition among institutions in a given geographic area.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

At both the state and local levels, CTPDs and OTCs play a strong role in economic development. Statewide programs incentivize employer participation and the upskilling and training of the state's talent pipeline. In 2019 the Ohio Legislature passed H.B. 2,¹⁹ which established the TechCred program and allocated it \$12 million annually.²⁰ The TechCred program encourages businesses to upskill and train their employees by reimbursing up to \$2,000 per credential for employees who earn one of the currently 379 approved industry-recognized credentials.²¹ Because OTCs are often the sole providers for these credential programs, they play an important role in the implementation of TechCred statewide while also simultaneously contributing to the accomplishment of the statewide postsecondary attainment goal. Similarly, an OTC can be labeled a Center for Training Excellence (CTX).²² As

a CTX, an OTC can be subsidized more than \$50,000 out of a \$3 million state allocation for offering customized and contracted trainings for employees of local businesses, as well as provide consultation services for businesses looking to expand or further develop their employees. An additional \$3 million in funding can be potentially allocated based on the prior year's customized training and business consultation service hours performed. These funds must have a dollar-for-dollar match. Finally, the Regionally Aligned Priorities in Delivering Skills (RAPIDS) program allocates \$8 million in new equipment to “develop and support workforce development initiatives at postsecondary institutions that focus on furthering the career aspirations of students and the economic growth of businesses in the region.”²³ While many OTCs participate in RAPIDS, they must be partnered with a community college, increasing the collaboration between these two types of institutions to benefit area workforce needs. These three state investments — TechCred, CTX and RAPIDS — provide a robust state subsidy, available to OTCs and CTPDs, to support the economic growth and prosperity of their communities.

CONCLUSION

Ohio's system of CTE delivery, though complex, is designed to serve the needs of learners at all levels while remaining aligned with established secondary structures. Though they operate under different state agencies, OTCs and CTPDs benefit from co-location and co-governance through the sharing of both physical and financial resources. Strong statewide articulation and connection to higher education bolster OTCs' ability to strengthen postsecondary attainment, while state-sponsored workforce development and investment programs help OTCs generate economic growth both statewide and locally.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#nation>
- 2 For the purposes of this report, the term “postsecondary learners” includes adult learners.
- 3 <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3317.161>
- 4 <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Career-Tech/Career-Connections/Career-Pathways>
- 5 <https://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-61>
- 6 <https://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3313.90>
- 7 <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Finance-and-Funding/State-Funding-For-Schools/Career-Technical-Funding/Ohio-CTPDs.pdf>
- 8 <https://council.org/>
- 9 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43159.pdf>
- 10 https://archives.obm.ohio.gov/Files/Budget_and_Planning/Operating_Budget/Fiscal_Years_2020-2021/BlueBook_BookOne_BudgetRecommendations_FY20-21.pdf
- 11 http://www.lsc.ohio.gov/documents/reference/current/schoolfunding/sfcr_feb2019.pdf
- 12 <http://www.ohioacte.org/news/7790798>
- 13 <https://completetocompeteohio.org/>
- 14 <https://completetocompeteohio.org/>
- 15 <https://completetocompeteohio.org/wp-content/uploads/Bridging-Ohios-Workforce-Gap-Attainment-Plan-August-2020.pdf>
- 16 <https://www.ohiohighered.org/transfer/ct2>
- 17 <http://regents.ohio.gov/careertechtransfer/archives/documents/HB66Language.pdf>
- 18 <https://www.ohiohighered.org/transfer/ct2/ctags>
- 19 <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA133-HB-2>
- 20 <https://techcred.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/techcred>
- 21 <https://techcred.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/techcred/about/credential-list>
- 22 <https://www.ohiohighered.org/otc/ctx>
- 23 <https://www.ohiohighered.org/rapids>
- 24 While specific comprehensive or compact districts may fit Advance CTE’s working definition of an ATC, JVSDs are the most direct analog at the secondary level.