



Committee testimony on Cupp-Patterson school funding proposals

Harry Snyder

Preliminary statement

Great Oaks Career Campuses and other Ohio career-technical schools have become increasingly essential to the Ohio economy. As unemployment drops, technology advances, and available jobs become increasingly technical, the gap between the skills of potential employees and the needs of employers widens almost daily. At the same time, college costs are making post-secondary education a more difficult pathway. Being able to earn professional certifications as well as college credit in high school gives Ohio students a head start in the world of work. But career-technical centers must be able to provide up-to-date equipment and current technology for students to learn on, and career centers must be able to meet the growing demand from students of all ability levels. The state funding model should match the changing reality for career-technical schools.

Testimony

Good morning. My name is Harry Snyder, and I am President/CEO of Great Oaks Career Campuses in southwest Ohio. We serve 36 school districts covering 2200 square miles. Students may attend any of our four campuses; we also have satellite programs in 29 high schools in our region. About one out of every four high school students attends a Great Oaks program, either on campus or at their high school.

Students have the chance to earn professional certifications or licenses by the time they finish high school. Our graduates may have their Federal Aviation Administration airframe mechanic certification. They may be qualified in robotics or become licensed practical nurses. Our students can become career-ready in more than 30 fields, and earn college credit while doing so.

Great Oaks students are great kids working for a better future. I think about Trent, a recent graduate who dealt with family addiction issues and homelessness throughout his young life. He persevered, excelled, and was a speaker at his senior ceremony. In fact, his Dean even chose him to travel with us to Washington DC to represent Great Oaks.

To be relevant in the regional economy, we must continually examine the programs we offer. Old, outdated programs are set aside and new programs that meet changing demands begun. For instance, programs in years past that taught stenography or mechanical drafting have closed, and new programs in robotics, coding, surgical technology and others have taken their place.

We must provide our students with experiences that prepare them for the future. For existing programs, that often means investing in equipment and technology even before business and industry does. For example, our welding program has served students for years; we've recently

added plasma cutters to each of our welding labs. That's because students will need to gain experience with them in order to be more widely employable.

The Ohio model of career-technical education was ahead of its time when it began. And, for over 50 years it has been held up around the country as a model of success. We're proud to be a part of it.

And though education professionals and employers have seen career-tech or vocational schools as critical, there had long been a stigma about attending. Fortunately, that has changed—and our enrollment and surveys show that. A 2017 survey of our residents showed that 92% believe that career-technical education is more important than ever.

The state has also recognized the value of career awareness and exposure at earlier ages. Great Oaks has embraced that effort by providing a full-time staff member to assist our 36 partner districts in developing career activities for elementary and middle school students. And, our annual Summer Career Camps give early high school students the chance to try out a wide range of careers. But it's a drop in the bucket among the tens of thousands of students in the districts we serve.

All of that means that more students are depending on Great Oaks and other career-technical schools. On-campus enrollment has grown more than 10% in the past five years, and satellite program enrollment has grown even faster.

Unfortunately, Great Oaks is subject to the funding cap. We receive no additional ADM funding for additional students. At a time when more students need our services, the Ohio economy needs more well-trained and well-prepared employees, and more communities recognize the


value of career-technical education, we've had to find ways to step up without the funding to support them.

That's why we appreciate the work of the Cupp-Patterson committee. The career-technical proposals contained in their recommendations will address the growing demand for quality career training and will financially support the increased work we do. We particularly endorse lifting the funding cap and providing funds allocated for career awareness and exploration.

We also appreciate that the weighted funding formula recognizes the unique needs of career-technical programs.

Next year marks Great Oaks' 50th anniversary as a Joint Vocational School District. The Ohio system began with visionaries at the state level and has served our residents well for five decades. We appreciate your support in providing the means to keep serving our communities for the next fifty years and beyond.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Snyder', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Harry Snyder

President/CEO