



Testimony Before the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission

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Good Morning Governor Taft and esteemed committee members. I am Sue Steele, member of the Goshen Local Board of Education and the Great Oaks Board of Directors. For 13 of the 17 years I have served on the Goshen Board of Education, I have been their representative to the Great Oaks Board. I have chaired both organizations and presently serve on the Board of Trustees of the Ohio School Boards Association.

I am honored to be here today to speak about the important role career centers and their boards play in the education of youth and adults, and the economic revitalization in our communities.

Ohio has a rich history of bipartisan support for public education for all students. In the early 1960's, Ohio stepped forward to create what many believe is the most impressive vocational system in the country. Governor Rhodes and the legislature mandated that all school districts offer students a comprehensive vocational education. To provide this expanse of courses, many districts formed jointures. Great Oaks, which now serves 36 public school districts, began in this way.

Our district includes 2,200 square miles – from Wilmington to the Ohio River to the Indiana border. Our students represent the diversity of Ohio citizenry from small rural districts to large Cincinnati suburbs. We have four campuses strategically

located so that career training addresses state and local labor demands.

Each year we educate 3,000 junior and senior high school students on our four campuses; another 13,000 take classes in their home schools.

Most students who come to our campuses are there all day; taking both academic and career courses. Upon entering, students, parents and counselors create a plan of study so that each student can graduate on time with the necessary certifications and credits to pursue a successful career. For many, that means continuing education.

Students at Great Oaks can choose from over 30 careers. After selecting a path that integrates their interests and abilities, students begin building a series of competencies. They earn licenses and certificates, as well as college credits. They participate in student clubs which align with their careers and expand on knowledge learned in the classroom. They learn from industry partners who are integral to a Great Oaks education. 1400 business partners serve on advisory committees, act as mentors, provide on-site learning and employ students.

The goal at Great Oaks is for all students to begin a lifetime of learning as they enter and advance in a career pathway that benefits them and their employers.

This vision has led to successful outcomes:

- 92% of our high school graduates are employed, continuing their educations or both
- 95% graduate in four years
- 82% of students tested passed technical skill assessments in their career fields
- 46% go directly to college
- 89% earned college credits through dual enrollment classes

Adult programming at Great Oaks has been equally successful. It began in the mid-seventies when a major manufacturing plant near the Sharonville campus closed. Laid-off workers needed training and we had open labs after high school students left for the day. That initial outreach has grown into multiple training programs that are a major resource for our region.

Last year, we served 24,649 adults. Some need assessment and career counseling. Others attend full-time programs from construction and dental assisting to personal enrichment. 10,340 students attended classes to earn their GED or improve language skills. A single facility is dedicated to training police and fire personnel. Soon, we will open a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility dedicated to robotics training. We have worked closely with the Ohio Board of Regents to align our curriculum with universities so that adults receive college credit for programs taken on our campuses.

We operate on monies from the state and local sources. 61% comes from a 2.7 mill property tax levy and 36% from state funds. Grants and miscellaneous monies account for 3%.

Leading this successful institution, which many consider the best in the country, is a 35 member Board of Directors. We represent 36 sending districts. 29 directly represent individual districts. Six are from Educational Service Center boards and represent their collective districts.

We are as diverse as the districts we represent. We are business owners, college professors, executives, chamber presidents, engineers, bankers, farmers and IT experts.

Our governing duties include hiring a superintendent and treasurer, passing a budget, placing money issues on the ballot, determining policy and setting and monitoring goals for the district.

We meet once a month. Before the regular meeting, members meet in committees. The work of the Board comes through these committees, and is then discussed at the official meeting. We have developed an efficient, effective method of governance that is built on trust and extensive communications.

Last year, the Ohio legislature altered the rules regarding membership for career-technical center boards. Our board members are concerned about the impact on Great Oaks and other career centers.

1. Career center board members no longer need to be an elected official; they can be community members appointed by the sending board.
2. Their primary qualification is knowledge about workforce development issues. This has traditionally been the role of advisory committee members at career centers.
3. These members are now appointed for three year terms, and limited to two consecutive terms. In 2020, Great Oaks could have 35 new board members. The biggest challenge with the rule change is the threat to institutional knowledge and continuity. Seasoned board members are able to share historical information on the complex operational challenges of career centers.

We are hoping that Ohio legislators will address these issues, which could potentially impact the successful governance of Great Oaks and other career centers.

One additional topic I would like to address is the difference I have experienced in the role of a board member on a career center board, and that of a local board.

1. Initially, the learning curve is steep. Career center boards are generally larger, with their own budgetary and legal requirements.
2. On a CTE board, you must build relationships quickly in order to build the trust necessary to conduct business. On local boards, most people know each other or have certain commonalities.
3. You are the liaison between the local board and the CTE board. You have to find ways to effectively communicate.

4. On a CTE board, you are responsible for ensuring that students have an education that prepares them for a career and continuing education.
5. Adult students are now your responsibility, too.
6. It also means additional professional development as you seek to understand a different educational delivery system.

I am proud to be a member of the Great Oaks Board of Directors. We are changing lives – one student at a time - and the businesses that employ them.

Thank you for the privilege of bringing you this message today.