



**Joint Committee on the Public Schools Facilities Hearing  
Testimony by Judy Savage, Executive Director, NJCCVTS  
May 8, 2018**

Good morning Assemblywoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the unique school facility needs of county vocational-technical schools and how the proposed Securing our Children's Future Bond Act would help to address critical career and technical education needs.

Research studies, surveys, and ongoing conversations with employers all tell a similar story: there are many well-paying jobs in advanced manufacturing and other growth industries in New Jersey that require training beyond high school, but not necessarily a four-year degree.

But many New Jersey employers struggle to fill those jobs because they cannot find qualified candidates. As a state and as a nation, we have focused too much on preparing all students for college, at the expense of opportunities to pursue technical education that puts young people on a career pathway.

The Legislature's Manufacturing Caucus heard this message loud and clear from manufacturers who are unable to fill current openings and are very worried about their future workforce as longtime employees retire. Employers in other industry sectors have similar concerns.

A recent report by McKinsey & Company linked this critical workforce need to NJ's economic growth<sup>1</sup>. Other national studies have similar findings: There are great opportunities for people with technical skills and a credential or two-year degree to fill good jobs in manufacturing, transportation and logistics, health care, IT, construction and other essential growth industries.<sup>2 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Reseeding Growth in the Garden State*, McKinsey and Company, July 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/reseeding-growth-in-the-garden-state>

<sup>2</sup> *Good Jobs that Pay with a BA*, Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, November 2017, <https://goodjobsdata.org/>

<sup>3</sup> *Middle Skills Fact Sheet for NJ*, National Skills Coalition, February 2017 <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/2017-middle-skills-fact-sheets/file/New-Jersey-MiddleSkills.pdf>

Today's workers need technical training as much as they need academics. As one of our district partners told us recently: "It doesn't matter what your business is. If you don't have people with technical skills, you're going nowhere."<sup>4</sup>

And young people feel the same way. They understand that technology is constantly evolving, and they want to get a head-start on careers that most of us have not even imagined yet.

Expanding career and technical education is a key to closing this skills gap. It is a critical investment in New Jersey's future workforce that is needed to support long-term economic growth.

NJ's 21 county vocational-technical school districts are already responding to these critical workforce demands. Our schools collaborate with employers, colleges, local high schools and others to prepare students for careers as well as college.

But additional capacity is needed to serve more students in new and upgraded career programs.

Career and technical education or CTE – the new term for vocational education -- has changed dramatically over the past 20 years, just like the economy has.

Recognizing how quickly jobs are changing, and the strong academic foundation and high-level skills needed to succeed in a global economy, today's high-quality CTE programs prepare students for a career pathway, not just a single, specific job.

Communications, problem-solving and team-work skills are as integral to our programs as the technical aspects of automotive repair, information technology, health care or any other career area. And our students benefit from work-based experiences, opportunities to earn college credits and industry-recognized credentials, and a clear roadmap for career success.

CTE is gaining steam across the nation, and the demand for these programs is especially intense in NJ. County vocational school enrollment has increased by over 34% since 2000, yet thousands of students are still being turned away due to lack of capacity.

While the demand varies by county and by program, on a statewide average, there are almost 2.3 applicants for every available seat in a county vocational school. Nearly 30,000 students applied to county vocational-technical schools in 2018, and roughly 17,000 could not be accepted due to program capacity.

When you look at this overwhelming student and parent demand for more career-focused education -- along with the skills gap -- it is clear that we must expand CTE to prepare more young people for careers.

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<sup>4</sup> James Mahlman, owner, Netcetra LLC, Toms River, NJ.

Last fall, the NJ Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools undertook a statewide needs assessment to identify specific needs in each county. We asked our county vocational school leaders to think about emerging needs for the next 10-15 years, especially in current and emerging technically skilled careers that can be launched with a credential or associate's degree.

Some of our districts have been considering the need to expand for quite a while, and they already had a clear picture of what is needed in their county. Others, quite frankly, have been stymied by lack of resources for a very long time and did not really consider the possibility of expansion until recently.

The discussion about future needs will continue to be developed locally, engaging county leaders, employers, colleges and local school districts.

All county vocational schools agree that expansion is essential to add more students and new programs. At the same time, existing programs need upgrades to keep pace with industry needs and to attract the next generation of tech-savvy students.

The major needs are CTE shops and labs for the new career programs, as well as the equipment to outfit those facilities.

County vocational school leaders focused their needs assessment on technical education programs that will help to address New Jersey's skills gap in key industries. They are excited about starting new programs in areas like global logistics and distribution, manufacturing, aviation and drone technology, and emerging health care careers. And they also want to upgrade existing programs like welding, construction, and green energy to attract more students into these well-paying fields.

It is important to emphasize that the demand for these programs is coming from industry. All county vocational schools have strong business advisory boards, and are active with their local Chambers and Workforce Development Boards. The legislation requires that all funded projects must align with labor market demands or local economic goals, and employers must be engaged in this process.

Our needs assessment estimates the cost of new construction projects to be approximately \$630 million. This would include new vocational high schools in five counties and significant expansion of existing buildings in others.

Renovation projects to upgrade and expand CTE shops and labs is estimated to cost an additional \$266 million. And the initial estimated cost for technical equipment to support new and upgraded programs is about \$67 million.

We recognize that the total needs of approximately \$963 million is very significant. The proposed \$450 million allocation for county vocational-technical schools will go a long way towards addressing priority projects. Many counties are still reviewing their needs with local officials so that they will be ready to move forward when funding is hopefully approved by statewide voters.

Making this investment at the county level is the most cost-effective approach, especially if county vocational schools can collaborate with county colleges and local school districts to make these advanced programs available to high school and adult students throughout the region.

If all of the identified needs could be addressed and sufficient operating aid is provided to support expanded enrollment, we estimate that as many as 10,850 additional secondary students could be added.

This is a very exciting time for career and technical education. The state's focus on increasing students' career readiness has never been stronger, and NJ's county vocational-technical schools are enormous grateful to Senate President Sweeney for leading the way towards an expansion of CTE in New Jersey.

Still, we need a new dialogue with students and parents, who may still harbor misperceptions about vocational education as a lesser choice. We need to work with schools, community leaders, employers and others to help everyone recognize that there are many great career opportunities that pay well without requiring a four-year degree.

We need more focus on work-based learning, apprenticeships and innovative approaches like the Rowan Work and Learn Consortium, which aligns all levels of the education system with employer needs.

And finally, we need to break down barriers and improve collaboration with local school districts to expand opportunities for more students to gain CTE experiences. It should not be tug of war for students, but rather a collaboration where the vocational school provides shared services at the county level.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I will be happy to respond to your questions.