**October 6, 2025**

**Senate Communications & Technology Committee and Senate Education Committee: Joint Public Hearing on AI in Education and Workforce Development**

**Prepared Testimony of Michael Stauffer, Ed.D., Executive Director, Berks Career and Technology Center**

Tracy Pennycuick, Chair of the Senate Communications & Technology Committee, Nick Miller, Minority Chair of the Senate Communications & Technology Committee, Lynda Schlegel Culver, Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Lindsey Williams, Minority Chair of the Senate Education Committee, and members of the committees, thank you for hosting this important discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its application in education. I appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences at the Berks Career and Technology Center and explain how we have integrated AI into our student experience.

My name is Michael Stauffer, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Berks Career and Technology Center.

For six years, I taught as a Technology Education teacher in the Tredyffrin/Easttown School District. My career took me to leadership roles with Schuylkill Haven Area High School and Oley Valley Middle/High School, where I served as High School Principal for three years.

Seven years ago, I joined the Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC), where I am now in my fifth year serving as executive director.

Now in my 21st year in education, I have had experiences supervising instruction in both the traditional middle/high school settings as well as within a career and technology center. Throughout my career, I have seen how the application of technology in our classrooms has played a critical role in transforming the teaching profession and improving the learning experience for our students.

I am fortunate to have experienced much of the educator and leadership pipeline in career and technical education. I know first-hand what it is like for teachers to make the jump from a trade to education, as I began my professional life as a carpenter and have a unique perspective as I understand the requirements of both professions.

The school I lead now, BCTC, was founded in 1968. Today, we operate two campuses, Leesport and Oley, in Berks County. The school serves 16 public school districts, numerous nonpublic schools, and the citizens and businesses of the Berks County area. We work closely with our community partners to ensure our students have a modern and relevant

CTE experience. Over 400 business and industry advisors review and provide input into the school's educational program annually.

The staff consists of approximately 60 professional educators and 25 instructional support personnel, serving approximately 2,000 secondary and 500 adult students each year.

Students choose from 30+ career programs across the following career clusters: Business & Information Technology, Communications, Construction, Engineering & Manufacturing Technology, Healthcare, Services, and Transportation. Our students can earn advanced credits through articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions. All students learn advanced technical skills and earn nationally recognized industry credentials.

We provide our students with a blend of classroom theory, technical applications in state-of-the-art laboratories, and authentic off-campus work-based experiences. Students regularly apply reading, writing, mathematics, science, communications, and technology through real-world contexts and applications in a career relevant educational experience.

Today, relevance means Artificial Intelligence.

Our students are going to enter their careers at a time when work and the workforce are rapidly changing, and we view it as our charge and responsibility to adapt quickly and prepare them for the future world of work. Over the last several years, we have thoughtfully and purposefully introduced and integrated artificial intelligence into our system.

In the Fall of 2022, we began to introduce AI as an embedded component of the educational system by training staff. In doing so, we have converted one of our professional staff positions to focus on the center’s needs in adopting AI. This individual, who was identified due to their existing technology literacy, has been charged with implementing and leading this adoption.

Their role streamlined teachers’ workloads, enriched the curriculum, and exposed students to state-of-the-art tools. Now, BCTC has a trained staff and is beginning to prepare its students to be adaptable in an AI tech-driven economy while protecting student privacy, preserving academic honesty, and utilizing AI tools in an ethical and responsible manner.

By Spring 2024, we had developed a plan for the next phase of integration, including AI enhanced applications for staff and student-facing AI tools for use by teachers in the classroom. The objective was to refine best practices based on pilot feedback and lay the groundwork for more advanced applications.

In the Spring of 2025, we gave our instructors options to integrate AI into their classrooms. Our focus was on maintaining academic integrity so that our students could learn skills without relying on AI as a crutch and our instructors could have confidence in the work their students were producing.

Today, we are not only tracking AI's impact in the classroom but also monitoring AI's application and evolution in industry as we prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow.

Since establishing the framework for AI integration, we have developed four innovative tools for our students and instructors tailored to specific program needs and applications.

We created a job simulator that utilizes text and audio to enable students to participate in an authentic job interview. This tool allows students to independently practice their interviewing skills in career specific fields. Furthermore, the tool allows for the student to submit a transcript of the simulated interview to their instructor to review and provide feedback.

Our learning guide builder has been instrumental in designing lessons and providing suggestions for innovative instructional delivery models. Additionally, instructors utilize the AI tool to create lesson plans, vocabulary lists, quizzes, and study guides.

Our instructional strategy selector assists educators by sequentially gathering lesson details—such as the topic, number of students, and preferred learning styles to recommend tailored instructional strategies. It analyzes a preloaded instructional strategies knowledge base to present the best option and expand upon the chosen strategy with detailed implementation steps and will also suggest additional resources to enhance the lesson.

We also offer a business plan pitch simulator, similar to the popular TV show SharkTank, that allows students to experience a realistic investor pitch simulation, where AI provides critical feedback and makes investment decisions based on the presented business plan. With a focus on key areas such as value proposition, market gaps, competition, and sales strategy, the Business Plan Simulator ChatBot will ask unique questions based on the content of the pitch, offer a financial commitment based on a five-year profitability prediction, and engage in valuation-based negotiations.

As we develop new plans and initiatives, our lawmakers can play a crucial role.

First of all, our most critical need is being able to offer our CTE programs to more students by expanding our capacity. The most difficult part of my job is turning students away due to capacity.

More students and their families are coming to understand the value of career and technical education and the combination of classroom learning and hands-on training is more appealing than ever as our workforce needs and the cost realities of education change. Those students could build careers in our communities and help our businesses grow and thrive, but if we don't have the slots for them, we are wasting that potential.

We greatly appreciate the work the legislature has done thus far to increase much needed funding for CTE; however, there is still more work to be done as our CTC's work to address rapidly growing enrollment demands so we can address our waitlists and do our part to help our communities, and the Commonwealth thrive now and well into the future.

Second, we need our lawmakers to avoid the temptation to overregulate Artificial Intelligence in Pennsylvania. Artificial intelligence is still in its infancy, and I understand the desire to ensure its safety. However, as you examine a regulatory structure, I encourage you to collaborate with those of us on the ground to understand how we are utilizing AI and how it can benefit our instructors and students.

If we overregulate the use of AI in education, the flexibility we have to create the tools that are responsive to our students' needs may disappear.

Career and technical education is thriving in Pennsylvania. We have more demand than ever, and many schools like ours are leading the way and integrating new technology into the learning experience for our students.

Hearings like this are important, and I encourage you to continue your discussions with practitioners who are already using AI safely and successfully in their schools and learning from their experiences. I would also like to take this opportunity to invite each of you to our Legislative Breakfast hosted by our Education Foundation on Wednesday, December 10, 2025, at our East Campus in Oley, PA. During that time, we would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate for you how we are applying many of the AI tools we shared today.

We appreciate all your efforts to improve the student and instructor experience at our schools, as well as the increased focus and value that has been placed on career and technical education in Pennsylvania.

We are looking to our leaders to provide the funding and regulatory structure that helps us grow and innovate. We look forward to working with you so more students have the opportunity to build thriving careers - and lives - in our communities.

Thank you for your time and for your support of career and technical education and innovation in Pennsylvania.

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