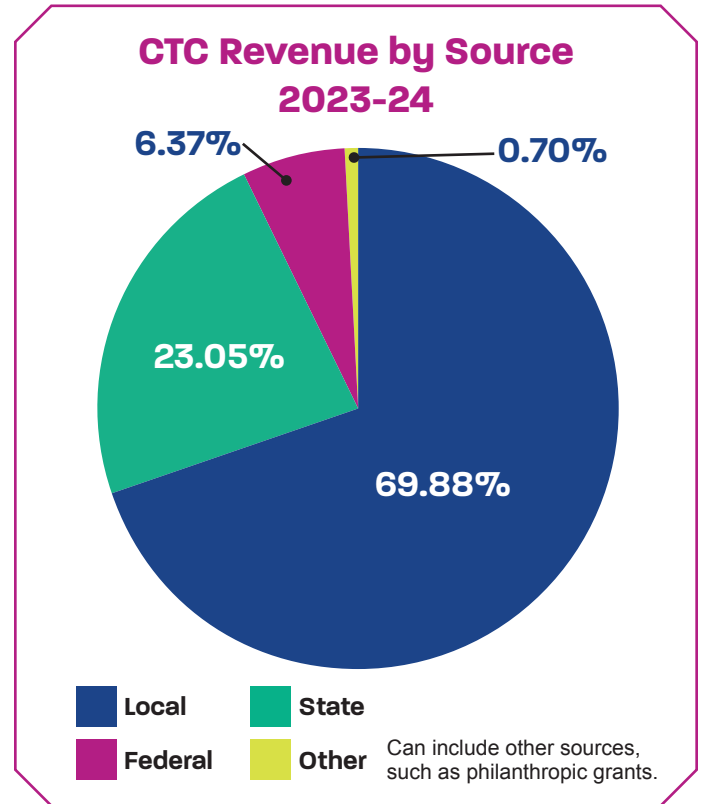


Career and Technical Education: Investing in Pennsylvania's Future

Career and Technical Education (CTE) plays a critical role in preparing students for today's rapidly evolving workforce. By combining rigorous academics with technical training and real-world, hands-on experience, CTE equips students with the skills and credentials needed to succeed, whether they enter the workforce immediately after high school or continue into postsecondary education with a clear career pathway.

In Pennsylvania, CTE is a key driver of workforce readiness and economic competitiveness. In the 2024-25 school year, 32,548 secondary students, 2,744 postsecondary students, and 5,565 adult students earned industry credentials, and 16,128 students (84.2%) scored competent or above on their program-end NOCTI assessment, with 10,197 (53.2%) scoring at the advanced level. CTE programs position students and the state's economy for long-term success.

However, access to CTE has not kept pace with growing student demand. Interest in these programs continues to rise, reflecting both student career goals and employer needs. In the 2024-25 school year, 76,300 students were enrolled in a CTE program, a 10% increase since 2021-22. According to a recent survey conducted by the [Legislative Budget and Finance Committee](#) as part of its Barriers to Career and Technical Education report, waitlists increased by 35% over the same period, from 4,480 to 6,893. The report cites the most common reason for wait lists as a lack of physical capacity. While state support for CTE has increased over the last several years, it has not kept pace with school needs. Those include high-cost materials,



equipment, and space required for in-demand programs that prepare students for high-priority occupations.

A key factor driving these limitations is how CTE is funded. Currently, almost 70% of funding for career and technology





centers (CTCs) specifically comes from local sources, while only 22% is provided by the state. Just over 6% comes from federal funding. This heavy reliance on local funding places a significant strain on both CTCs and high schools that offer CTE programs. CTCs rely on funding from home school districts, or districts of residence, whose payments are based on existing programming and enrollment, and who may be unwilling or unable to fund program expansions. CTE programs in high schools must compete for limited resources with a myriad of other programs that support a diverse array of student interests and academic needs.

What Policymakers Can Do

Policymakers can prioritize students and ensure that interested students can participate in CTE programs. CTE is no longer a supplemental pathway; it is an essential component of a modern education system and a strategic investment in Pennsylvania's workforce. While participation continues to increase, current funding levels are insufficient to fully meet student demand or to expand program

capacity, particularly given the system's heavy reliance on local funding.

To ensure all interested students have access to high-quality CTE opportunities, policymakers should prioritize sustained and increased funding in the state budget. This includes fully funding Governor Shapiro's proposal for a \$14.3 million increase to the Career and Technical Education Subsidy in the 2026-27 state budget. This increased state investment would reduce pressure on local districts, enabling schools to begin to address the significant disparities in access across the state, and providing them with the resources they need to develop or expand programs in high-priority industry sectors.

Expanding CTE is an investment in students, communities, and Pennsylvania's economic future. Aligning education with workforce needs will require a long-term commitment and a variety of strategies, but the return on that investment is clear: a stronger, more prepared workforce and greater economic opportunity across the commonwealth.



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