



Area Technical Centers: Supporting Postsecondary Skill and Credential Attainment in Delaware

Lumina Foundation’s Stronger Nation initiative finds that just half of Americans hold a credential beyond high school.¹ There is great disparity by race and education level in who has access to the skills and credentials needed to transition into new careers or advance in current ones. In response to this need, Lumina Foundation set a national goal of equipping at least 60 percent of the working-age population with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025, challenging each state to set its own postsecondary attainment goal; — and most have. States have many resources they can leverage to achieve their postsecondary attainment goals, including area technical centers (ATCs).

ATCs can play an important role in helping learners equitably access and attain postsecondary education and related credentials of value. ATCs are institutions that are focused on Career Technical Education (CTE). They serve learners from across multiple geographies, offering sub-baccalaureate-level education and training. These institutions are nimble enough to respond to changing labor market conditions and provide learners with the skills they need to obtain credentials leading to high-wage, in-demand employment.

In Delaware, ATCs are a long-standing component of the state’s workforce development system. Delaware’s ATCs are part of the state vocational/technical school system, serve both secondary and postsecondary learners, and have the primary responsibility of providing training and instruction for the state’s Registered Apprenticeship program.² As such, these institutions have strong connections to employers and are regularly leveraged by state and industry leaders alike to support Delaware’s economy and help learners gain the skills necessary to be successful in the labor market.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Registered Apprenticeship is an employer-driven, “learn-while-you-earn” model that combines on-the-job training with job-related instruction in curricula tied to the attainment of industry-recognized skills standards.

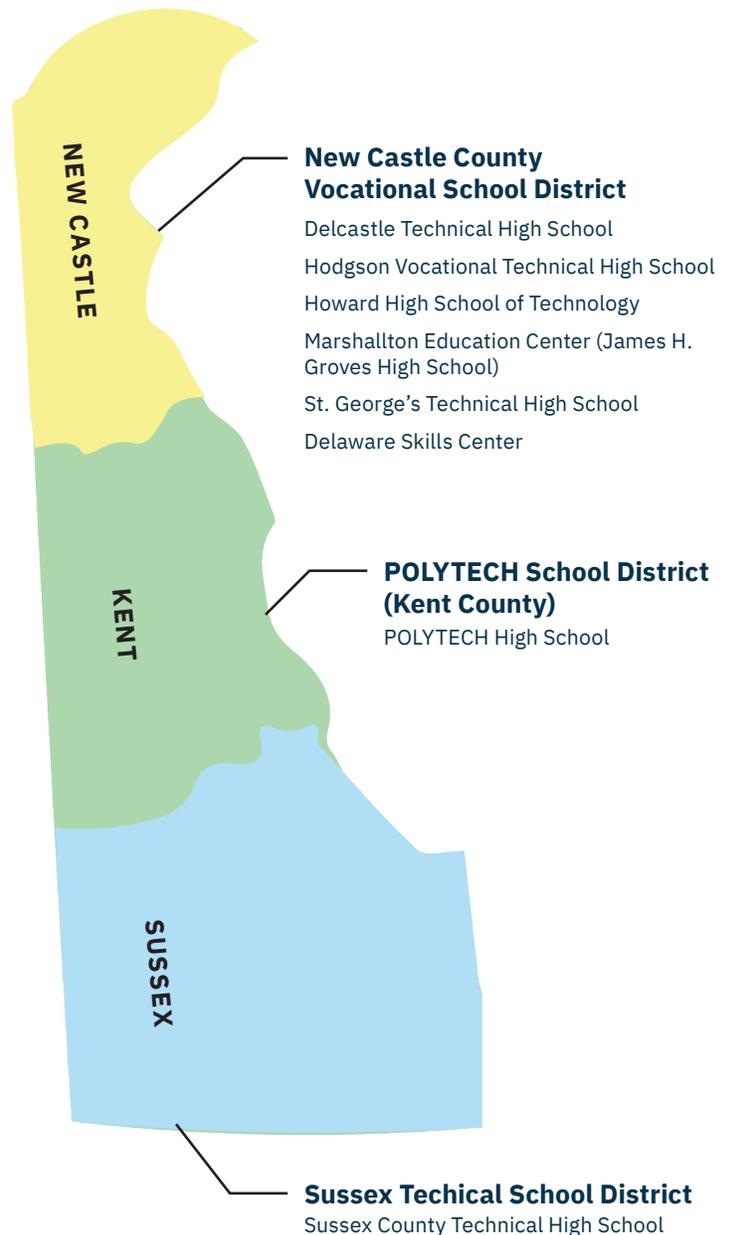
Source: U.S. Department of Labor

DELAWARE'S VOCATIONAL/ TECHNICAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Each of Delaware's three counties is home to a vocational/technical school district that houses an ATC. The vocational/technical school districts whose members are statute, each vocational/levy taxes for financial support.³ Local taxes are the primary source of funding for Delaware's vocational/technical school districts. Additionally, the state provides \$8.5 million in block grants to support adult learning at ATCs.⁴

The state's block grant funding supports programs that lead to short-term postsecondary CTE credentials and the state's Registered Apprenticeship program. This funding covers the cost of enrollment for registered apprentices, removing any financial barriers to learners completing a Registered Apprenticeship program. A limitation of this funding mechanism for institutions, however, is that the funding does not adjust for new learners being enrolled or programs being added. The block grants also do not pay for the salaries of instructors or staff, leaving institutions to find creative ways to make up those gaps.

The postsecondary education programs in Delaware's vocational/technical school districts are also supported by federal funding. Delaware secured approval from the U.S. Department of Education for an alternate postsecondary funding formula as part of its Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) state plan. This alternate formula identifies ATCs that offer postsecondary CTE programs as Perkins-eligible institutions. Delaware made the change because the statutory funding formula in Perkins V relies on Pell eligibility and Delaware's ATCs are not eligible recipients under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Thus,



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the statutory Perkins funding formula would exclude ATCs from receiving funding despite serving a significant number of economically disadvantaged learners.⁵ In addition to Perkins

Delaware Postsecondary Learners Enrolled in a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Program, 2018-19

Institution	# of RA Programs	Enrollment in RA Programs	% of Total Enrollment
New Castle County Vocational School District	20	1,170	83%
POLYTECH School District	8	368	45%
Sussex Technical District	6	329	68%
Total	34	1,867	69%

Source: Delaware Department of Education

funds, some of Delaware’s ATC program offerings are eligible for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS AND CREDENTIALS OF VALUE

Delaware has a robust Registered Apprenticeship program that serves almost 1,900 learners annually or, as the table below shows, almost 70 percent of the state’s vocational/technical school district postsecondary learner population.

The connection between Delaware’s vocational/technical school systems and its Registered Apprenticeship programs has been a long-standing component of the state’s workforce development pipeline. Because these institutions serve both secondary and postsecondary learners, the transition between learner levels can be seamless. The state also saves on costs by using the same facilities for both secondary and postsecondary learners.

Given their history of serving as the training providers for registered apprentices in the state, Delaware’s vocational/technical school districts have been able to attract and retain a strong employer network. For example, the New Castle

County Vocational School District, Delaware’s largest district, has developed industry advisory committees through which district leadership meets with industry leaders at least once a year to discuss curriculum, facilities, and ways to improve programs to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the labor market. Additionally, the state has created statewide industry councils — groups of industry-specific business leaders — that act as advocates for work-based learning experiences such as internships, apprenticeships and Delaware’s Registered Apprenticeship programs with their peers in the business community. Industry councils also help to inform and shape education programs and credentials for learners.⁶

Delaware also works with its employer network to create apprenticeship opportunities. The Delaware Department of Education partnered with the Delaware Workforce Development Board and the Delaware Department of Labor to create the Learning for Careers Program, an initiative that enables employers, industry associations or entities that represent employers to apply for grants that support the creation or expansion of Registered Apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities throughout the state.⁷

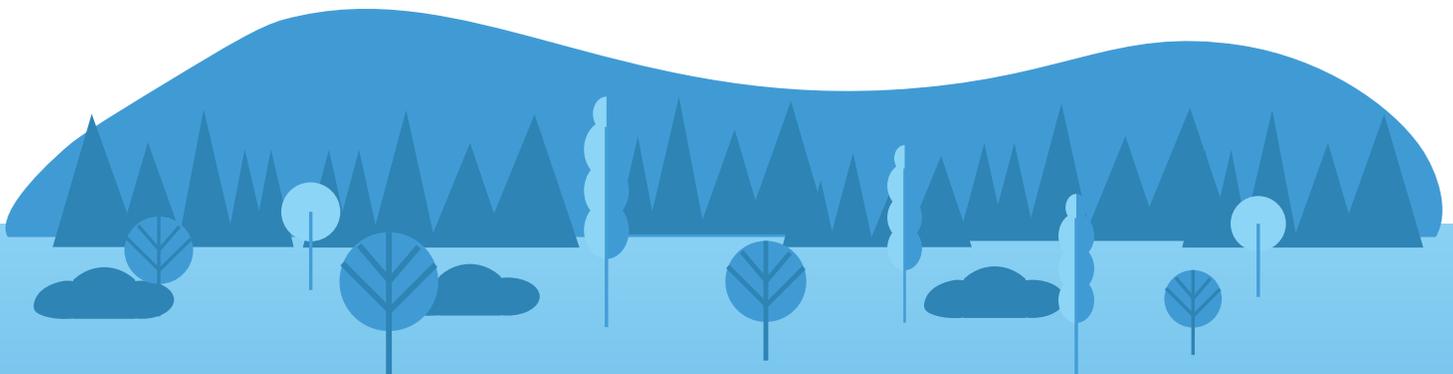
A common challenge in states is a concern about competition for postsecondary learners between ATCs and other institutions of higher education. In Delaware, the Department of Education has addressed this concern by developing a postsecondary CTE alliance. The vocational/technical school districts, technical and community college system, and other state agency/workforce partners are each represented in this alliance, working with the department to develop and advocate for a shared policy agenda to operationalize Delaware's postsecondary attainment goal of having 65 percent of the state's workforce holding a degree or credential by 2025. Together, this postsecondary alliance has worked to expand the state's Registered Apprenticeship program to include youth and pre-apprenticeship models, develop credential and coursework articulation across institutions, and improve data infrastructure and data sharing between the education and labor market sectors.

The department has also worked to build institutional bridges by requiring its vocational/technical school districts to offer stackable credentials, meaning learners can take the credentials earned at their ATC and build on them by seamlessly transferring among public Delaware postsecondary institutions as they move along a career pathway.⁸ Delaware's CTE Policies and Procedures requires that learners who complete a program of study earn an industry-recognized credential, certificate or license

that holds professional value.⁹ And according to Delaware's Perkins V plan, short-term credential programs in the state must provide learners with equivalent academic credit that can be applied to a subsequent credit-bearing certificate or degree program at a two- or four-year degree institution.¹⁰

ENSURING ACCESS AND EQUITY

Delaware's small size and population make geographical access to its ATCs manageable. In New Castle County, Delaware's most populous county, learners can choose among four technical schools; the Delaware Skills Center, which is an adult vocational/technical training center; or the Marshallton Education Center, which is the state's only high school that exclusively serves adults seeking to earn a high school diploma. Delaware's two other counties — Kent and Sussex — are smaller in size with only fractions of New Castle County's population, and they have only one ATC each. Tuition and fees, often the greatest institutional barrier to postsecondary education, have been removed for most postsecondary learners at Delaware's ATCs. As noted, the state funds the Registered Apprenticeship programs at the technical schools in the vocational/technical school districts while the Delaware Skills Center is an eligible training provider through WIOA. There are also no pre-screening or eligibility requirements that postsecondary learners have to meet to enroll in a Delaware ATC.



There are few institutional barriers to becoming a registered apprentice in Delaware. To become a registered apprentice, a prospective learner merely needs to find an employer sponsor to hire them. However, Delaware law limits the number of registered apprentices a company may sponsor. This limitation could have equity implications considering who has access to sponsoring employers. Learners interested in obtaining the skills and education associated with a program can still attend a Delaware ATC as a trade extension student. These learners receive the same training as a registered apprentice and earn the same industry-recognized credentials and certificates; however, they do not work with an employer who participates in Delaware's Registered Apprenticeship program and are responsible for tuition and fees.

While the state has removed some barriers to access, much of the work to support access and success comes at the local institutional level. For example, the New Castle County Vocational School District offers academic support to every learner. The district requires every postsecondary learner to take a basic math course to prepare them for "trade math," and if a learner is really struggling, they can attend the adult high school at the Marshallton Education Center for additional support. The school district also uses the fees a learner pays when they register for classes to purchase the textbooks learners will need, ensuring that every learner has the materials required to complete their studies. Lastly, the district provides wraparound services to learners who need support, including gas cards, bus tickets, work-appropriate clothing and protective equipment and English language support.

A challenge to access and equity, however, is that learners not enrolled in a program covered by the state can be charged tuition and fees. These costs

can be a barrier, particularly because, as noted, schools under Delaware's vocational/technical school districts are not eligible to receive federal financial aid under Title IV of the HEA.¹¹

Another equity challenge in Delaware is that enrollment in the postsecondary skilled trades programs and Registered Apprenticeship programs is overwhelmingly White and male. The Department of Education hopes that by employing the alternative formula for its Perkins V funding the state will be able to focus on targeted recruitment from economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color. Delaware also plans to improve upon its data and accountability models through its participation in Advance CTE's Advancing Postsecondary CTE Data Quality Initiative, which will allow the state to better track and incentivize equitable access to and success in postsecondary CTE.¹²

ABILITY TO BE NIMBLE AND FLEXIBLE

Delaware's economy, like the rest of the nation, was devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. As the state begins its economic recovery, state leaders are leveraging its vocational/technical school districts to support its efforts to upskill and reskill Delaware's workforce. The design of ATCs to upskill or reskill learners for high-wage, in-demand occupations allows these institutions to be nimble in responding to changing labor market needs. Delaware's ATCs provide easily accessible and affordable training aligned to the state and regional economies. As such, the state is leveraging these institutions to support its economic recovery efforts.

One way Delaware is leveraging the nimbleness of its ATCs to support its economic recovery is through the state's Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds — a

\$2.2 trillion economic relief package passed by Congress to support states in their economic recovery. The state is investing \$10 million of its CARES funds to support Forward Delaware, a set of rapid training and credentialing programs focused on in-demand occupations and skills in the health care, construction, hospitality and food service, transportation and logistics, and computer and information technology industries.¹³

CONCLUSION

Delaware's ATCs are vital assets to the state's workforce development system. They provide training and education for registered apprentices and help postsecondary learners attain the skills necessary to earn credentials of value in high-wage, in-demand occupations. Delaware has

made substantial financial investments in its ATCs through direct state funding and leveraging its share of federal dollars, most notably taking advantage of the alternative funding formulas allowed by Perkins V. These investments allow Delaware to offer the education and training provided by the Registered Apprenticeship program at no cost to learners and target economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color for recruitment into its credential programs. These policy decisions, along with a long-standing relationship between Delaware's ATCs, the communities they serve, and the industries with which they partner, have made ATCs essential components of the state's education and workforce development systems.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#nation>
- 2 For the purposes of this report, the term “postsecondary learners” includes adult learners.
- 3 <https://delcode.delaware.gov/title14/c026/index.shtml>
- 4 <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?LegislationId=48159>
- 5 <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/170/Delaware%20Transition%20Plan%20Perkins%20V%2024June19.pdf>
- 6 <https://deowbl.org/industry-councils/>
- 7 http://bidcondocs.delaware.gov/LAB/LAB_20001Lfc_rfp.pdf
- 8 https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org/resources/2016/10/20/10/11/Enhanced_Career_Pathways_Toolkit
- 9 http://education.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2017_08_de_cte_pos_policyandprocedures.pdf
- 10 https://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/170/DE_full_four_year_state_plan_perkins_v_200325.pdf
- 11 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43159.pdf>
- 12 <https://careertech.org/initiatives>
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