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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Effective Practices for Occupational Advisory Committees

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Introduction

An effective Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC) is a key element in every successful career and technical education program. OACs provide a vital link between the Career Technical Center (CTC), and the local and regional business and industry community. Active OACs ensure the relevance of career and technical education programs and serve as an advocate for the impact of career and technical education in addressing regional workforce needs.

The purpose of this guide is to highlight effective OAC practices taking place in Pennsylvania's CTCs and to provide examples of ways in which schools can strengthen their OACs. Examples highlighted in this guide are drawn from recommendations and nominations by Pennsylvania career and technical education leaders and administrators, with a focus on four key areas:

- OAC composition;
- Engagement of OAC members;
- Support for instructors in their work with OACs; and
- Effectiveness of OACs.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) administrators and instructors who implement the suggestions in this guide will take their OACs beyond minimum compliance to a level where they achieve the true purpose for which they are intended – to breathe energy and excellence into each CTE program.

Background

Occupational Advisory Committees (OAC) are mandated by Chapters 4 and 339 of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code. These regulations require the establishment of OACs as a condition for career and technical education program approval by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. As stated in 22 Pa. Code. 4.331(c):

An OAC shall be established for each vocational-technical education program or cluster of related programs offered by a school district or area vocational technical school (AVTS). The committee shall meet at least twice annually to advise the board, administration, and staff on curriculum, equipment, instructional materials, safety requirements, program evaluation, and other related matters and to verify that the programs meet industry standards and, if appropriate, licensing board criteria and that they prepare students with occupation related competencies.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) Bureau of Career and Technical Education publication found on the PDE website, www.education.state.pa.us, *Establishing and Operating Effective Occupational Advisory Committees* describes the purpose of OACs as a means "to strengthen the career and technical education program by making recommendations for program improvement and providing technical

assistance to assure the most up-to-date curriculum content and appropriate applications of technology."

Although OACs have no legislative or administrative authority, they provide valuable support to CTE administrators, instructors, and programs. PDE's publication referenced above outlines the following major goals for OACs:

- Provide recommendations to update, modify, expand, and improve the quality of the occupational program.
- Support and strengthen the relationship between business, industry, the community, and education.
- Make recommendations to strengthen and expand the curriculum and provide assistance in implementing these recommendations.
- Articulate long-term goals and objectives of the occupational program to parents, employers, and the community.
- Assist in identifying needs, determining priorities, and reviewing and evaluating curriculum.

Effective OAC Practices

The following examples, drawn from recommendations and nominations by Pennsylvania career and technical education leaders and administrators, focus on four key areas: OAC composition, engagement of OAC members, support for instructors in their work with OACs, and effectiveness of OACs.

Examples are drawn from information provided by the:

- Berks Career and Technology Center
- Eastern Center for Arts and Technology
- Erie County Technical School
- Upper Bucks County Technical School
- York County School of Technology

OAC Composition

The effectiveness of an OAC is determined, in part, by the perspective and expertise of the committee members. Thus, it is important that each OAC be of sufficient size and a diversity of perspectives to represent the true breadth of an occupation or career field. In contrast, if an OAC is too small or heavily represented by just one type of company in an industry students could miss out on experiencing the range of career opportunities in a field.

Establishing and Operating Effective Occupational Advisory Committees provides helpful guidelines for achieving optimal OAC membership and offers the following recommendations:

- **Size:** The size of OACs vary with the size and diversity of the community served, number of participating institutions, scope of authority, program of activities, and other factors. Size may also vary over time as committees expand and contract. Most occupational advisory committees include ten to twenty members.
- **Composition:** Committee membership will be representative of the community in terms of sex, race, age, occupation, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and other locally appropriate factors. A balance between large and small employers will be established and maintained.
- **Terms of Membership:** Terms of membership will be determined by several factors, including the availability of individuals to serve on the committee. The suggested term of membership is three years.
- **Qualifications:** Committee members will possess characteristics such as an interest in the school and desire to improve the school's programs, vision and leadership experience/potential, experience in or knowledge of the occupations represented in the school's programs as well as other occupations, and high motivation and dedication to the purposes and work of the committee.

In addition to the guidelines provided by PDE, each CTC may develop its own guidelines for OAC composition and membership. For example, Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) has established the following guidelines:

- OACs typically consist of ten to twenty-five members representing the occupational scope of the curriculum.
- Active incumbent workers and supervisors from the industry shall constitute the majority of the membership.
- Committees may include a student, a parent, and staff members from other educational and workforce development agencies.
- As a rule, vendors of the program are not permitted to serve on OACs due to the potential conflict of interest. Exceptions may be made upon written request to the Administrative Director should the vendor also represent an incumbent worker/supervisor in the related field and who may employ BCTC graduates.
- BCTC staff, students, and parents are non-voting members.
- Committee members are expected to be current in their understanding of the business or industry, civic minded, and people of goodwill working cooperatively with one another and the administration of the school.
- Every fall, membership will be re-evaluated. Members who have not attended meetings for two consecutive years or who have not otherwise served in a productive way shall be recommended for removal from the membership list by the program teacher. In addition, new members may be recommended at this time. The OAC membership listing is recommended by the administrative director and approved by the Joint Operating Committee annually at their regular October meeting.
- OAC members have no term limit.

In order to ensure that all relevant segments of business, industry, and education are represented on the OAC, Eastern Center for Arts and Technology provides a Committee Table of Organization for each OAC. The Committee Table of Organization, which is approved by the school's Executive Advisory Committee, includes a mix of supervisory and non-supervisory positions and at least one student currently enrolled in the program. For example, the business areas represented on the Allied Health OAC are as follows: Clinical Coordinator, Community Health Education, Former Student Representative, Hospital, Nursing Home (Skilled Care), Postsecondary Education, Practical Nursing Program, and Student Representative. The program instructor and Eastern's assistant director serve as ex officio members.

Each fall the OAC is asked to review its Committee Table of Organization to determine if the segments represented are current and appropriate, and to propose any recommended revisions. In addition, Eastern administrators encourage diversity among OAC members to maintain a balance across gender, ethnicity, and age.

Engagement of OAC members

Active and engaged OAC members can provide long-lasting benefits and support for career and technical education programs. In addition to their advisory role, CTCs may offer OAC members the opportunity to actively engage with instructors and students in the programs they represent. These activities may fall into categories such as student recruitment and placement, public relations and community outreach, professional development, and legislative and financial involvement.

In its OAC Procedure guide, Berks Career and Technology Center suggests that activities for OAC members "may include adult and continuing education programming assistance, career information dissemination, student recruitment and placement, program planning, curriculum development, program evaluation, staff selection and development, career and technical student organizations involvement including judging competitions, student performance assessment, facility and safety reviews, equipment selection and specifications, public relations, and advocacy, donations, etc."

To provide OAC members with examples of ways in which they may become involved with the CTC, Erie County Technical School created a list of partnership opportunities. This is not an exhaustive list, but it is intended to serve as a starting point for discussions. While some examples include a financial contribution from the partner, many opportunities include requests for time and/or other resources. In addition, some of these opportunities are one-time engagements while others are ongoing. This variety in structure allows for a wide range of partnerships.

Examples of Partnership Opportunities for Business/Industry

Adapted from materials created by Erie County Technical School and PDE's publication
Establishing and Operating Effective Occupational Advisory Committees

<p>Staff Development/Professional Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worksite orientation for instructors • Seminars/training on the latest methods/materials, etc. • Industry partnership participation • Assistance in shadowing experiences and professional observation days • Expositions and conferences • Specialized training programs for instructors • Development of communication between instructors and employers to improve collaboration • Aid to help instructors find summer employment related to their instruction assignment 	<p>Curriculum Assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class demonstrations • Occupational Advisory Committee membership • Identification of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to compete in the job market • Review and modification of curriculum/training plans • Current industry standards met for curriculum, course content, student competencies, and safety procedures • DACUM participation • Identification of facility and equipment needs
<p>Student Competitions, Testing, and Graduation Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SkillsUSA judge • NOCTI proctor • Senior portfolio review • Career and technical student organizations (CTSO) support 	<p>Assistance with Educational and Career Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers • Field trips • Mentoring activities • Meetings with individual students
<p>Work Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mock interviews • Shadowing opportunities • Internships • Cooperative work experiences 	<p>Student Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of certificates (attendance, outstanding worker) • Offering of items that can be used as student awards for graduation and competitions
<p>Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prizes or donations for student reward/incentive programs • Equipment loans • Donations of materials and supplies • Acquisition of needed equipment and supplies on loan or at special prices • Establishment of scholarships or other financial assistance for outstanding graduates who wish to continue their education/training • Review and recommendation of budget requests for equipment and supplies 	<p>Recruiting Assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to prospective students • Presence at open houses • Participation in school and community career fairs • Admissions congratulatory letters • Speaker at student orientation meetings • Assistance in the development of admissions criteria for the occupational program

<p>Public Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared advertising spots on local media • Development of public service announcements to inform the community about the program • Distribution of information describing the CTC's occupational programs 	<p>Community Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the economic and workforce needs of the community • Completion of surveys to identify present and anticipated employer needs and job availability • Representation of the business community in the strategic planning process
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During the winter months when construction company schedules are typically slower, Upper Bucks County Technical School (UBCTS) invites local companies to present information sessions for students in the Construction Cluster. The school-to-work coordinator begins the invitation process in early fall and schedules the visits between the conclusion of the District SkillsUSA Competition and the NOCTI preparation period.

Construction company representatives provide students with a wide range of information including: the company's history and current status; advancement and educational opportunities for employees; profiles of successful UBCTS graduates working at the company (if applicable); procedures to apply for a position; and sought-after employee attributes. Following the sessions, interested students may apply for employment. Interviews take place at either UBCTS or at the company site. The interviews have resulted in both cooperative education placements and full-time positions following graduation.

Through these sessions, instructors make valuable contacts for potential OAC members and NOCTI evaluators. Furthermore, in addition to potential employment opportunities, students and instructors receive current workplace information and hiring requirements.

Support for instructors in their work with OACs

As part of their duties, career and technical education instructors serve as the primary point of contact for their program's OAC. In this role, they regularly interact and communicate with OAC members to plan, coordinate, facilitate, and support their involvement. Instructors are responsible for maintaining OAC membership lists as well as recruiting new members.

The Eastern Center for Arts and Technology OAC Handbook lists the following responsibilities for career and technical education instructors:

- Establish and maintain a viable OAC.
- Orient new committee members.
- Collaborate with the committee chairperson and secretary to plan meetings and prepare agendas, minutes, reports, and recommendations.
- Prepare all necessary materials for meetings and mail materials to members.
- Take and prepare the minutes of each meeting.
- Contact all members regarding meeting times and dates.

- Conduct first meeting of a newly organized OAC.
- Provide committee with input on curriculum, budget, cooperative education, enrollment, and graduate placement.
- Follow-up on OAC recommendations.
- Involve OAC members in technical education public relations efforts.

CTCs often provide training and support for instructors to ensure they are aware of their role and responsibilities with regard to their program's OAC. At Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC), all instructors are provided an OAC Procedure Guide that covers topics such as roles and responsibilities, requirements for committee membership, meeting procedures, and membership communication. As part of the school's Induction Program, new instructors are paired with a mentor teacher who supports and coaches them as they prepare for their first OAC meeting. In 2014-15, BCTC added the requirement that new teachers observe an experienced teacher's OAC meeting.

Administrators at some CTCs have centralized their OAC support resources. For example, at Erie County Technical School, the business partnerships coordinator plays an active role in managing administrative matters for the OAC meetings such as sending out meeting invitations, coordinating meeting logistics, and making follow-up phone calls to OAC members. Erie County Technical School also provides a standardized meeting agenda which is reviewed with faculty members at a staff meeting prior to each OAC meeting.

At least one week prior to OAC meetings, instructors at Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) receive a packet of materials prepared by administrators and the work-based education coordinator. This packet includes a copy of the OAC membership list, a standard agenda, a sign-in sheet, previous meeting minutes, and multiple forms including those for facility inspection, fixed asset disposal, new equipment purchase recommendations, and task list changes. Teachers are expected to make copies of the materials and distribute them to OAC members.

In September 2014, administrators at York County School of Technology authorized an Act 80 professional development day during which technical instructors visited local employers. Instructors were encouraged to use this opportunity to establish relationships with new employers and to strengthen bonds with employers who supported the CTC through internships, co-ops, or OAC membership. Instructors had flexibility in scheduling their visits. For example, instructors from the health professions teamed up to visit employers as a group. The auto body instructor made arrangements with a local supplier to ride along with its sales representative for the day and visit many different shops. Afterward, instructors were expected to complete a summary report of their experiences.

A total of 37 instructors representing 25 CIP codes networked with 110 local employers during this activity. Then in October, employers were invited to attend the school's OAC meetings. On average, each program recruited at least one new OAC member who attended an October OAC meeting, and each program arranged at least one partnership for a cooperative education placement.

Effectiveness of OACs

Key characteristics of effective OACs include a shared understanding of the group's purpose and goals, active participation by OAC members during and in between meetings, decisions reached by consensus whenever possible, and the establishment of short-term and long-term objectives for the program.

Orientation / Handbooks

In order to provide information and guidance to OAC members, many CTCs provide an OAC handbook and/or a formal orientation program for new OAC members. At Eastern Center for Arts and Technology, new OAC members receive an orientation session that includes information about the advisory committee structure at Eastern, a discussion about how Eastern serves the sending schools and the business community, and a tour of the classroom and school. In addition, Eastern is in the process of developing a series of short informational videos for OAC members.

Participation

Attendance at meetings is an important component of an effective OAC. In fact, data on OAC participation is among the performance indicators monitored by administrators at Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC). Participation is measured on the program level and overall school level. Each year, administrators review the following data:

- Average OAC program participation (five year trends)
- Average overall OAC member participation (five year trends)
- OAC member participation by program (five year trends)
- Annual percentage of OAC participation by program (five year trends)
- OAC participation report (current year)
- Annual percentage of OAC participation by program (five year trends)
- OAC participation report (five year trends)

By monitoring these indicators, administrators are able to identify OACs in need of additional support and put corrective action plans in place to help teachers improve participation rates.

Feedback

Input and feedback from OAC members are key to ensuring that CTC programs offer students the most up-to-date curriculum, laboratory, equipment, and technology. Although not every recommendation or suggestion from OAC members may be actionable, acknowledgement and response to suggestions and feedback are important.

At Berks Career and Technology Center, a CTC administrator is present at every OAC meeting. Following the meetings, the administrative team meets to review the actions and recommendations detailed in each OAC's meeting minutes and to provide a written response to every recommendation that the OAC made. At the next OAC meeting, the instructor and OAC members review the administrative responses as part of the meeting agenda.

Administrators at Eastern Center for Arts and Technology also attend every OAC meeting. Rather than holding all OAC meetings on the same day, meetings are scheduled on 12 dates throughout the year, with a maximum of three OAC meetings per day. The school's three administrators each attend OAC meetings and are able to provide immediate feedback to members.

Evaluation

Administrators at Berks Career and Technology Center evaluate OAC meeting effectiveness through the use of an "OAC Observational Feedback" form. This instrument, which includes the indicators of quality listed in the table below, allows administrators to provide direct feedback to instructors regarding how well the meeting aligns with the standards. It also provides the opportunity to highlight "distinguished areas" and make recommendations for improvement. The form is completed and signed by an administrator and sent to the instructor via email within a few days of the OAC meeting.

Summary of BCTC OAC Observation Feedback Form	
Indicator	Definition of Proficiency
A quorum was present.	Single center programs: 5 members Dual center programs with 2 teachers: 7 members Dual center programs with 3 teachers: 8 members Dual center programs with 4 teachers: 10 members
The instructor facilitated a timely start and end to the meeting.	Meeting started on time and ended within 1.5 hours. The teacher kept the meeting focused and moving.
The room layout was conducive to a productive meeting.	The program area was clean and organized, and seating was arranged in a manner in which all members were facing each other and communicated effectively.
Agenda and related documentation was available for all members.	Each member was provided a current and error free copy of the agenda and pertinent documents for the meeting.
The OAC chairperson or other designated OAC member conducted the meeting.	The chairperson led and managed the meeting and referred to the instructor for information and guidance as needed.
The teacher effectively served as a secretary and resource to the committee.	The teacher actively captured notes during the meeting, demonstrated knowledge of agenda items, and answered questions or concerns in a professional manner. The teacher facilitated professional and positive dialogue.
All agenda items were covered during the meeting.	The agenda items were given appropriate consideration, and recommendations were voted upon. The teacher reviewed all administrative responses to previous OAC recommendations.

The teacher demonstrated professional appearance and attire.	Staff members wore modest business attire. Men: Buttoned down shirt and tie with slacks Women: Blouse, sweater, slacks/skirt
The minutes from the previous meeting were accurately completed and recorded.	The minutes were clear and provide sufficient detail of the previous meeting. The minutes addressed all areas in the BCTC OAC Minutes template and were submitted by the deadline.

Conclusion

Effective OACs are a key element in the success of a career and technical education program. In the words of one administrator, "Show me a high quality OAC and I will show you a high quality program." While OACs have no legislative or administrative authority, they can provide valuable support to career and technical education administrators, instructors, and programs. OAC members provide a valuable link between the CTC and the local business community.

In addition to the primary responsibilities of making program improvement recommendations for program improvement and providing technical expertise, OAC members may also promote the program and the value of career and technical education with their contacts in the industry and the community.

While the Pennsylvania Code mandates OACs for each approved career and technical education program, minimum compliance is not likely to make the positive impact on program quality that is intended. The enhancements and innovations identified in this report will help CTE administrators and instructors enhance the quality and impact of their OACs, and ultimately, benefit the learners and future workers coming out of Pennsylvania's CTE programs.

Reference List

Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Career and Technical Education publication *Establishing and Operating Effective Occupational Advisory Committees*

https://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/1244584/advcomm_occupational_pdf&sa=U&ved=0CAQQFjAAahUKEwjUm_T7pdjGAhXLWT4KHYdUDYg&client=internal-udscse&usg=AFQjCNG_4Ts-efDXJAzw7X40WDDtz_0tdA

Berks Career and Technology Center guidelines for OAC composition and membership

Copies available upon request from the CTC
www.berkscareer.com

Erie County Technical School list of partnership opportunities

Copies available upon request from the CTC
www.ects.org

The Eastern Center for Arts and Technology OAC Handbook and Videos

<http://www.eastech.org/oac>