

EdConnection

A message from Dr. Richard A. Ross
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Ohio | Department of Education

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Colleagues:

Where I grew up in northwest Ohio, farming and manufacturing put bread on the table for most families—mine included. My dad had a degree in vocational agriculture and was a farmer. I remember as a teenager learning a manufacturing skill—welding—so I could help repair farm machinery at our place.

I'm 63 years old now, and the need for skilled manufacturing workers hasn't changed. Ohio is behind only two other states—California and Texas—in the percentage of our Gross State Product made up of manufactured goods. Some 600,000 Ohioans are employed in the industry.

Before Ohio Manufacturing Month ends, I think we should congratulate our state's manufacturers for the prosperity they bring to our state. But we need to do more than that. We need to help them survive.

The average age of our skilled manufacturing worker is 56. Yet only 30 percent of American families recently surveyed say they have encouraged their children to pursue a manufacturing career. The national Manufacturing Institute is warning of a "worsening talent shortage that threatens the future effectiveness of the U.S. manufacturing industry." Ohio will have great job openings for machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors, draftsmen and technicians in the coming years. But we may not have qualified graduates to fill them.

Many Ohio manufacturers took action this month to address that issue, giving middle school and high school students exposure to manufacturing careers through plant tours, career workshops and live interactive telecasts.

We should begin working with local manufacturers to promote career options year-round to our students. I urge your districts and schools to have middle and high school students tour a facility in your community to see the opportunities available in robotics and other kinds of high-tech, advanced manufacturing. Most students will be surprised to learn that wages in manufacturing are 9 percent higher than the state average.

I also believe we need to raise the status and prestige of vocational careers to the same level as college and professional careers. One way of doing this is to strengthen our career-tech curricula and assessments to the extent that our students can graduate from high school with important industry credentials already in hand.

For more on career-tech assessments and industry credentials, visit the Career Technical Education page on the Ohio Department of Education's [website](#).

Thank you for all you do for the boys and girls of Ohio.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard A. Ross
State Superintendent of Public Instruction