



**BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
SENATOR ANDREW BRENNER, CHAIRMAN**

**TESTIMONY
OF
ALEXIS McCULLOUGH
THK MANUFACTURING OF AMERICA, INC.**

MARCH 3, 2026

Chairman Brenner, Vice-Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Alexis McCullough. I serve as Corporate Communications Business Partner with THK Manufacturing of America, Inc. located in Hebron, Ohio, who is a pioneer manufacturer of Liner Motion Guides and components, supporting many essential industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, and clean energy for the US and beyond. I am here today on behalf of the Ohio Manufacturers' Association, representing Ohio's largest industry sector and the employers who continue to invest, grow, and create opportunity across our state.

Ohio manufacturing is experiencing historic growth. Our members continue to report workforce shortages as their most pressing constraint to expansion. Employers need not only technical skills, but also professional skills, career awareness, and early exposure to pathways that lead to high-demand careers.

Senate Bill 328 is an important step in strengthening Ohio's education-to-workforce alignment and ensuring that students and families are equipped with the tools to make informed decisions about their futures.

Manufacturers across Ohio consistently identify three core workforce challenges. First, students often lack early awareness of career opportunities in modern manufacturing and other in-demand fields. Second, the quality and consistency of career advising varies significantly by district. Third, fragmented data systems limit our ability to understand outcomes and measure return on investment. Senate Bill 328 directly addresses each of these concerns in a thoughtful and strategic manner.

The bill's requirement for structured middle school career exploration ensures that students are exposed to numerous career clusters before making important high school course decisions. Career decisions often begin earlier than we assume, and when students do not understand the opportunities available to them, they cannot adequately prepare. Expanding structured exposure increases enrollment in career-technical education, advanced manufacturing pathways, and other high-demand programs that lead to strong careers.

Equally important is the creation of a statewide career coaching framework. Establishing consistent quality indicators, clear session objectives, and alignment to essential professional skills will bring needed uniformity to career advising across the state. Manufacturers increasingly emphasize professional skills such as communication, problem-solving, reliability, and teamwork as essential for workplace success. Aligning coaching and coursework to employer-validated professional skills standards ensures students are prepared for real-world expectations, regardless of where they attend school.

The bill also requires structured academic and career plans beginning in eighth grade, with annual updates and parent involvement. This approach strengthens intentionality. When students understand how their coursework connects to long-term goals, they are more likely to complete credentials, participate in work-based learning, and successfully transition into postsecondary education or employment. Involving parents further ensures transparency and shared decision-making throughout the process.

The OMA supports the creation of the Education and Workforce Return on Investment Initiative. Employers make decisions based on data, and Ohio should do the same. Linking cross-agency data to better understand postsecondary outcomes, credential value, talent gaps, and wage progression will allow policymakers, educators, and employers to invest in strategies that demonstrably work. The required annual reporting on graduate outcomes and workforce gaps will strengthen transparency and accountability while leveraging existing data systems rather than creating duplicative structures.

The OMA offers several recommendations to ensure successful implementation, which will require careful attention to resources and execution. The expanded middle school exploration requirement and coaching framework will necessitate advising capacity and professional development. Sustainable funding will be essential to ensure these new responsibilities do not divert resources from existing high-quality career-technical programming. Implementation should also allow existing effective coaching programs to qualify under the framework and provide districts flexibility to utilize aligned vocational-technical coursework in grades seven and eight where appropriate.

Additionally, a phased implementation timeline would strengthen statewide rollout. Allowing time for framework development, stakeholder engagement, and clear guidance prior to full compliance will improve consistency and effectiveness. Finally, the Return on Investment Initiative should minimize reporting burdens by leveraging existing data and reducing duplication.

This legislation comes at a critical moment. Ohio is attracting unprecedented capital investment in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, aerospace, mobility, and energy technologies. These investments demand a strong pipeline of skilled operators, technicians, engineers, and managers. Senate Bill 328 strengthens that pipeline at its earliest stages. Career exploration in middle school is not about narrowing options; it is about expanding awareness. High-quality coaching is not about compliance; it is about informed choice. Cross-agency data is not about reporting; it is about results.

As the Committee considers Senate Bill 328, it is important to emphasize that employers must also be prepared to support their schools partners. Through the statewide Career Ambassador Program, the OMA is training manufacturers to engage

more effectively with K–12 students and educators. The program equips employer representatives to:

- Translate complex manufacturing roles into student-friendly language
- Connect daily job tasks to academic subjects like math, science, and technology
- Lead engaging classroom presentations and hands-on demonstrations
- Support job shadowing, plant tours, and work-based learning experiences
- Reinforce professional skills expectations in age-appropriate ways

One consistent lesson we have learned: simply sending a technical expert into a classroom is not enough. Meaningful career exploration requires preparation, messaging alignment, and intentional interaction design.

The Career Ambassador Program prepares manufacturers to present modern manufacturing accurately and compellingly, engage middle school students in interactive career exploration, align messaging with Ohio’s career clusters, and reinforce the professional skills standards employers expect. This matters because the quality of employer engagement directly impacts student perception. When done well, students leave with clarity, excitement, and understanding. When done poorly, the opportunity is lost.

Senate Bill 328’s emphasis on structured career exploration and coaching aligns directly with what we have seen succeed on the ground. Employers are ready to participate — and programs like the OMA’s Career Ambassador initiative ensure they do so in a way that is thoughtful, consistent, and aligned with school objectives.

For these reasons, the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association supports Senate Bill 328. With thoughtful implementation, including adequate resources, a phased rollout, and strong collaboration with practitioners, this legislation can meaningfully strengthen Ohio’s talent pipeline.

We appreciate the leadership of Senator Koehler and the Committee’s consideration of this bill, and we stand ready to partner in implementation to ensure success for Ohio students, families, and employers.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.