



PA Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness

Phase I Completion Report

31 DECEMBER 2024

Introduction

The Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness is an 18-month commission created in June 2022 by adding Section 123.1 to the School Code of 1949. The Commission was further defined and funded by Acts 34 and 35 in December 2023. The Commission is charged with making recommendations for the 2026 legislative session based on analysis of global education and economic trends used to forecast the skills and competencies Pennsylvanians will need to be competitive in 2030 and beyond. The Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness takes into consideration Pennsylvania’s current context and establishes that statewide vision and implementation plan to transform public education and workforce development in the commonwealth through policies that will result in a system that is adaptive, innovative, and globally competitive.

The Commission has engaged a Subcommittee of stakeholders who are pursuing a three- phase process of 1) learning together to understand local and global context, 2) working together to develop recommendations, and 3) listening together to validate recommendations through a series of hearings across Pennsylvania. A final report with recommendations based on 13 goal areas identified at its inception is to be submitted by the Commission to the General Assembly by November 1, 2025.

Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness Goal Areas

- (1) Early childhood education and necessary supports
- (2) An aligned instructional system with special attention to curriculum, assessment, pedagogical approach, and standards that spans early childhood education through career and technical education and higher education
- (3) Education environment is conducive for all students to learn, including school infrastructure
- (4) Equitable access to education and educational resources to ensure students of all unique needs are successful
- (5) Holistic approach to education that includes a focus on development of well-rounded individuals through research-based competencies and dispositions associated with postsecondary education, career, and life-readiness
- (6) Professional work environment for educators, support staff, and school employees in K-12 schools
- (7) Creation of a leadership development system for K-12 schools
- (8) Recruitment and attainment of high performing educators
- (9) Community partnerships in the education system
- (10) Meeting the employment needs of the Commonwealth
- (11) Creation of a system that effectively re-tools displaced workers
- (12) Addressing the impact of the Commonwealth’s changing demographics
- (13) Effective governance and accountability

Phase I: Learning Together

Making the Case for Change in Pennsylvania

The world has dramatically changed for today's students. Today's high schoolers have never known a world without learning constantly available at their fingertips through Google and other platforms. (Quidwai, n.d.). Today's youngest learners will never know a world without artificial intelligence (AI)—arguably one of the most consequential developments in recent human history.

Today's schools are tasked with preparing the next generation of Pennsylvania community members and civic leaders who will preserve the wellbeing of our society. At the same time, schools aim to equip students with the skills needed to compete in a rapidly changing job market and adapt to a world where they leverage AI and other emerging technologies responsibly.

Our schools must equip students to compete in a rapidly changing job market and succeed in jobs that have already been fundamentally transformed. Across Pennsylvania, we are already seeing these changes affecting industries that are crucial to our economy. Manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, energy, and information technology are at the forefront of driving growth, collectively contributing to more than a [third of Pennsylvania's GDP](#). These sectors, along with others like hospitality, tourism, gaming, mining, natural resources, and agriculture, are increasingly reliant on data analytics, digital tools, and new technologies that boost efficiency and productivity.

[Emerging priority industries](#) for Pennsylvania, including aerospace, defense, and IT, demand higher levels of technical sophistication. Schools can—and must—play a critical role in developing the skills that align with future job demands: analytical thinking, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, agility, motivation, self-awareness, and lifelong learning. Recognizing this, the commonwealth has strategically aligned its Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to ensure students are well-prepared for careers in these industries.

Public schools are essential for achieving Pennsylvania's stated goal of diversifying the economy, increasing wages, reducing unemployment, and improving the standard of living across the state. This alignment is part of a broader economic development strategy, as evidenced by the creation of the Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness, co-sponsored by Senators Aument and Hughes. This 18-month-long Commission, supported by a Subcommittee on Education Planning, has studied global educational and economic trends, analyzed Pennsylvania's current context, and will be developing concrete recommendations for the 2026 legislative session.

The Commission's work has focused on forecasting the skills and competencies Pennsylvania's workers and citizens will need to be competitive in 2030 and beyond, identifying policies to bridge the gap between the current state and future vision, and presenting a preliminary implementation plan. By fostering a skilled workforce tailored to the needs of burgeoning industries and directly connecting education to the state's most significant economic drivers, Pennsylvania aims to create a pipeline of talent-ready individuals, ensuring long-term prosperity and competitiveness in the global market.

But the purpose of education is much broader than simply preparing students for work. Our students will grow up to be spouses, parents, neighbors, taxpayers, voters, and civic leaders. **Our educators are responsible for the growth and development of these future Pennsylvania community members, and, ultimately, for sustaining our communities, institutions, and democracies.** In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, our society now has a greater appreciation for the linkage between schools and community wellbeing.

Finally, our schools are the most valuable resource we have for ensuring that our **next generation can use and shape current and emerging AI technologies creatively, responsibly, and for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians**. The widespread adoption of Generative AI and the coming generation of AI technologies offer us both a challenge and an opportunity. We see an opportunity to guide the development of new technologies in ways that can unlock new possibilities for all. As stewards of education, we must take responsibility for equipping our young people with the technical skills, creativity, and good judgment to make wise decisions as they use, develop, and guide new technologies.

In short, we must ensure that workers and learners across Pennsylvania are **future-ready**. This goal is daunting and urgent. Achieving it requires nothing less than **transforming our education system so that it not only responds to today's challenges, but also adapts to anticipate the future**. This Commission will take actionable steps to fortify our economy, support a rapidly diversifying business community and attract new businesses, strengthen our communities and our civic-mindedness, and grow our population in the coming decades.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness recognizes the need to fundamentally transform our education system to equip every citizen of Pennsylvania with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to thrive in a changing future. Beyond education, this commission is committed to vibrant economic development and establishing an environment where business and industry can flourish with a prepared, thriving workforce. This is the bold commitment Pennsylvania must make to fortify a robust economy, strengthen our vibrant communities, attract new business, and grow our population in the coming decades.

Commission and Subcommittee Engagement

To achieve the goals of the Pennsylvania Commission on Education and Economic Competitiveness, the Commission identified a wide-ranging cross-section of stakeholders to comprise the Subcommittee on Education Planning. The Subcommittee includes leaders from K-12 and higher education, workforce development, community-based organizations, professional associations, and state-level Departments including Community & Economic Development, Labor & Industry, and Education. This diverse group of individuals have spent the last six months studying the context of Pennsylvania's economy and current state of education while comparing it to systems across the United States and across the globe. Through this evaluation, many bright spots across the commonwealth provide a springboard for possibilities. In Pennsylvania:

- Organizations and institutions across Pennsylvania are working exhaustively to provide PA's children and youth with an education that ensures their future success and the success of our commonwealth.
- An economic strategic plan focuses on key sectors and supports Pennsylvania in reaching its full economic potential and ensuring every Pennsylvanian has an opportunity for work-life success
- School and system leaders are leading learning communities that serve our youngest residents to our re-skilled older workers
- Committed parents and community members, including business leaders, support innovations and investments in public education in order to propel the commonwealth forward.

We have also seen all the ways that the system as it is currently designed is holding us back. Well-intentioned policies are sometimes outdated, other times misaligned, and too often misunderstood or poorly implemented. Our student learning outcomes are middling within the United States and lagging significantly behind global top performers. While efforts are being made to attract educators, the challenge remains a barrier. Many of our students are disengaged, contributing to chronic absenteeism, and parents seek to understand their child's education opportunities and, in many cases, seek alternative education options outside of the local public schools. Employers and businesses report that their newest employees arrive with few of the skills needed to thrive in modern workplaces. This is not the fault of students, educators, parents, or policymakers. It is the inevitable result of an outdated and inflexible system designed for a bygone era.

To actively address these challenges, the Commission established the Subcommittee on Education Planning which has been actively leveraging understanding of the current system to envision and build an adaptable and future-focused education and workforce development system.

Rethinking our systems in Pennsylvania require revising the mindset we bring to the charge. To cultivate active, engaged, and curious learners; produce a highly skilled, globally competitive workforce; and contribute to vibrant communities the Commission needs to deliver on the promise of a transformed education system from which our students, educators, parents, businesses, and taxpayers will all benefit.

Phase I Timeline, Arc of Learning, and Results

The Subcommittee, under the leadership of co-chairs Senator Aument and Representative Mullins, convened the first official meeting on May 30, 2024. Representatives from 34 organizations across Pennsylvania were identified throughout Spring 2024 with NCEE staff meeting with each organization individually to brief them on the purpose of the Commission and the role of the Subcommittee. By naming their selected representative to the Subcommittee, the organizations identified in the statute made commitments to join forces in the three phase approach. The May 30, 2024 meeting provided a virtual forum in which all Subcommittee organizations came together, with both the named representative and other leaders from their organization participating, to better understand the significance of this endeavor as well as the specifics in terms of meeting dates, deliverables and more.

Three in-person, full-day meetings followed. One important purpose of the in-person meetings was to build relationships across sectors that often have little to no contact. In-person meetings were designed with a dedicated intention of relationship building across sectors that often have little to no opportunity to collaborate towards shared goals. Each session's experiences ensured interaction among members and encouraged engaging with new perspectives and areas of expertise across subcommittee members in a spirit of learning and discourse.

Subcommittee members met on August 29, 2024, with a goal of building member understanding of the evolving world of work and learning for today's learners. Through sharing data on technology and its impact, shifting in-demand skills and work environment, and understanding conditions that enable global education systems to thrive, this meeting laid the foundation for the impactful opportunity for deep education transformation in Pennsylvania .

Meetings continued on September 20, 2024, where Subcommittee members were invited to review the thirteen goal areas with the objective of understanding intersections, dependencies, local/regional successes, and barriers to achieving these goals. The meeting enabled

subcommittee members to prioritize goal areas relevant to their expertise and organizational focus while ensuring a shared understanding of the content and rationale for how each of these thirteen goal areas is critical to transformative impact in the commonwealth.

Phase 1 engagement concluded on October 24, 2024, during which Subcommittee members examined how three high performing systems, Finland, British Columbia, and Singapore, have each established joint education and economic priorities, set clear metrics, developed coherent policies, and implemented efficient processes relevant to local demand to ensure education/workforce development systems are adaptable, innovative, learner-focused, and globally competitive. This type of global benchmarking afforded Subcommittee members an opportunity to examine high-performing systems, the designs of which can serve as a catalyst for new ideas. Second, Subcommittee members can apply deep local expertise and contextual analysis to identify and prioritize strategies that could generate the greatest impact for Pennsylvania relative to our unique circumstances..

As a result of the Phase 1 learning process, Subcommittee members are rooted in a shared understanding of the thirteen goal areas and the urgent call to action to adapt current systems to ensure all Pennsylvanians are able to succeed in future economies.

Phase II: Working Together

Moving Forward with Subcommittee Work Groups

Upon conclusion of the learning that took place during Phase 1, four workgroups were established in November 2024 with a goal of developing targeted policy recommendations ensuring that all thirteen goal areas outlined by the legislation creating the Commission are addressed. Each Subcommittee member selected a workgroup to join, and each work group elected one or two co-chairs to collaborate across work groups. Workgroup chairs will coordinate with Pennsylvania-based NCEE facilitators to achieve coherence and alignment across the four workgroups. The four workgroups are addressing the critical areas of Pennsylvania's education and workforce development systems, and are informed by Phase 1 learning. Each workgroup has distinct responsibilities relative to a subset of the thirteen goal areas:

- **Work Group 1: Foundations for Early Success** is committed to enhancing early childhood education, ensuring equitable access to resources, fostering community partnerships, and adapting to the state's changing demographics.
- **Work Group 2: Coherent & Aligned Competency-Based Learning System** focuses on developing a seamless instructional framework from early childhood through higher

education, creating inclusive learning environments, and fostering holistic student development.

- **Work Group 3: High-Capacity Educators** aims to support educators by improving professional work environments, leadership development, and strategies for recruiting and retaining high-performing educators.
- **Work Group 4: Meeting Current & Future Workforce Needs** is tasked to align education with workforce demands, retooling displaced workers, and strengthening community partnerships to meet the evolving employment needs of the Commonwealth.

Each workgroup will engage in a structured process that includes articulating a **Future Vision**, analyzing the **Current Context**, developing **Policy Principles**, and formulating **Policy Recommendations**. This process will be iterative and collaborative, involving workgroup meetings, Subcommittee sessions, and eventually public forums. Throughout, workgroup members will engage with stakeholders, gather data, and refine deliverables based on feedback. The workgroups will ensure that policy recommendations are actionable, stress-tested against guiding principles, and informed by real-world implications.

This comprehensive approach ensures that the outcomes are practical, forward-thinking, and responsive to Pennsylvania's learners, educators, and workforce. The anticipated outputs during this phase of work include developing a comprehensive report containing concrete recommendations for the Commission to consider when finalizing the long-term vision for the Commonwealth, legislative recommendations for 2026, and an implementation plan to bridge the gap between the 2026 legislation and the vision. Additionally, the report will include a list of unresolved issues for the Commission to discuss and resolve.

Phase II Timeline



Appendix

- Subcommittee meeting materials
 - [Orientation May 30, 2024](#)
 - [Meeting 1, August 29, 2024](#)
 - [Meeting 2: September 20, 2024](#)
 - [Meeting 3: October 24, 2024](#)
 - [International Benchmarking references](#)
- [Work Groups by Goal Area](#)
- [Work Group Membership](#)
- [Legislation creating and funding the Commission](#)