



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Guest Column:**

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## **Computer Science Education Must Start Early to Develop Workforce of the Future**

We all want Ohio to be the best it can be. To make our state the most enjoyable place in which to live, we must first focus on its economy and, as a result, its workforce.

When the Ohio Chamber surveys our members on their greatest day-to-day challenges, the overwhelming answer, no matter the industry or economic sector, is workforce. We need skilled, properly educated workers who are prepared not only for the jobs of today, but also for the jobs of tomorrow.

*The Blueprint for Ohio's Economic Future*, a comprehensive vision released by the Ohio Chamber in November, analyzes Ohio's economic competitiveness and makes thoughtful recommendations toward improving it. In the *Blueprint*, lack of STEM Education in Ohio is identified as a strong barrier to a thriving workforce.

Computer science skill sets are already in demand, and this need will only grow as specific fields like data analytics, cloud computing, cybersecurity, programming, networking and artificial intelligence continue to expand into the future. According to JobsOhio data, though, the skill gap between computer science occupations and the supply of computer science graduates in our state widens by over 11,000 openings every year.

These jobs provide upward mobility opportunities for young people in our state: the average annual salary in computer science jobs is \$30,000 higher than the median Ohio household income. While Ohio has been increasing the number of computer scientists it produces, we still rank 44th in the country for growth in this area.

To get the next generation of Ohio's workers interested in pursuing computer science careers, we must introduce them to computer science education as early as possible. However, according to Code.org, 50% of Ohio's public K-12 school districts had no computer science class offerings at the high school level in 2020.

Ohio legislators are not ignoring this issue— in 2018, Ohio enacted House Bill 170, which created K-12 computer science standards and model curriculum. The bill also gave flexibility to high school students by expanding the list of coursework options applicable toward graduation requirements. These changes helped Ohio's school districts to offer more diverse courses, which was a start, but not a complete solution. There are 27 states that require, rather than just encourage, high schools to offer computer science education; this should ultimately be our goal.

Gov. DeWine's recently released proposed state budget would provide funding to create licensures for more computer science teachers, create a council to drive more participation in computer science, and establish the "CS Promise" program to guarantee students the opportunity to take at least one computer science course per year, starting in the 7th grade.

We commend Gov. DeWine for prioritizing these policy items in his budget, but we also ask that the \$18.5 million per fiscal year for in-school and virtual computer science offerings be restored, as well as the "Teach CS" grant program intended to fund coursework, materials and exams to develop more qualified computer science instructors.

As the *Blueprint* warns, Ohio's economic future depends on our ability to prepare students for jobs of the future. Every industry needs computer scientists, and as technology continues to advance, this demand will not lessen. To ensure that our students' interest in computer science jobs is piqued before the time comes to choose their college majors, we must invest in K-12 education that introduces them to these careers and the opportunities they provide.

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