

HARFORD COUNTY
CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION
MINUTES OF MEETING

January 13, 2026

8:30-10:00 a.m.

Attendees: Joe Connolly, Charlene Chester Jerome, Jeanne Donlick, Katie Eckstein, Savannah Feist, Matthew Gullion, Matt Johnstone, Megan McDowell, Erin Mock, Joshua Oltarzewski, Becky Pensero, Joni Poust, Sara Saacks, Charlotte Scheers, Wade Sewell, Andrew Thomson, Emily Thomson, and Kelly Zajicek

HCPS Updates: Mr. Connolly began the meeting at 8:15 AM. We received Perkins Reserve funding to allow 8 more students to participate in the Defense Interns program; we were also able to register the organization for Registered Apprenticeship status.

Mr. Connolly had each attendee give their name, background, and a project or goal for this year related to their work. After attendees reviewed the prior meeting minutes, he asked for approval. With a correction noting that the senior survey did *not* receive the participation needed, Mr. Sewell motioned, and Mr. Johnstone seconded to accept them. This meeting's agenda was accepted with a motion from Mrs. Saacks and a second from Ms. Feist.

Mrs. Eckstein shared our annual CTE Family Night is scheduled for February 26th at PMHS, make-up date of March 6th. The event will start with an overview and opening remarks before transitioning to a fair-style event. The goal is to have teachers and students there from all magnet/signature programs and CTE student organizations like HYWI, apprenticeships, MFRI, FBLA, and Skills USA.

Mrs. Eckstein met with Mrs. Stapleton to discuss when information should be shared to keep families informed about events and opportunities available. They also discussed the calendar misalignment between HCPS and HCC. Through the feedback provided by this group, they have created a menu of items that can fill the school days before HCC courses start back up, such as guest speakers, job shadowing, etc.

In December, she and Mr. Johnstone attended the LAPSEN and ACTE conferences. They were able to attend many sessions and get one-on-one time with each vendor and LAPSEN's executive director. With space opening at Harford Tech next year, they would like to bring the 911 Call Center IRC to HCPS. This can be used at 18 and paired with corrections, or other law enforcement roles that require a minimum age of 21. Next steps are reviewing available curriculum to create a robust program of study with Career-Connected Learning integrated, and to develop a Stakeholder committee with law enforcement agencies, public safety, judges, etc.

Mr. Oltarzewski suggested speaking with Jeff Norris, HCPS's Safety and Security Technology Systems Coordinator, on who to work with while creating the new Law Enforcement program.

Mr. Connolly added that JOHS's Homeland Security students will be taking the LAPSEN Introductory Level Competency Level 1 Exam this year. He has already met with Eric Robie

from the Harford County Sheriff's Office and will continue to do so as the program is created, likely to be implemented in the 27-28 school year.

We received an additional \$19,000 in Perkins carryover funds, which will most likely be spent on computers. We are up for a new Comprehensive Needs Assessment this February or March. If the document is ready, it will be discussed at the March meeting. The review looks at data, statistics, and local workforce needs, and how we can align our work and goals to match. It also dictates the next two years of Perkins requests.

Mr. Connolly reviewed our SMARTIE goals, all of which we have been successful in. He recently presented to all CTE directors on his collaboration with the Math office. In an effort to remove barriers for our students, planning has begun for school-based enterprises to give students work-based skills experience without the need for additional transportation.

Starting next year, we would like to offer AP Business and Personal Finance to provide more rigorous courses for our students in upper grades; this will include entrepreneurship, marketing, finance, accounting and management, real-world applications, and project-based learning.

Updated Program of Study guides were adopted September 30th, to be implemented in the 27-28 school year. At the full-day department chair meeting, we were able to have them look at standards and descriptions in the guides, requirements of courses, new Industry-Recognized Credentials related to the course, etc.

MSDE asked us and several other LEAs to pilot Career-Connected Learning next year so that they can create a playbook for all LEAs. This will be fully implemented in the 27-28 school year and will include internships, apprenticeships, and school-based enterprises. Ms. Kutcher, Mr. Connolly, and Mr. Johnstone will attend an all-day meeting on January 30th, surrounding the expectations and final related business rules.

Mr. Johnstone said our apprenticeship numbers will peak in 27-28, but with the addition of internships and school-based enterprises, we will have more students getting business experience.

Ms. Thomson explained that the Early College program is a rigorous course of study, with synchronous HCPS courses taught by Swan Creek staff and asynchronous HCC courses. Students can earn an associate degree while earning their high school diploma. The program includes four tracks: Associate of Science-Psychology, Associate of Arts with a certificate in Accounting, Business Administration, or Data Science.

She will focus on the asynchronous component and support students by meeting with them once per week; monitoring progress to determine if additional support is needed; and supporting communication between HCC, Swan Creek, and families. She will also facilitate workshops on digital literacy, time management, and self-advocacy, especially.

In addition to HCPS resources, students will have access to HCC amenities, such as the library, learning centers, counseling and career services, etc. After earning their associate degree, they will be able to transfer their credits to a 4-year university. Thanks to HCC's partnerships with certain 4-year universities, students have the opportunity to receive their Bachelor's degree at HCC tuition rates.

Mr. Sewell shared that he is a big supporter of this program and asked how many students we have the bandwidth for in the program.

Ms. Thomson hopes to have 30 students the first year. Despite holding the information night just before the holidays, there were approximately 40 people at the event, with many homeschool families expressing interest. The application ends on January 23rd but could potentially be extended based on the community's needs. She expects that the program will experience greater growth once presented alongside the other magnet programs next year.

Mr. Connolly expects somewhere around 20-25 students enrolled the first year, with 20 per cohort in future years.

Ms. Pensero shared that we started this year with about 70 students in HYWI, which is lower than last year due to funding limitations. The CNA program was not held this fall due to funding and student paperwork requirements. Harford County Government provided additional funding for spring offerings, including the CNA course and another section of Dental.

This is the final year of SWN funding HYWI; the program was proposed in next year's HCPS budget at the board meeting last night, which would allow for program partnerships with HTHS as well as HCC. The college hopes to hold all courses on campus to eliminate half the buses needed, and include trips that will make further use of the buses already being utilized. She met with career navigators and counseling department chairs yesterday to discuss next year's HYWI offerings; all will be kept except Windows, which students have trouble passing due to a lack of background knowledge. Counselors will meet with students next week to log their course requests, informing them that the program is budget-dependent.

A counselor brought up how we can prepare students for the Accuplacer math test required for Allied Health programs, which students tend to struggle with. In addition to practice exams, HCC has a QR code to scan after taking the test that shows which questions were missed and provides videos to help understand the material.

Mrs. Saacks suggested talking to the math office about this issue, to see if they have insights or resources that may be helpful.

Mr. Connolly shared that HYWI students earned 151 credentials last year. By the next meeting, Ms. Pensero will have a current figure for this year.

Ms. Zajicek explained that HCC is working on their welding lab so that they can expand to offering 10 booths. The Radcliff Foundation scholarship expires June 30th, with \$75,000 still available; high school students are eligible, but funding is for specific programs, mainly trades.

Ms. Pensero said that SWN will provide funding for a Career Exploration program again this summer which will focus on middle schoolers. This gives them a chance to explore courses available to them in high school.

Mr. Johnstone shared the new approved IRC list will be out January 22nd. The third session of the CTE Leadership Academy will focus on the science of learning, led by Andy Renzulli. Data released in November showed that HCPS had exponentially higher apprenticeship participation than any other MD school district. Currently, we have 285 apprenticeship placements, with one less staff member than in the prior school year. There were 251 this time last year.

Ms. Feist shared that her students enjoyed hearing from Ms. Becker, that they learned about many opportunities they were not previously aware were available to them.

Ms. Mock said the construction crew is hoping to have the office suite completed by the end of May to start Cosmetology in early June, hopefully to be finished before school starts. The culinary restaurant will open Feb 10th; she expressed her thanks to Mrs. Donlick for coordinating with HCC so students could receive kitchen experience during the renovation.

Mrs. Donlick said nearly 100% of HTHS seniors have earned at least 1 IRC. She is working through magnet applications, which are down slightly from last year. The nursing program is extremely popular, and she would like to see a second program started; 150 applications we received this year. She would like to visit middle schools in future years to promote programs with lower application numbers, which includes auto refinishing and horticulture this year.

When Ms. Feist asked what she felt was the cause, Mrs. Donlick said the equipment in the automotive area likely outshine the refinishing area during tours. Also, their horticulture program currently competes with NHHS's offerings. However, with the new greenhouse, HTHS will be able to expand their program and offer more than just floral design again.

Ms. Scheers shared that she enjoys the Printing and Graphics program, especially creating projects for the community, like churches and senior living facilities. She earned a certification as a sophomore, which is unique opportunity at HTHS for which she is grateful.

Mr. Gullion shared that culinary students have had more teamwork and collaboration due to construction, which is a positive, real-world skill.

Mr. Connolly opened the floor for comments, of which there were none. The meeting was adjourned.