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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE REGARDING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Texas AFT supports well-designed, well-implemented career and technical education programs that significantly increase the academic rigor and relevance of the high school curriculum and expand what students can do with their futures. Texas AFT supports professional development opportunities for career and technical education teachers who need additional training to meet these new demands, which should include opportunities for workplace visits and joint curriculum development with teachers of traditional academic subjects to enhance the integration of academic and career and technical education. We believe well-designed CTE programs can help us reduce dropout rates and increase the postsecondary readiness of students who complete high school.

Recommendations to Improve CTE Programs

Indeed, some exemplary CTE programs are achieving these goals already. While conducting our own site visits of successful CTE programs, Texas AFT has learned about promising strategies that CTE instructors use to reach disengaged students. At Cypress-Ridge High School, Mr. Peterson, the carpentry and welding instructor, told us how co-teaching plays an important role in helping him reach bored or disengaged students. He said students who may not "get" ratios and other concepts in a math classroom can directly and meaningfully apply the concepts in the carpentry lab. By meeting with his students' math instructors, he is able to identify those students who require an additional or different learning approach for certain concepts. The carpentry course allows him sufficient latitude to address individual student needs in the manner he finds most effective for each one.

One example he gave was of a student who seemed distracted and bored in class. The student spent most of his time twirling his pen in class until Mr. Peterson explained the connections between cost of goods, sales price, profits, etc. This student made the connection that he could spend a couple of dollars on a project, then go to the flea market and sell it for \$20. The student became an entrepreneur once he realized what he was learning directly benefited him. The student became actively engaged and interested in the coursework, even spending extra time in the carpentry lab after school. As a result, both his math grades and his carpentry grades improved.

Meanwhile, in the Cy-Fair program's welding department, students help to build components for NASA 's training operations. The project instills great pride on the part of students and NASA even sponsors a banquet to honor them at the end of the school year.

The automotive technology instructor at Cypress-Ridge High School, Mr. Mooneyham, stays in close contact with Houston area car dealerships to ensure he is training students in advanced automotive technology, which involve significant and complex computer advances. Because of the tremendous advantage of having a ready workforce at hand, auto dealers actually invest in individual students and provide two-year scholarships to community colleges and four-year colleges as well. The University of Houston currently offers a four-year degree in automotive technology. One automotive technology student we met was also enrolled in AP Calculus. Mr. Mooneyham explained that automotive technology has advanced to the point that a solid math and science foundation is necessary for a student's success. Automotive technology is not the "shop class" of the past. He also noted that many of his former students out-earn him within a couple of years of graduating. Both instructors told us that these courses are in very high demand and there is a great need for additional qualified instructors.

Effective, academically rigorous CTE programs exist all around the state, even at campuses that are otherwise struggling to achieve acceptable performance ratings. Here in Austin, for example, at one such campus--Johnston High School--a bright spot is the school's program to advance students toward a career in nursing. This program operates in close collaboration with the Austin Community College's health-sciences division, engaging students in college-level work for credit and starting them on the way to a nursing degree before they leave high school.

As the state seeks to improve career and technical programs, we can also learn from other success stories and tap into some underused resources. For instance, labor organizations already play an integral part in career and technology education in Texas and are well-equipped to assist in training programs within school districts. Texas labor unions, through regional AFL-CIO central labor councils, have partnered with school districts and have been involved with successful career and technology programs throughout the state. Because of their regional nature, central labor councils are keenly aware of area labor needs and how to address them.

The Cypress-Fairbanks ISD Career and Technology Program again provides an excellent example. By partnering with local labor councils and employers such as auto dealers and Cisco Systems, the program is able to identify workforce needs ahead of time in order to ensure that a trained workforce will be available when the jobs open up. Through this collaboration, labor councils and businesses join forces to fund the students' training, including apprenticeships, and the students earn certifications that allow them to begin work immediately in several different fields.

In July, the Career and Technical Education Review Panel, established last session by HB 3485, will be making formal recommendations to the State Board of Education on how

to increase the academic rigor of the career and technical education curriculum and to improve and increase participation in the program. We welcome this effort. However, this panel does not include any CTE instructors who have first-hand experience with student success in CTE programs. Before the State Board of Education convenes the TEKS writing teams for CTE standards, Texas AFT feels it is imperative to include on the teams those educators who have first-hand knowledge and experience with successful career and technical education programs. Central labor councils also should be represented.

By involving front-line educators and the network of career and technology education experts in central labor councils, we can ensure that students have academic choices that are attractive, attainable, rigorous, and aligned with regional economic-development needs. As this committee continues to examine CTE programs, we strongly urge you to seek the counsel of those who have a proven track record of guiding high school students into long and productive careers.