

“Reviving our Economy: How Career and Technical Education Can Strengthen the Workforce.”

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Thank you Chairman Kline, Member Heck and Members of the Committee. It is an honor and a pleasure to share with you my perspective on the importance of career and technical education and its relevance to our economy.

My name is Felicia Nemcek and I am the founding principal of Southwest Career and Technical Academy here in Las Vegas, Nevada and we are part of the Clark County School District, the fifth largest district in the nation

We are one of seven career and technical academies in Southern Nevada. At SWCTA, our facilities were funded through a bond measure approved by voters in 1998 and we were modeled after our community's original vocational high school, now known as the Southeast Career and Technical Academy (SECTA). After 30 years of continuous high graduation rates from SECTA, our school district and community leadership developed a vision to build upon this success by opening more career and technical academies in different parts of the Las Vegas Valley, providing more access to students. The rebranding of the name from “vocational” to “career and technical academy” and opening CTE programs that meet the needs of our community got us all off to a great start. Today, the career and technical academies have over 95% graduation rates and more applicants than we have seats. Our community sees the value of their investment and the value of career and technical education.

Here at Southwest Career and Technical Academy, we have 1475 students enrolled in 11 different program areas. The school is divided into two smaller learning communities – the Design Academy and the Professional Service Academy. Within the Design Academy, we offer Entertainment Engineering, Fashion Design, Video Game Design, and Web Design. In the Professional Services Academy, the areas of focus are Culinary Arts, Hospitality, Automotive/Diesel Technology, Respiratory Therapy, Dental Assisting, and a Certified Nursing Assistant Program. All classes provide rigorous curriculum, educational technology, soft skills training, and project-based learning in order to prepare the students to be both college and career ready in a 21st century world. With support from local business and industry professionals who sit on our advisory boards, we continually update our programs to ensure that the curriculum addresses industry standards. For the last three years, we have been recognized as an Apple Distinguished School for our innovative use of educational technology and the last two years, we were named a Magnet School of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America.

Since my appointment as principal in August of 2008, I have become a great advocate of career and technical education because of the successes I have witnessed here in my school, in Clark County, and across our state. From my perspective, we need to recognize and support the following:

- The role of a principal has changed. We play an important role in economic development and we must develop strong relationships with our community. In order to educate 21st century learners and to prepare them to be both college and career ready upon graduation, we have to value professional development and connect with industry experts in order to keep current with local trends and demands. For example, I attend many community events and professional conferences; I am a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and Nevada ACTE and other professional organizations; I am a member of the Nevada Governor's Workforce Investment Board IT sector council; I participate in all of my advisory boards; I am a recent graduate of the Public Education Foundation's Leadership Institute; and I am the educational leader of Southwest Career and Technical Academy. As a principal, I challenge all students academically to ensure that college is achievable, I oversee the integration of core content into CTE courses to make learning relevant and engaging, I provide my teaching staff with ongoing and focused professional development, and I ensure that all CTE curriculum evolves with the constant, changing workplace standards. We can no longer be "building" principals working in isolation.
- Educational technology should be a standard in all schools and in CTE. Every job is tied to technology and if we are to prepare our students to be workforce ready, they need to be educated in a technology rich environment with appropriate equipment and software aligned with workplace needs. Here at SWCTA, we are fortunate to have funding through Carl D. Perkins and state grant programs, to provide industry appropriate technology as well as the infrastructure that supports it. I have many examples of why it is important to make this a standard but one of my favorites is a former student named Jacob. Jacob struggled to graduate, but despite several barriers, he earned his diploma. After graduation in 2012, Jacob was able to secure an introductory auto tech position at a local dealership. After three weeks, Jacob was called into the human resources office. He was offered an opportunity to train as a hybrid technician because of his ability to adapt to the newer technology and because he had already demonstrated the necessary soft skills to be successful. Today, Jacob has a successful career in a high wage, high demand area.
- Business and industry partnerships are vital to our success. These partnerships provide our schools with advice on curriculum, our teachers with professional development and our students with internships and job shadowing opportunities. Clark County School District Superintendent Pat Skorkowsky is especially supportive of these partnerships and their part in moving career and technical education forward. Mr. Skorkowsky recently released his plan to transform

education in Clark County. In this plan he has identified six work streams – Achievement, Opportunity, Results, People, Innovation and Community - that collectively support the success of each and every student. The inclusion of Community emphasizes the importance of the role business and industry partners play in advancing student achievement, both in school and in life. One example is Jonathan. Jonathan was a student in the web design and development program. He graduated last June and began an internship with Qualifyor, a Downtown Project backed consultancy. Shortly after the completion of his internship, Jonathan was immediately hired by Qualifyor because of his solid foundation of IT skills, work ethic, and because he is simply amazing. Jonathan plans to continue working with Qualifyor while he attends CSN and later transfers to the University of Nevada-Las Vegas to complete a degree in computer science.

- Articulation agreements with colleges are needed to create stronger connections between secondary and post-secondary systems. High school students need a better bridge between high school and their post-secondary education similar to the Tech Prep articulation provisions in previous authorizations of the Perkins Act. Tech Prep agreements provide for college credit in articulated courses. Due to the wide range of programs of study and the skills required for each program, the connection between secondary and post-secondary education should not be restrictive or prescriptive, but flexible to meet the needs of each state and local program. One size does not fit all when working with the wide variety of CTE programs, even within one school. The bridge between secondary and postsecondary education could include the traditional Tech Prep between high schools and colleges, but it may also include opportunities like apprenticeship programs in our high skilled technical areas.

Ideally all of our CTE students will continue in the same career pathway after graduation, but we must recognize that some students may not choose to pursue postsecondary options in the same field — and this should not be considered a “failure” in federal accountability systems. Regardless of the pathway, during their high school years, they have obtained the necessary skills to be employable, they have the ability to work in skilled areas and can pay for their own college tuition, and they have explored careers prior to enrolling in college, which saves a great deal of time and money.

In conclusion, I believe that career and technical education is economic development. Fully funding the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act is essential to the continued academic success of our CTE programs and our economy. Here in Nevada, we are still recovering from the great recession and through federal and state support,

we have been able to sustain our current programs. The success of our academies has created a demand from our community for more, high quality CTE programs and we need to build those in our comprehensive high schools.

The key to reviving our economy? First and foremost, adequately investing in CTE. Funding at the 2012 pre-sequestration levels at a minimum and the removal or revision of the hold harmless provision so that Nevada can receive its fair share of funding is critical to our state and the continuation of our economic growth. And finally, ensuring that all students in all high schools have access to high quality programs so that they are prepared to contribute positively to our economy.