Summer Teacher Externship

Presentation Planning

Ryan Kirch, Summer 2017

The most important focus of my presentation/awareness is to bring together the resources we have at McNary High School and the Salem Keizer School District with Construction Industry Leaders.

It is my belief that there is a disconnect between the education system and the Construction Industry which has led to frustration, misinformation, and ultimately resulting in a labor shortage which has reached a “crisis.”

While I believe we do a great job as a school and district presenting and requiring students to look beyond high school graduation, I believe we are misguided in the way we are pushing them. It is true that all students must have an education beyond high school to develop skills that will put them in high demand, long lasting careers that provide a strong and stable income. However, I believe the term “college” is misused as a pursuit of those skills. I believe the term “training” is a more accurate and responsible word choice.

“College” is NOT a good choice for everyone, but it is not because some students aren’t able to do college, but because college does not provide the skills needed for all careers. The term college is used as if it a higher education that is better than any other form of training. This is simply not true. If a student is taking a freshman level Art History course in college, is that more valuable or noteworthy that a welding course or hours on the job in an electrician apprenticeships. The answer is surely no. In fact, economically, it may be a worse decision. With more and more students entering college two very unsettling results are occurring. One, the oversupply of degrees devalues the worth of the degree, thus pushing the equilibrium wage rate down. A bachelor’s degree in Communications, Business, and many other degrees are not as valuable as they once were. To compound the problem, is that the high demand for college from often misguided students is an increase in the cost of tuition. What this leaves us with is more and more students shackled with astronomical debt with a degree that in most cases, has very little value. In my opinion, we are failing many of our students.

As a college graduate with three degrees, I am the first to admit that college is a wonderful opportunity for so many students. My concern is for the 20-30 percent of students who do not know what they want to do, and have yet to understand the options to them. 68% of high school graduates enter four-year universities, yet only 27% graduate with bachelor’s degrees.

Why? We are unintentionally trying to overproduce students with the skill set to work in fields where there is simply not the demand. This leads to many unsure, insecure young people who are crippled with debt. We have failed them. The term “college” is used as a success vs failure mentality, when in reality it could be argued the other way around.

Why are we not guiding students towards the fields of pluming, sheet-metal, manufacturing, electrician, and construction amongst others? The stigma that we have created is that these jobs are for those who aren’t good enough to go to college, not smart enough to make it at the next level. The reality is, we’ve created, and believed, the stigma ourselves.

My hope is to change that.

1. I will work with Rochelle Farris who is the head of our Career and Connections Center at McNary High School. My hope is to find information in the form of fliers, booklets, informational documents that we can place in The Center for students to observe and seek out. In addition, I hope to coordinate with her the opportunity for industry leaders and apprenticeship program department heads to visit and present to our students much like representatives from colleges and universities.
2. I will reach out to Rhonda Rhodes, principal of CTEC, to share my thoughts and observations from the Teacher Externship Program. I hope to seek from her ways to bridge the gap of awareness from our students about the opportunities CTEC provides in preparing students for jobs in the construction industry.