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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS & COMMERCE REGARDING CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Texas AFT, the 65,000-member Texas affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, supports well-designed, well-implemented career and technical education (CTE) programs that significantly increase the academic rigor and relevance of the high school curriculum and expand what students can do with their future. Our recommendations speak to the significant proportion of targeted workforce training that can and should occur within our public education system. Some districts have already created local partnerships with business and labor, and these successful programs address future workforce needs in target economic growth areas. These successful programs should be included in the TEA Best Practices Clearinghouse and should be replicated throughout the state.

Recommendations to improve CTE programs

- The TEA best practices clearinghouse disseminates valuable information on model education programs throughout the state. However, the clearinghouse currently does not include examples of successful, evidence-based best practices in CTE programs. While conducting our own site visits with successful CTE programs, Texas AFT has learned about effective strategies such as co-teaching that CTE instructors use to engage students' interest. (Co-teaching involves collaboration between teachers in core academic subjects and CTE teachers to engage students through relevant applications of academic concepts.) The best practices clearinghouse and TEA should encourage districts to collect and report on such valuable teaching strategies and interventions used by current CTE teachers who have first-hand knowledge of how to engage students and help them achieve postsecondary success.
- The clearinghouse should also include examples of local partnerships between school districts, labor councils, and businesses that join forces to fund students' training, including apprenticeships, and even scholarships. Because of the tremendous advantage of having a ready workforce at hand, local businesses have actually invested in individual students and provided two-year scholarships to community colleges and four-year colleges as well.
- The high-demand occupations list that is developed by the Texas Workforce Commission, in consultation with the Texas Workforce Investment Council, could be strengthened by requiring consultation with Texas labor organizations. Texas labor unions, through regional AFL-CIO central labor councils, have partnered with school districts and businesses and have been involved in 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.
- Any development of mathematics and science courses for high-demand occupations could be improved by including the input of teachers and local labor organizations in developing coursework.

By seeking the counsel of front-line educators and the network of career and technical education experts in central labor councils, we can better ensure that students have academic choices that are attractive, attainable, rigorous, and aligned with regional economic-development needs.