

Teach a man to fish ... Sylacauga City Schools Career and Technical Programs

By DR. TODD FREEMAN, Special to The Daily Home | Posted: Sunday, March 1, 2015 12:00 am

The mission of Sylacauga City Schools is to prepare all students to be college, career and community ready.

One of the goals of our strategic plan is to "provide meaningful, rigorous, high quality instruction to meet the needs of all students." School career and technical programs are an important pathway to meeting that goal.

February is recognized as Career and Technical Education Month.

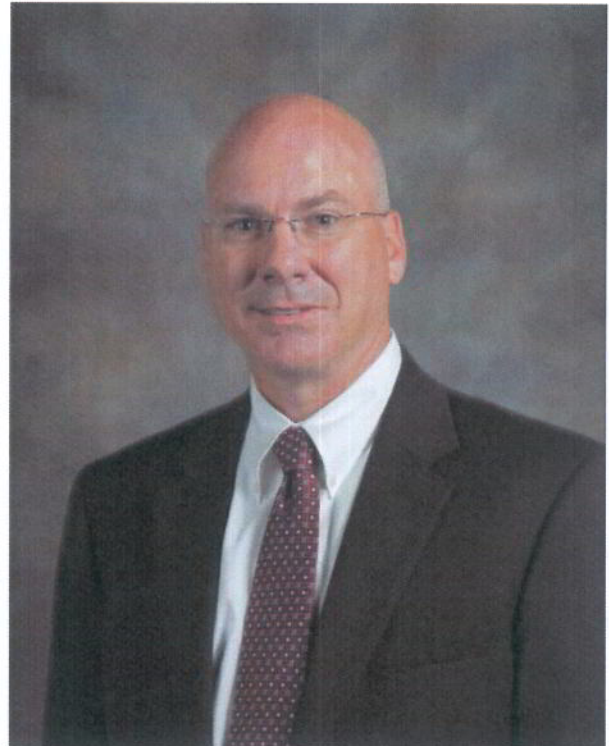
Career and technical (CTE) programs are critical to the economic success of a community. They provide the opportunity for students to learn workplace skills and prepare for making career choices. We strive to ensure that our programs are meeting the needs of the future workforce in three primary ways:

1) Awareness of the work skills needed in our local industries.

Dr. Mark Heinrich, chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, says that "85 to 90 percent of those who lose their jobs do so because of poor essential workplace skills."

Over the last several months, I have visited several industries in the area to learn about their operations. Honda makes automobiles; Nemak produces automobile engine blocks; Omya takes marble and transforms it in to a product that is used in making paints, plastics, and paper; IKO makes shingles.

Like all industries, they expect employees to have strong workplace skills such as dependability, preparation and timeliness. These industries also place a high value on quality control, safety and a worker with a diversified set of skills.



Sylacauga superintendent

Dr. Todd Freeman is superintendent of Sylacauga City Schools

2) Awareness of what our business and industrial leaders are telling us.

Our CTE program director meets routinely with an advisory council that consists of local business and industry leaders. To further learn from our industrial leaders, Sylacauga High School (SHS) played host to events in November and January that included tours of our CTE programs and a time for feedback on how we can more effectively support workforce development.

3) Awareness of the future job market.

According to the Workforce Development Council of Alabama, the top occupations in our region of the state are in health care services; industrial maintenance and machinery; electrical, welding, and metal work; and retail trade.

The target industries are automated manufacturing and robotics, construction services, health care and hospitality/tourism. A report by the National Association of Colleges and Employees says the "employment areas with the greatest demand for this year's graduates include business, engineering, computer sciences and accounting".

Finally, careerbuilder.com recently released a report detailing the 10 most sought-after jobs that require a college degree. Medical, marketing, and business fields dominate the list.

To meet these regional, state and national workforce needs, SHS offers programs in health care, industrial maintenance, business, pre-engineering and dietetics/wellness. Courses in those programs include sports medicine, robotics, programmable logic controls, machinery, business, marketing, journalism, accounting, finance, construction wiring, computer science and pre-engineering.

In fact, SHS offers CTE programs that support preparation for nine of the 10 jobs listed by careerbuilder.com.

Our future plans include adding courses that more specifically address the remaining job field of construction.

It is critical that we continue to develop what the Alabama Workforce Council calls a "talent pipeline" in K-12 and post-secondary education.

To lay a foundation for this pipeline and support development of workplace skills, students in CTE courses participate in developing career portfolios and producing work that is related to real-world situations. This includes work-based learning and dual enrollment college courses and acquiring trade credentials or certifications such as Microsoft Office Specialist, Adobe Specialist, Serv Safe, Patient Care Technician, EKG Technician, and Basic Cardiac Life Support.

I am confident that trade credentials and certifications are going to be as important in the coming years as a four-year degree.

The proverb says "Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." Career and technical programs have long been a proven way to teach our students skills that prepare them for a lifetime.

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