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Celebrating CTE Month in Idaho

By Trent Van Leuven, Idaho 2024 Teacher of the Year

(BOISE) – February marks CTE Month, a time when Career Technical Education student organizations in many school districts commemorate through various activities. These students are inspired as they search for their post-K-12 educational journey thanks to CTE. Dr. Linda Clark, President of the State Board of Education spoke to this point in Mackay last October when she said: “I have heard a lot about the ‘3 R’s’, but early on I recognized that there is an important 4th ‘R’ that is the responsibility of educators. And that is Reality—preparing students for the reality of life when they leave our classroom—with whatever pathway they choose.” Our program areas ranging from agriculture, business, engineering, family & consumer sciences, health professions, and trades—all prepare students for reality.

Often, the journey towards reality begins with a simple yet impactful statement from an educator or mentor, acknowledging a student's strengths and suggesting potential career paths with: “You should consider a career in _____.” This vote of confidence becomes ingrained in the minds of students, shaping their future aspirations. Such career advice transcends the classroom, leaving the students believing that a future exists for them.

As part of that task in preparing students for reality, we should emphasize preparing students for in-demand careers through creating talent pipelines.

Talent pipelines can be large or small. Developing them is achieved through a concerted effort. The first hurdle is to understand the needs that exist locally and regionally. State labor data serves as a great baseline for determining goals.

One development from Idaho CTE is the Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment that is now a requirement for applying for Federal Perkins dollars. In hosting the first meeting in our agriscience classroom, I brought in administration, parents, the academic advisor, local economic development committee members, teachers, a college instructor, and a student that chaired the

meeting. Stakeholders discussed local needs and prioritized goals for developing talent pipelines. These meetings effectively bring local stakeholders to discuss preparing students for reality. Without CTE, these meetings might not be happening in our schools; they bear fruit when internships, scholarships, and talent scouts from the local school, postsecondary, and industry collaborate. Thanks to “Advanced Opportunities,” our colleges and high schools are collaborating at a new level.

I am excited to see what recent investments in Career Technical Education and Idaho Launch will yield in the upcoming years. These investments are driving the discussion on preparing students for reality. Education needs more volunteers and input from industry. Great things happen when businesses ask what they can do for their local schools.

As a CTE teacher I believe that we are in the Golden Age of Career Technical Education in Idaho. I hope that we can build on this momentum. I hope to see more individuals take on the role of talent scouts. CTE champions one very frequently underserved population of students. This population includes students from all demographics and backgrounds. This population is made up of kinesthetic learners—the ones who learn best by doing. Idaho is one of the leading states in providing Career Technical Education to serve these students. Happy CTE Month!

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