

“We have 7.3 million open jobs right now, most of which don’t require a four-year degree. They require training, they require skill and they require a willingness to master a trade that’s in demand.”

Mike Rowe

By Bill Husfelt

Bay District Schools Superintendent

Preparing students for their post-secondary plans is something Bay District Schools takes very seriously. While we pride ourselves in providing a top-notch education for those who dream of graduating from colleges and universities, we are also very proud of the opportunities we provide for those who dream, instead, of entering the work force.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) students can currently choose from more than 29 unique high school programs and 8 middle school programs that offer a combined 16 specific pathways. Currently, more than 4,640 students are trying out careers, learning new trades and putting their skills into pathways which will truly work for them. Our CTE pathways lead to valuable industry certifications that translate into higher-paying jobs and college credit for those choosing that path. For a complete listing of programs offered just check out our website at <https://www.bay.k12.fl.us/cte-about>.

In short, CTE is making a difference for thousands of BDS students and our community and we’re so proud of that partnership.

Traditionally, I think we all probably remember “home economics” and “shop class” and while we don’t offer those classes exactly, our students can take advantage of even better, more specific, CTE classes approved by the state of Florida.

For example, we live in an area that survives in part based upon tourism so it makes sense that we have a thriving hospitality training program. Working through the Culinary Academy career pathway, students can earn their valuable ServSafe certifications and experience a host of classes designed to help them secure positions in the hospitality industry. Our students regularly compete against private companies in events like Death by Chocolate and come away with some of the top prizes.

Another great example of our community partnership can be found in our Construction Academies. Business leader Richard Dodd approached us several years ago with a need for more highly-trained entry level construction workers and his generosity enabled us to begin Construction Academies at both Rutherford High School and J.R. Arnold High School. We’ve had wonderful support for these programs from the Bay County Contractors and Associates (BCCA) and the Bay Building Industries Association (BBIA) and we are so very grateful.

Students in those programs are learning valuable construction-related skills and have the opportunity to put those skills to good use by providing products for our community like free little libraries, pop up pantries, bird houses and buddy benches for area elementary schools.

Recently, we were able to add a heavy equipment focus to the program at Arnold and we look forward to providing state-of-the-art simulator-based training to hundreds of students who are interested in these high-paying jobs. A partnership with Eastern Shipbuilding led to the very recent addition of a welding lab for the Rutherford program and students there can matriculate into the welding program at Haney Technical College after graduation.

Those construction pathways also offer students a virtually seamless transition into the electrical trade programs currently offered at Haney Technical College. We would love to add an HVAC pathway for students as well but need a qualified instructor.

And that's a perfect segue into what our students really need!

We need qualified, interested and interesting instructors who want to teach "the trades" to our students. Unfortunately, we cannot lure technicians away from their fields with our salaries but our CTE program growth is directly linked to the number of qualified instructors we have on staff (full-time or part-time).

Certainly not every tradesman, or woman, would make a perfect teacher but I am confident there are people in our community who could make that transition (on a part-time basis) and who could teach the next generation the skills they need to be successful. There really isn't a nobler calling than giving back to our children and while the people who do so may never be rich in terms of dollars and cents, their lives are definitely enriched by having forged meaningful connections with students.

If all of the businesses in our community would commit to providing us with technical support and qualified instructors there's no limit to the partnerships we could forge and the programs we could offer our students. Unfortunately, that's not the case currently but I certainly wish the business community could see the potential here. The more highly-trained workforce ready graduates we have, the more our community's labor pool will grow which is something surely all of us can get behind. And increased training and opportunities for advancement make it more likely that our graduates will choose to stay in Bay County to raise their own families and pursue their own career dreams.

The problem is, how do we attract these qualified and experienced tradesmen and women and ask them to leave their high-paying jobs to come and teach students so those students can go back out into the working world and make more than our teachers? If there's a lure I am missing, please let me know because we need these people desperately! There's not a trade out there that students aren't interested in and there's not a CTE pathway that we wouldn't consider putting into our schools if we could find people willing to teach.

We would love to offer dual-enrolled Airframe Mechanics so students can continue their studies at Haney Technical College, for example, but we don't currently have an instructor for that

either. Members of the public email me all the time asking about this program or that one and my answer is always – can you teach it or do you know someone who can?

Our faculty members have stepped up in unimaginable ways to ensure our students have access to the CTE programs that interest them but they need the continued help and support of our community. Did you know, for example, that we have a competitive vegetable team and another competitive team that showcases livestock? While not all students are going on to be farmers, our Agriculture CTE students are learning critical real-world communication skills as they present throughout the state. By networking with adults in professional communities, CTE students learn those “soft skills” that are so hard to teach but are so important in the working world. We have one thriving agriculture program (at Deane Bozeman School) but likely have student interest to form others but we don’t have instructors. We had an amazing horticulture program at Rosenwald High School but lost the program when our instructor retired. Again, we had student interest and wanted to build a network of student-run gardens that could provide life-sustaining nutritious food for families in need but we need instructors and funding to make those things happen.

We are doing an amazing job offering students a plethora of thoughtfully-chosen CTE pathways that link to post-secondary educational opportunities at Haney Technical College, Gulf Coast State College and Florida State University. I think we’re doing a great job of offering state-of-the-art training and industry certifications that lead to higher-paying jobs for those who want to enter the workforce right after graduation.

But there’s always room for improvement and we need our industry leaders to continue to be a part of this solution. If you, or your company, could help us with instructors, funding, employment opportunities for our graduates or anything else related to CTE I encourage you to reach out to Beth Patterson, our CTE Supervisor, at 850-767-4356 or [patteb@bay.k12.fl.us](mailto:patteb@bay.k12.fl.us)

Stay safe and God Bless!