

My Take: Coming Up With A Plan

Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
Friday, 23 March 2012 14:58



I recently received an interesting note from our Assistant Editor Greg Pietras. A transplanted South Carolinian, he brought to my attention the dilemma his Uncle David is facing back home.

David Pietras is the cabinetmaking instructor at Richland Northeast High School (RNE) in Columbia, SC. His course and RNE's auto-repair classes—*central to the industrial-arts program*—are currently on the chopping block. According to an article in the online edition of *The State*

, South Carolina's largest newspaper (www.thestate.com), RNE's Principal Sabrina Suber wants to dismantle these offerings to make way for classes in health sciences and culinary arts. The article quotes her as saying that "the new programs will generate more student interest and prepare students for jobs in growing industries." Hmmmm...

The cabinetmaking and auto-repair instructors learned about the shift in RNE's vocational-training focus—and *the fact that their jobs would be eliminated*—in January. As of mid-February, however, the school board still had not approved the \$1.5 million necessary to retrofit space for the new courses. That might be due to a wrench thrown into the works by Columbia businessman Jim McGrew, who took up the cause of the beleaguered cabinetmaking program.

McGrew owns James McGrew Cabinetmakers in Columbia. An unpaid advisor to RNE's cabinetmaking program, he apparently "gets it" when it comes to the importance of providing this type of practical industrial-oriented "shop" training for non-college-bound high-school students—and *has evidently garnered national support for his efforts to keep it up and running at the school*. For now (i.e., as this magazine goes to press), we understand that the school board has asked proponents of the training to come up with a plan for retaining it. We'll keep our fingers crossed and you updated on this saga (including Uncle David's future plans).

Alas, the zeal for eliminating traditional, industrial-oriented vocational training isn't exclusive to Richland Northeast High School. As Contributing Editor Bob Williamson has frequently

My Take: Coming Up With A Plan

Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
Friday, 23 March 2012 14:58

reminded us in his “Uptime” columns, it’s pervasive. Too many well-meaning educators, teachers, counselors, politicians, community leaders and concerned parents across the U.S. have jumped on the same bandwagon. It’s going to be an expensive ride, one that will prove to be especially costly for vast numbers of kids—*not to mention the industries that are so desperate to put their interests, talents and energies to work in well-paying skilled-trades jobs.*

As our economy recovers and manufacturing returns to our shores, it’s time for our schools to do better by our children—*all of them.* We’ve been harping too long about the perfect-storm workforce crisis coming down around us. It’s time for all of us to get more informed about and involved in the goings-on of our local school systems. Despite what we’ve been led to believe, they really are leaving many a child behind.

Now that you’ve read my rant on the topic, please turn to page 10 to read Bob’s—*entitled “Promoting Careers in Maintenance.”*

He has more pages to work with and plenty of specifics/statistics to back up his argument. In the meantime, we encourage you to share news of other industrial-arts programs that are being “dismantled” in favor of whatever. Better yet, don’t hesitate to tell us about school systems that are bringing these valuable programs back.

jalexander@atpnetwork.com