

Public Hearing for the Senate Committee on Education
Senator Florence Shapiro, Chairperson
October 20, 2008

Honorable Chairperson Shapiro and Committee Members, my name is Rosena Garcia and I am the director of Career and Technical Education with the Houston Independent School District. It is with great honor and pleasure that I come before you to provide testimony in an area that is highly important not only for our educational system, but for our state and nation. Career and Technical Education programs bring an immense amount of relevance to our students and help them make connections between what is taught in the classrooms and what is happening in the world of work.

As I attend meetings with industry organizations throughout the greater Houston area, the resonating theme is that there is a critical shortage of trained individuals needed to enter into their respective industries. Many of the industries that attend these meetings employ individuals in jobs that are in high-skill, well-paying occupations, critical to the Gulf Coast region's economic future. Moreover, many of these industry leaders have taken a proactive approach to meet the needs of the workforce shortage by establishing active partnerships with school districts to help us create academies that will provide workers for their industries. Some examples of these notable partnerships from Houston ISD include the Independent Petroleum Association of America who is establishing academies within our Houston ISD schools to support the energy industry; as the city with the largest marine port in the country, the Port of Houston, Houston Pilots and the East End Chamber of Commerce are assisting Houston ISD to create maritime academies; Baylor College of Medicine, along with a large number of renown Houston hospital partners are assisting with our health science technology programs; the National Academy Foundation, along with industries employing engineers, are supporting our Engineering programs; and the Association of General Contractors actively supports our construction academies. Each of these academies has the potential to provide these industries with a workforce pipeline of students entering the world of work.

We recognize that forces outside of the greater Houston area also influence the job market and major employment trends. One major initiative that gives Career and Technical Education focus is the Governor's Competitive Council. This major state initiative is placing Texas as the leader in economic development for this country. To ensure that our students are well prepared to take advantage of the benefits that this initiative is bringing to our state, the Career and Technical Education department has enhanced its focus on the career clusters that align with the Governor's Competitive Council.

Houston ISD has taken a major step toward providing our students with opportunities to acquire industry certifications to improve their skills and employability. Our department has and will continue to acquire vouchers for our students to take industry certification exams after they have completed courses that support the tested areas. We anticipate that this effort will provide students with more meaningful options when they are placed in their capstone, career preparation course their last year in high school.

To provide our students with a more focused approach, the Career and Technical Education department, in collaboration with other departments in our district, has purchased Kuder, a career interest inventory assessment that will be implemented in the 8th grade and at the high school level this school year. Students in the 8th grade will be exposed to career options before it is time for them to begin course registration for high school. This strategic implementation of Kuder will assist the high schools in meeting the needs of students coming to their campuses. At the high school level, students will have a more defined and focused course selection process that will align courses with college credit offerings.

Finally, Houston ISD is a district dedicated to creating a college bound culture. We are not just encouraging our students to seek college opportunities, we are making these opportunities a reality by aligning our courses with college credits so that students acquire the college credits prior to graduating. Students benefit from this alignment by having these courses credited toward a degree, whether that is a technical, associate or baccalaureate degree. At a time when financial aid and resources are becoming scarcer for families of limited or middle income, this provides them relief toward funding their child's college education.

As you listen to other testimonies this morning, I urge you to consider the link between the challenges that our state faces and the relevance that Career and Technical Education programs bring to students. Our programs have the potential to assist with major challenges that face our educational system such as the drop out rate, graduation rate, limited English proficiency, and workforce demands.

I would be delighted to answer any questions that the committee may have.

Public testimony provided by:

Rosena Garcia, Director – Career & Technical Education
Houston Independent School District
4400 W. 18th St.
Houston, Texas 77092
(713) 556-6981 phone
(713) 556-6899 fax
rgarci20@houstonisd.org