

Good afternoon Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and distinguished members of the committee.

My name is Joe Kolenda; I am a resident of Spring, Texas. My career is principal and CTE director in Spring Branch ISD at The Guthrie Center in Houston. I am speaking on behalf of my school and department, as well as the Career & Technology Association of Texas.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning in favor of this wonderful, timely and important Senate Bill 1313, and thank you Senator Shapiro for sponsoring this bill.

I have reviewed the potential impact of it in many ways - as an educator, as a former member of the business community and as a parent of children who are finishing post-secondary education or already in the workforce.

I can only see positive benefits from all parts of the bill.

First, the increased emphasis of counseling services for students early on in high school for career options and graduation planning, to the expansion of centers to help explain financial aid for college and high demand/high wage/ high skill career opportunities through CTE is critical for our students success. This helps all parties - students, parents, businesses and education. While components of these are in place in many districts, this bill establishes a baseline of services and supports it with funding.

The bill also rewards students who step up and take the initiative by providing funding for license and certification

exam fees, many of which are out of their reach. Also, by removing the financial aid limits to completing college in a limited time, we are encouraging students who stretch themselves and take dual credit classes in high school.

The Best Practices Clearinghouse will be an excellent resource for everyone, and especially for business and industry. Many of our partners tell us that they wanted to be involved in public education but didn't know where to start or who to contact, or even what is happening in schools. This tool can help them identify local needs and encourage support. The clearinghouse, along with the development of high school math and science courses centered around high demand occupations will help them pinpoint where the successful programs are and where to find a stream of educated and highly-skilled future employees.

The part of the bill where school districts receive additional funding for students in coherent sequences is critical to continued development and refining of our programs. This also will help support the proposed CTE course and sequence updates that are scheduled to begin in the 2010 school year. We will use this additional money to provide the tools, equipment, software and hardware needed to maintain industry standard classes and extend our current classes to prepare students for cutting edge careers.

The Houston area has a great organization of CTE programs throughout - from Katy to Conroe to Galena Park and Sugar Land. Our team of CTE departments at the area districts meets regularly to share information, best practices and new developments. All of the people in our organization I have spoken with are in support of Senate Bill 1313 as well.

Spring Branch CTE programs have strong partnerships with area businesses. Some of our partners include Air Routing Group, Village Family Practice, Memorial-Hermann Hospital and The Omni Hotel Westside - all who provide internships and many who sponsor scholarships.

Higher Education partners include the University of Houston who provide articulation and curriculum advice; UT Tyler offers professional development for pre-engineering teachers; The Art Institute of Houston donates a chef co-teacher, lab space, curriculum advice and scholarships, Houston Community College helps with dual credit costs, joint grant writing, shared resources and scholarships.

This bill will help us continue these strong partnerships and develop additional ones, all working together to provide our students with a seamless transition from K-12 education to college and career.

Thank you for allowing me to speak, and thank you for proposing this great benefit to students of Texas schools.

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