

Community Comment / Monday, Oct. 29th, 2012

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Last Thursday, business and community members came together in Eureka to discuss high school and community college career training programs. These are the programs that produce auto technicians, police officers, carpenters, computer programmers, nurses and the like. Advice and guidance was given to educators to make sure these programs produce well-prepared employees.

Meeting workforce challenges in today's world is not easy. It was just a couple of years ago that the Public Policy Institute of California, a well respected research think tank raised a red flag that California was facing a shortage in excess of 1 million trained workers to meet the needs of employers throughout this state. Their conclusion was the very competitiveness of California is at risk and it is an economic imperative that this be resolved. The great recession slowed down the urgency, but it will come back with a vengeance once the economy rebounds.

Local employers raised this concern as well. That concern led to the launch of the Decade of Difference Initiative, the 10 year community Initiative to increase high school graduation rates and increase the number and percentage of our youth continuing some education and training beyond high school. That initiative has taken off with hundreds of community members and educators currently involved.

There are fewer opportunities for young people today that do not graduate from high school and have some additional education and training. A recently developed national Career Readiness Council stated, and I quote, "The link between education and the economy has never been more apparent; the urgency for change unparalleled. We have a window of opportunity for bold change, and the future of our nation, and each and every citizen depends on it." End quote.

We need to support creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial thinking in our schools. We need to strengthen job training programs during a time when

resources are limited and will be for the foreseeable future. This can be done by new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and closer working relationships between education and the community. We need to engage our youth, starting at the middle school level, in more hands on activities showing them the relationship between their interests, their education and future opportunities.

We need to be smarter, wiser and more creative with the limited resources we have and consider developing regional career training programs at the K-12 level. Most programs are only available to students from a given school where that training is offered. There is not the demand or the resources to offer these quality programs in multiple locations throughout the county.

Now is the time to build upon the foundations, the partnerships and the good working relationships we have in this county to meet the needs of employers and provide a bright future for our youth.

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