

Committee Hearing for H.F. 105

February 9, 2023

My name is Andy Traetow. I have the privilege of serving as Superintendent of Fairmont Area Schools. It is an honor to provide testimony on behalf of our schools, our students, our communities, and most importantly, the future of our great state. I have been a teacher and administrator for twenty years, and have had the honor of observing great progress in education during my tenure.

In 2014, Minnesota enacted legislation to ensure all schools developed a focus on the future of our state's workforce. The World's Best Workforce legislation was enacted, in part, to solidify Minnesota's presence as a competitive, viable, workforce market for our future generations. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, for Minnesota to be competitive, we must have students who are career and college ready, students who are poised to lead the state's workforce.

While we are striving to ensure all students are ready to be contributors to society, it is no secret we are facing a shortage of skilled workers, and workers in all sectors. In 2018, it was predicted that by the year 2022, Minnesota was expected to face a shortage of over 239,000 workers (*Real Time Talent, 2018*). We are here, and the predicted challenges are now reality. According to the National Career Readiness Indicator, in conjunction with Minnesota's ACT data, our students across the state are demonstrating the abilities to leave our school's ready to enter a career field. The reality is that about 55% of our graduates get lost in a career field right out of high school (*St. Paul Building & Construction Trades Council*); meaning they go to work without a vision for what they want their future to be.

With the combination of our students demonstrating the ability to contribute, and the gap in our skilled labor force, this legislation will only have a positive impact on our students and workforce. All areas of trades work are facing the challenge of recruiting skilled workers. Locally, we have collaborated with electricians, plumbers, welders, automotive professionals, HVAC technicians, farmers, and restaurant owners to analyze how we can serve each other to meet these demands. This proposal for increased funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities outside the regular school day will allow the ability to offer both supportive and enriching experiences for our learners who otherwise would be unable to access these educational opportunities. Fairmont Area Schools, and others, have invested millions of dollars into our CTE programming...including a recent \$7 Million voter-approved CTE expansion, and we are limited in our scope of use due to funding parameters and unsustainable fiscal model.

I believe each and every student possesses talents and gifts that can be developed and enhanced through these types of courses. Our own students have seen the value of experiencing learning outside their regularly scheduled classes. Each has demonstrated skills that prove they are talented in many areas of their schooling. With full schedules and course requirements, the classes we have offered in the summer months, and on weekends, have allowed for these learners to expand their skill sets beyond the traditional boundaries of a school day. Additionally, students with varying academic abilities have been able to acquire skills they otherwise would not have been able to. Personally, I have seen students at the top of their class working on projects they are passionate about, and have also observed students with special needs demonstrating proper welding techniques to groups of beginning welders in our metals shop.

We have historically supplemented these courses out of our general fund and through private donations. Recently, and in alignment with one of the Department of Education's identified priority areas, we have used ESSER III FIN 161 funds to support learning outside the regular school day. To provide a sustainable model for the use of these types of programs, and to meet the needs of our students and workforce, a more sustainable approach is needed and this bill will be a great starting point in accomplishing this.

By offering courses beyond the school day, students in our area of the state have garnered more voice and choice over what, and when, they are able to learn and develop a skill. Some of whom have been able to enter the workforce, debt free, earning more than \$40,000/year, and immediately contributing to a career field and our local economy. Through your support, more and more students will have these opportunities to advance their preparation in career-related fields. With an accelerating need for skilled labor, we need to ensure students have the opportunity to accelerate the acquisition of these skills that will help them be successful in their futures.

One of my favorite quotes is: "The greatest reason to grow is to have more to give to others". We hope to use this opportunity to be able to continue, and grow, our offerings beyond the school day so that the future of our state, our students...have more to give as they embark on their future endeavors.

To close, I want to share a historical perspective. Exactly five years ago, I was in this exact scenario testifying on behalf of this consideration. Five years ago, when our current workforce challenges were predicted. One of the students that testified with me in 2018 is currently employed as a Welding/HVAC instructor in our school district...a student who took advantage of our summer and weekend CTE academies. He started his career as a highline welder, went back to school to receive his teaching degree, and is currently instructing 50 students in the first year of our HVAC program as well as leading College In the Schools welding opportunities. We currently have 20 students and adults in our current Saturday welding academy, and local businesses are already seeking a presence to build connections with these individuals.

The evidence of impact is clear, and this policy will only benefit the future of our great state. Your consideration of action is greatly appreciated...by our students, teachers, and business owners in our communities. Thank you for this opportunity.