

Skills Create Opportunity

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It's no secret the world of work—and its related technology--has changed dramatically. As author Tom Friedman suggests in his book, "That Used to Be Us", we are living in a hyper-competitive world. Global access to computers means more people sharing information, starting new businesses, taking risks, and competing with us. As an educator my first questions are: how do I prepare my students? As a career tech educator my answer is with project based learning that focuses on career and technical skills. Challenging instructional projects keep students engaged, asking questions and solving problems. Teamwork, critical thinking, and taking responsibility for a finished project are all positive ripple effects of project based learning. In short, KHS CTE (Career Tech Education) students who complete a challenging project can say with some conviction: "I know how to do that". Skills matter. Skills open doors and create opportunity.

Kodiak High School has 475 (out of 753) students enrolled in at least one CTE class. Many students choose to take two CTE classes in their schedule. Choices include: drafting, welding, automotive, culinary arts, maritime science, multimedia, A+ certification, woods/construction, and business/accounting. Next fall KHS CTE will add a Health Sciences option. Courses include Medical Terminology, Health Care Occupations, and Advanced Human Anatomy and Physiology. In light of the 8.3% increase in demand for healthcare workers in Alaska these classes offer another great opportunity for KHS CTE students. Like other KHS CTE classes the new Health Sciences classes are defined as "Tech Prep" because students who earn a "C" or better receive UAA college credit and the opportunity to apply those credits toward a UAA degree program. More information for parents and students is available from the KHS counseling office.

Since 2007 over 250 KHS CTE students have passed a skills based, industry certification. Many of those students are from our village schools and have shown great determination in becoming certified welders. Certifying organizations include: American Welding Society, Apple Computer, Microsoft, AutoCad, PADI Dive certification, American Red Cross, ProStart Culinary, and NCCER construction certification. Some of these students will go to work in their chosen field, some will pursue two or four year college programs, some will participate in apprenticeships, and all them will have productive skills that create opportunity.

Beyond technical skills CTE students also learn the importance of "soft skills". Those include showing up on time, ready to work, and being a team player. The biggest complaint of business is that many high school grads don't know how to work, can't show up on time, and don't have a clue about being a productive team member. CTE programs seek to remedy these problems by using "YES" (Youth Employability Skills) to measure workforce readiness. Next year's KHS student report cards will include items that measure employability skills. Students need to know the expectations of the workplace. To learn more about "YES" visit: apicc.org.

Finally, all of us learn by doing. It's one thing to read about building a house and a very different thing to actually do it. In the doing is problem solving, creativity, and innovation. CTE students engaged in that process will be able to say, "I know how to do that" rather than "I wish I knew how to do that"