

We Must do a Better Job Preparing Students for the Future

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By: ROSEANN MIKOS

Should local school boards accept money from the School-to-Work (STW) program, funded by the federal government, if Ventura County is awarded a grant? That's what the *Star* seemed to be asking John and Jane Q. Public for the July 6 *Pulse* page.

I applaud the *Star* for recognizing that there is a difference of opinion about the value of the program. However, the way the background information and question were framed is misleading about how the program will work and be funded, if the county's grant application is successful.

"Should public funds be spent on such a program?" is a more appropriate question. My answer to that is a resounding "Yes!"

The Ventura County School Board has no jurisdiction to deny making a grant application and accepting a grant, if awarded. This is the responsibility of our elected County Superintendent of Schools.

Local school boards are free to allow their school systems to participate in the program or not. If they choose to participate, they become a partner in the process and share in paying for it as well as in benefiting from grant funds. The grant is not a free giveaway run by outsiders. It requires the partners who participate to help shape and oversee the program, as well as help fund it.

Students in the school systems who do participate will not be forced to participate against their parents' will. The program only requires equal opportunity access for all students. If parents choose to restrict their children's participation, they have that option.

I am certain that what's behind the STW program is not a secret government conspiracy to have "big brother" sabotage our educational system. This fine STW program is quite the opposite—an open, all inclusive program designed to strengthen our educational system and help all students better see the connections between the world of school and the world of work.

If the opponents of STW really did read the planning documents, legislation, and grants, then they would know that the proposed STW program (called School-to-Career [STC] here in California) was based on extensive public- and private-sector participation and on a broad-based inclusive process of public review and discussion.

The vision for California's STC plan represents a broad consensus. Only those grant applications that propose broad participation from their local communities will even have a chance to get funded. Ventura County has such broad participation.

Whether funded with a state grant or not, this program will eventually happen. And it will be an asset to our communities. It will begin to address the legitimate concerns of business leaders throughout America who consistently complain that too many of today's entry level workers leave our schools without the necessary skills or knowledge to succeed in the workplace.

School is supposed to help prepare our young people for life. Work is part of life. Therefore, it makes sense to include something about work in the school curriculum.

As a life-long educator with broad-based experience in both education and training, I have a unique perspective. I've taught students at every level (elementary, secondary, community college, university). I've taught in both public and private schools. And I have spent about 20 years as a performance technologist who helps organizations to improve the performance of their people in the workplace.

I've done this for selected jobs in many industries (e.g., information systems, banking, transportation, shipping, insurance, healthcare, energy services utility, retail grocery, mining, and even the military).

I've analyzed the knowledge and skill requirements for numerous jobs. I've designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated dozens of programs to help people perform successfully in those jobs.

I can tell you, from experience, that the School-to-Career Program is a step in the right direction. It is worth the tax payers' money. It will not harm your children's education. Rather, it will strengthen it. And in the process, your children will hopefully see that lifelong learning is an essential ingredient to succeed in today's workplace.

—Roseann Mikos has a doctorate in Instructional Technology. She is a business consultant who has lived in Moorpark for 16 years.