

F O C U S

THIS MONTH

HVAC & Plumbing

Jan: Construction Forecast **Mar:** Construction Education **May:** Concrete Industry **July:** Electrical Industry **Sept:** Green Building **Nov:** Architecture & Engineering
Feb: Construction Safety **Apr:** Women in Construction **Jun:** HVAC & Plumbing **Aug:** Service Providers **Oct:** Specialty Contractors **Dec:** Construction Equipment



Wanted: YOU

Alicia Dover, CAE
 Executive Director
Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors of Texas
 Austin, TX

Workforce shortages! The need for more skilled tradespeople! Bring back the trades to the schools!

These and other phrases are being heard throughout the plumbing and HVACR industry. In addition, there is a cry from the education community: We need teachers! Tell us how to do it. What do we teach?

In the current climate of high demand, low supply and a desire to train for the skilled trades, what is our next step? The need has been shared. The schools listened. Now what?

As the Executive Director for the plumbing and HVAC trades in Texas, I am often asked to attend introduction meetings with school systems across the state. I share our desperate need for workers; they share their desire to meet that need.

Problem solved, right? Wrong! What needs to happen at that point is the exchange of information. The practical "know how" of creating a program, selecting curriculum, obtaining the supplies and tools required and ultimately

finding the qualified instructors to teach the students. To add to the mix, how will they market the program to attract students when there can be over 10 other career clusters from which to choose? The question I am often asked is: How do we make plumbing "sexy" so that kids will want to select this highly viable and financially rewarding career path?

And therein lies the dilemma: How do we come alongside the schools in our area when education issues are well outside our wheelhouse? I often feel left out and uniformed when I am asked to sit in on advisory councils, school district meetings and even legislative conferences dealing with bringing career training into the school setting. I mean, who really knows what accountability ratings, Teks and approved certifications really are? How do they apply to our need for more skilled labor? These issues matter if a school system is going to receive funding

for each of their students. There must be some sort of path or result to get the state of Texas to bless their endeavors.

So, how does all of this affect you, the plumbing or HVAC contractor? Your expertise is needed. For schools that have never had any sort of vocational education in the areas of building construction, or those that are trying to resurrect or improve current training, they need you. Many of my district level meetings are focused on what needs to be taught. Will it be relevant? Will students be able to secure gainful employment upon graduation? Can students intern with local companies while in high school? What can you teach them that require real world experiences? Those who will one day employ these students must answer these questions and more.

What can you do? Look to your own school district; find out who has a program or who is looking to add construction related programming. Offer to serve on an advisory committee for the program's implementation and ongoing evaluation. Provide access to local suppliers and manufacturers for lab items required. Be willing to offer internships. Speak about your industry during a class period. Be willing to host an instructor for a day or two of real world training (what to take back to the classroom). Put your best young people forward and let them share with the students. Offer to teach a concept or skill – kids love to think that

what they are learning is being taught by an expert. Encourage your employees to volunteer. You may find a true mentor or teacher in your own backyard.

Pretty simple stuff, right? In an economy of being too busy to even imagine reaching out in a volunteer mode is daunting. I am reminded of a saying, "If you want something done, ask a busy person!" I believe this applies to coming alongside education to help grow your trade. They want to do it right and they want you to tell them how.

My question to you is, won't you consider helping at a school near you? As a representative of the trade in which you work, I need your assistance. I can bring curriculum data, industry statistics, and lists of local area contractors, but ultimately, they want the real deal. They desire to partner with the one who is going to provide employment for their students.

As I mentioned earlier, the need is known, and the education world has listened. Now it is time for us to step up and provide the missing link to create high quality and relevant learning for high school students in Texas.

Would you like assistance in finding a local program in your area? Do you need help with an existing program? Please do not hesitate to contact me at alicia@phcc-tx.org.

PHCC is a construction trade association in Austin and through-out Texas.: cmw