



## ETHS Providing More Education For High-Demand Careers

---

*By Jennie Berkson*

The Applied Sciences and Technology (AST) Department at ETHS is keeping up with current work force trends by providing opportunities for students to obtain certifications that start them on the road to above-average-paying jobs that may not require a four-year college degree.

AST Department chair Shelley Gates told the District 202 School Board at their Sept. 22 meeting about a recent report issued by the Workforce Alliance, a Washington, D.C. based coalition of community, education, labor and business leaders. The report identified jobs in "the forgotten middle," that have "a shortage of workers, account for nearly half of all employment in Illinois, and are projected to represent nearly 1 million job openings during the decade ending in 2014."

"What, you might ask, does all this have to do with certification programs in the Applied Sciences and Technologies Department?" Ms. Gates asked. "The answer is that the certification programs we have in place, as well as those we are working to implement over the next few years will, in fact, help to prepare them for many of these so-called 'forgotten middle' positions - those requiring some post-secondary training, but not necessarily a four-year degree. Health care, manufacturing, transportation, law enforcement, and fire safety careers are all mentioned in the report."

In addition to the certification programs already in place for pharmacy technician, nurse assistant and Microsoft Office specialist, Ms. Gates said that "the AST department is committed to expanding its curriculum to include additional industry-recognized certification programs in the areas of automotive technology, early childhood education and culinary arts/food service." In addition, Ms. Gates said that the department was researching the possibility of offering a level- one welding certification for metal sculpture or level-one manufacturing students which would be offered through the American Welding Society.

"The good thing about auto technicians," remarked Ms. Gates, "is the job cannot be outsourced. Someone in another country can't fix your car."

Ms. Gates said that the expansion of the certification offerings was made possible by a \$100,000 grant from the Owen L. Coon Foundation, in honor of Owen L. Coon, Jr., a 1951 graduate of ETHS.

"I think you've done a wonderful job in recent years," commented Board member Mary Wilkerson. "It's something I've been advocating for quite some time."

"One of the wonderful things about focusing on certifications for our students is that these certifications translate into real dollars," said Board member Omar Khuri. "It's the difference between minimum wage and \$10 [to] \$20 dollars an hour. In addition, I don't think that people should [necessarily] see these certifications as an alternative to college. [They] can be used to earn money while you're in college."