

## **More than just Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic**

When my grandmother attended country school in the 1950s, the students were taught the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. It was thought that as long as the students mastered the three core subjects, they would be able to obtain a high paying job and be active members in society. Now, over 60 years later, school still focuses on these subjects beyond everything else. Instead of adjusting to the growing list of skills needed to compete in the 21st century work environment, courses prepare students only in academics. More than ever students need soft skills and real job experience to truly be able to compete in the global market. If I could change how my school district prepares students for life as young adults, I would implement courses that focus on real life skills in addition to giving opportunities for interviews, internships, and jobs.

My grandmother attended school in a one room school house with one teacher for all eight grades. Although Lamar High School has enrollment ten times the size of her school, the focus is still upon the core subjects. I am not saying that the school should not teach English or mathematics, but that there should be additional courses and opportunities for students besides just the basic offerings. The Lamar Career and Technical Center (LCTC) does a phenomenal job of giving students interested in trades hands-on experience, but the high school does not follow its league for students interested in other careers. My first priority would be giving Lamar High School students hands-on experiences within their field of interest. I know that the LCTC requires its students to perform a "fake job interview" and I would require all high school seniors

to perform the same task. In addition, I would allow students to use a class period as time for an internship, paid or unpaid. No longer would students have to use time outside of school to do unpaid work, but could get it done during the day in order to make money after school. I would also speak with members within the community about jobs and internships in fields that usually are not open to high school students to allow kids to see what a potential career would look like. Right now, through the LCTC, a student can do the Co-op and work during the school day, but this program would allow students not just to work in fast food or retail, but to gain real job experience and skills that will translate to their future careers.

Through extra access to internships and jobs, students will gain what is truly important: soft skills. These are the abilities that are needed to perform in a job, but can't be taught by a worksheet or essay. Skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, tolerance, negotiation, and more come from working in a real life work environment. By students entering these areas before they graduate high school, they will be lightyears ahead of their competition. According to Monster.com, a website that shows jobs available in your area, soft skills are critical to career success. Through implementing just a few different courses, such as economics and engineering, and requiring students to undergo a job interview, students would not only be prepared to succeed in a college setting but the real world as well.

My grandmother grew up in a world completely different from the one I and my classmates live in today. Why should we learn the same way? The world is always getting more and more competitive each day, and through preparing Lamar's students for the world they are

about to enter, we could change their future career success drastically. My grandmother may have learned the 3 R's, but Lamar's students should be learning the 2 S's: soft skills.