CLASSROOM CHRONICLES

PATHWAYS to PROSPERITY

How an Electrical Instructor Ensures Student Success Through Work-based Learning

DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION
Louisiana Believes

Launched in 2014, Louisiana's Jump Start program prepares students to lead productive adult lives, capable of continuing their education after high school while earning certifications that create pathways to prosperity. Now, in 2020, the program is evolving. The next phase of the program, called Jump Start 2.0, will build on the state's Jump Start program by reducing the stigma attached to career education and by ensuring every student graduating with a Career Diploma is fully prepared to succeed in a high-wage, high-growth industry. And while the enhanced plan is not slated for adoption by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education until March, Jump Start 2.0 has already generated buzz.

JUMP START 2.0

Among those embracing the ideals of Jump Start 2.0 is **certified electrician and electrical instructor Cornelius Martinez, of the College and Career Readiness Center in St. Martin Parish.** Martinez, who recently spoke at the **annual Jump Start convention**, actualizes Jump Start 2.0's vision in his classroom every day, starting with the belief that, in order to reduce the stigma of CTE, student learning should come from an authentic source.

"What I teach is what I know. I believe that students want to learn skills from a person that does that type of work. This is a real life example of what Jump Start is about," said Martinez.

> **"I AM NOT TEACHING THEM ABOUT THEIR FUTURE; I AM HELPING THEM BEGIN THEIR FUTURE."**

From the moment students enter his class, Martinez makes it clear that a future in skilled trade, like becoming a certified electrician, is an honorable and high-demand path.

"On the first day of class I tell my students to raise their hands if they or someone they know doesn't use electricity. No one raises their hand," said Martinez. "I make them realize that, regardless of what they want to be, electricity is everywhere, and people will always be needed to complete that work."

His words resonate with his students. They listen to him and ask him questions about his first-hand experience in the field.

> **"I EXPLAIN TO MY STUDENTS THAT THROUGH CTE THEY HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO EARN MORE THAN SOMEONE COMING RIGHT OUT OF COLLEGE. I MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND THAT THEIR GROWTH POTENTIAL IS LIMITLESS."**

"Electricity is tied to every single industry. Once the lightbulb goes off, students are able to visualize themselves succeeding and work toward achieving their goals."

But this work doesn't come from looking at a manual, Martinez said. "Students in my class learn and practice electrical skills through hands-on experience.

"We have a classroom with desks, but we also constructed a lab," he added. "Students completed this work and built our workstations themselves. This is where much work-based student learning takes place."

Beyond the classroom, Martinez connects his students with on-the-job training through paid internships at his electrical company.

"Each semester, I take two to three students that are excelling after the first six weeks," said Martinez. "They work with me, and I am able to pay them for services rendered. Through this experience, my students are able to put into practice what they learn in class."

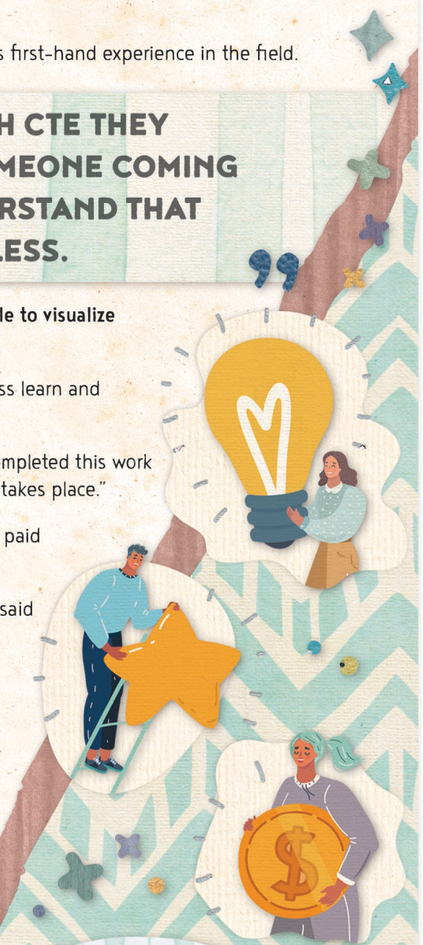
If they excel in their internships, he partners with different electrical companies to help students secure full-time jobs once they complete his course.

"Toward the end of the semester, I call my contacts and provide names of promising students," said Martinez. "Many of my students are able to secure jobs this way. Other students see this or hear about it and recognize the possibility of attaining a job right out of high school making $15-$16 an hour."

And while helping his students secure jobs is rewarding, Martinez most enjoys positively impacting the community that has so deeply impacted him.

> **"There are not a lot of African American men teaching in my school system, and there are a lot of kids, especially young black males, that are lost. If I can connect with them, if they can see that I grew up like them, in the same poverty-stricken neighborhoods, and despite those circumstances I was able to succeed, then they can too."**

Not everyone can be an athlete or an actor, Martinez notes. But everyone has the opportunity to succeed, and a technical career, like the one he pursued, is a viable option.



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