

Claude C. Laval, Timothy Stearns, Riley C. Walter: Fresno builds nation's first high school for entrepreneurs

By Claude C. Laval, Timothy Stearns and Riley C. Walter

As community leaders, we three have worked together on numerous initiatives intended to create jobs in our valley since 1996. We are fully aware that we live in an area that is dominated by small business, not Fortune 500 companies.

In the course of our work on such endeavors as the Jobs Initiative, Central Valley Business Incubator, Water and Energy Technology Center, and the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Fresno State, we have frequently encountered the problem of businesses that want to grow and expand but are hampered by not having qualified, job-ready, educated workers.

We know having a steady job is a huge social stabilizer. People with good jobs commit fewer crimes and pay more in taxes. But much of traditional public education lacks the requisite curriculum to prepare young people for work in the business sector. The requisite skills of critical thinking and problem solving can be learned through an applied entrepreneurship education.

This is why we are so excited about Fresno Unified School District's new entrepreneurship high school that will open in August. The school is a new construction just east of Ratcliffe Stadium in Central Fresno. It will open with an initial class of 150 10th-grade students and will eventually serve students in grades 10-12. The school and curriculum have been created through the lens of entrepreneurship and will offer a student-centered approach to education. Real-world business skills will be taught through the traditional course subjects of math, English, social studies, and science. Opportunities to meet regularly with community mentors will encourage students to apply learning to real-world situations. Students will develop and test new ideas. These ideas will become businesses that students will run their senior year of school. Acquired academic, entrepreneurial and technological skills will ensure students are prepared for both college and careers.

This is the first and only such high school in the United States. It is a tribute to forward thinking on the part of Fresno Unified School District leadership and school board. It will go a long way in creating a pool of talented young high school graduates available to the local business community.

Additionally, the business community will partner with educators in preparing students. Local entrepreneurs will serve as mentors to student teams starting their own businesses. Local business partners will also share their expertise by working with entrepreneurship teachers to plan and deliver specific content in the classroom. Students will graduate, excited for a future many could not have easily imagine before enrolling in high school. They will think like an entrepreneur, act like an entrepreneur, and contribute to the economy of our community as so many other entrepreneurs do.

In addition to us, the local business community members of the advisory committee includes Dora Westerlund of the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation, Jake Soberal of Bitwise, Rojelio Vasquez, dean of the School of Business at Fresno Pacific University; Garrett Jones of Laval Underground, Lorinda Forrest of the California Community Colleges Economic Workforce Development Program and Edgar Blunt of Career Pillar. Additionally, Fresno Unified members of the committee include Kurt Madden, chief technology officer; Brett Taylor, principal and Blair Eliason, vice principal.

This school will benefit the students and the Valley. We are excited about this incredible new high school and hope

you will be, too. We encourage the local business community to get involved.

An open house will be held at the new school located at Cambridge Avenue and Clark Street June 6 from 10 a.m. to noon, for students, parents and the business community.

If you would like more information on this very exciting educational development, contact Brett Taylor at brett.taylor@fresnounified.org or (559) 248-7360.

We hope to see you there.

Claude C. Laval, is with the Claude Laval Corporation, Dr. Timothy Stearns, is executive director of the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Riley C. Walter, is a partner with Walter and Wilhelm Law Group.

Entrepreneurship school open house

When: June 6

Time: 10 a.m. to noon

Where: Cambridge Avenue and Clark Street

Details: Brett Taylor at brett.taylor@fresnounified.org or (559) 248-7360.