Dear [Name]:

I’m a high school [English] teacher. I used to think my job was about [reading Shakespeare] with students and teaching them how to [write literary analysis papers]. I used to think what was happening down the hallways in the career-technical center had nothing to do with me or my students. “Was that even school?” I would ask myself. Did they take tests? Were there standards?

Slowly, after 18 years in the classroom — yes, it took that long — my perspective began to shift. I actually started paying attention to what went on down the hallway. I started to realize students in graphic design were learning how to read and write for a purpose. I started talking with recent graduates about what they were doing and why. I started talking to my colleagues who weren’t in my department and, in conversations with them, I realized I had been operating from my own deeply-rooted biases and assumptions about what education should be rather than what it could be.

If you are like me, a teacher who couldn’t shake her traditional notions of vocational ed. as somehow being “less than,” I urge you to check yourself and your assumptions. Walk down the hallway and talk to the students in “those” classes. Talk to your colleagues. Visit a local business and talk to the owners and employees about their needs and community goals. Realize that building the link between education and students’ futures is everyone’s responsibility. [Shakespeare is important]. And so is engineering.

Our job is to help students see the connection between school and life beyond school, whatever our students’ paths might be. There is no one way, only pathways with different end points.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[School or district name]