I have received some feedback of some misinformation that's floating out there about the fact that Timberlake is not currently a member of a Career Tech district. If your stance is that all Oklahoma students, including students within the Timberlake district deserve the opportunity to attend Career Tech, I could not agree more. This message is not to argue a point but to simply lay out the facts as I know them regarding Career Tech membership.

There is currently only one way to become a member of a Career Tech district. It requires a vote of the people to approve an increase of their property taxes to pay for membership. Rates vary. To become a member of NW Tech in either Alva or Fairview, the rate is 13 mills. For Autry in Enid, the rate is 15 mills. The issue is that Timberlake is a very unique district in that we cover over 600 square miles (2nd largest in Oklahoma) but have a relatively small enrollment. The geographical size of our district leads to a high valuation for property taxes. Here is a rough estimate of how the numbers would work out should our district become a member district:

Estimated Career Tech Enrollment: 10-15 students (Total grade 11-12 enrollment: 37 students)
NW Tech: 13 Mills = $627,022 per year*
Autry: 15 Mills = $723,487 per year*
Per pupil (Conservatively low): $41,801.5-$48,232 per student per year*
Per student figures are based on a Career Tech enrollment of 15 students which is likely an overestimate. There would most likely be years of much fewer students which would increase the per student cost. *These are all approximations based on current data.

I have personally been a part of these conversations at board meetings each year that I have been superintendent, as well as during the tenures of the previous 2 superintendents. Every one of those discussions has ended with all involved agreeing that we would love for Timberlake students to have the opportunity, but also agreeing that the finances under current state law do not make sense. I have the very strong opinion that the State of Oklahoma needs an alternative pathway for membership for districts like Timberlake or alternative ways to fund tuition. It's also important to mention that we are not alone. There are currently no Grant County schools that are Career Tech members for the same reasons, as well as several other school districts throughout the state. We are, however, the minority so our voices have fallen on deaf ears.

I have had in person meetings with leadership from Autry and NW Tech about our situation. Both agree that the math would be too hard to overcome in an election. I have expressed the importance of an alternative pathway for membership with multiple members of both the state house and senate, State Superintendent Field's office, as well as Bret Haken, State Director of Career Tech, who met with me in Helena. These are discussions that need to become more prevalent to bring attention to the lack of fairness and opportunity that there is for students in districts like Timberlake. I am never opposed to pushing this to a vote of the Timberlake communities, but as someone that prides himself on being a good steward of taxes paid by others, I firmly believe there is a better way. The situation in our district would place an unfair burden on our local landowners. Leadership at Timberlake has tried to find creative solutions but limitations to funding and limitations based on state statute stand in the way. The most promising option would provide an opportunity for our students to attend tuition free. The idea is

to fund out-of-district tuition on an individual student basis by carving out the necessary amount of millage from a school bond issue to pay for tuition. This would take the financial burden off of families. After consulting with our auditor and legislators, we have learned that this is not currently an allowable expense for bond funds based on statute. I was also a part of a meeting with all Grant County superintendents and Autry leadership where these types of solutions were discussed. Both sides of the discussion agreed to go back and work on alternative solutions with the same result. These are the types of solutions that need to be discussed on a much broader scale. Unfortunately, our local districts and local school boards do not have the power to implement these types of solutions. Legislation is required to open up membership or funding options. I will also renew dialogue with our local Career Tech leadership and this will be discussed again during upcoming board meetings.

Lastly, Timberlake leadership does its best to be transparent to all stakeholders. I have shared this information regarding Career Tech membership openly with anyone who has asked over the past several years. I have an open door policy and welcome input or questions from our community. It's important that discussions about our district come from factual information which I'm always happy to provide. Differences of opinion will always be a part of our reality, but if we as Timberlake Tigers are not championing the great things that our staff and students are accomplishing, who will? We have a great school system that serves a great community and we will continue to strive to be better each and every day together. If there is ever anything that you as a Timberlake stakeholder would like to discuss, I urge you to reach out to me. I am at the elementary school every morning, Helena each afternoon, and can be reached by phone at either site throughout the day.

Sincerely,

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