

Last month, we had a special guest speaker visit our 8th grade, year-long CTE class. Former Kulshan Middle School student, Vaughn McNamara (pictured here with his little brother, Jace) spoke about his experience as a welding student at Bellingham Technical College. Vaughn stated, "I never felt that I was any good at regular school work-that there was something more that I wanted to do. With welding, I am now the god of steel and fire!!!! Nothing could be cooler".

Vaughn frankly told the students about his academic struggles in middle and high school-especially with math. But, through a lot of hard work, Vaughn was able to raise his grades high enough to be accepted into BTC's welding program. In fact, he had raised his math mastery scores so high, that his BTC counselor tried to interest him in a nursing career, but welding is Vaughn's passion.

During the question and answer session, Vaughn was asked what he would say to students who may be tempted to drop out of school. "I've known a lot of guys who have chosen that route....some of them are good friends of mine. But now they are wondering what to do with their lives. It's hard to get work, and to make the money that they'd like to. I encourage them to go back to school. There are a lot of great paying career opportunities out there for guys like me who like to work with their hands-or who like to build and design things. Don't give up on your education!"

Vaughn also shared how important mentorship is, ".....my dad (a welder's union representative) was the one who first interested me in welding, he was the one who saw my potential" Vaughn then explained a bit about the unions, how they work, and what advantages they can offer workers.

Vaughn ended his presentation with information about the wages that can be expected for welders coming out of BTC's program. "Once I graduate, I can expect to earn a competitive wage-especially as a union welder. He also mentioned that there are several different career paths for, as well as different companies that are interested in hiring good welders.