

General Service Technician Program Summary

BACKGROUND

The concept for the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF) was developed by the automotive industry and education for the purpose of improving automotive education. Some of the recent trends and issues of industry and education have had an impact on the ability of many automotive programs to meet the NATEF standards – particularly those in public secondary schools.

Industry defines the standard for the skills entry-level technicians must have for employment. Of course, the “industry” is a broad label that is used to represent various sub-groups within it. Education is ultimately responsible for teaching the entry-level skills necessary for employment, whether it is immediately following high school or after further study at a post-secondary institution. All recommendations for change were made with the intent that meeting the needs of some will not reduce the value of the program to others.

THE BALANCING ACT

Secondary automotive programs are faced with a paradox. The knowledge and skill requirements for technicians have increased while time and resources available for training have decreased. Programs at the secondary level, in particular, must respond to increasing demands to show evidence of student competency gains in addition to meeting academic skill levels or standards of learning (SOL). At times the pressure to meet academic requirements comes at the expense of time available for students to spend in technical training classes. This pressure cannot be ignored, as public education is predominately locally driven and funded.

According to many automotive industry estimates, there is a critical shortage of technicians. Industry is turning to education to attract individuals into the career field and provide the training needed for employment. Many employers say they need entry-level technicians who have the essential knowledge and skills required for fundamental service and maintenance tasks while others prefer to hire individuals from an automotive program with more depth and breadth. Industry is also recognizing that it has to invest in its future by providing opportunities for employment and further education while students are in school. This comes at a time when many students are realizing that they must continue their education beyond high school.

It is the partnership between industry and education that brings value and strength to the NATEF standards and evaluation process. Industry and education work together to establish standards for programs that are achievable and benefit employers, programs, and students.

ASE-Certification through Articulation (Secondary School Programs)

In response to a concern that some secondary programs could not meet the requirements for certification in four required areas (Suspension & Steering, Brakes, Electrical/Electronic Systems, and Engine Performance), a means for achieving ASE certification through articulation was created with the introduction of the 1993 program standards. Programs are required to meet standards in a minimum of two of the four required areas and articulate with an ASE-certified program. It is not mandatory for students to attend a certified post-secondary program while still in high school; the articulation agreement fosters the relationship between the two programs and provides a seamless transition for students who want to continue their education. The main disadvantage to this approach is that the learning outcomes have a narrow focus for those students who seek employment in the industry immediately upon graduation from high school. Although additional breadth may be taught, ASE has little means for providing direction for instruction under this plan.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM FOR ASE CERTIFICATION

The Conceptual Framework

For years it has been said that the number of technicians needed is much higher than the number of individuals prepared for employment in the industry. Since the launch of the provision for ASE program certification through articulation, some employers have expressed a concern that the graduates did not have a broad enough skill set for employment. Some employers indicated that they preferred to hire individuals who have a solid foundation in electrical/electronic systems as well as a general understanding of all automobile systems. The current standards for articulated programs do not adequately address those needs.

To be responsive to industry and education, a change in concept for certification was presented to the NATEF Executive Committee in November 2001. The concept, to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn skills needed for entry-level employment, and a draft task list was proposed to the Board of Trustees at the May 2002 meeting. The Trustees directed Dr. Lundquist to work with industry experts to complete the requirements for an alternate plan for articulated program certification by the next board meeting. A workshop was held at ASE headquarters on September 19, 2002 and the requirements for the proposed General Service Technician Program were identified. **The NATEF Board of Trustees and the ASE Board of Directors approved the General Service Technician Program at their respective Fall 2002 board meeting. The program was launched nationwide in March 2003.**

The General Service Technician Program is not intended to replace the standards for automobile technician training programs. Rather, it is an additional option for secondary

programs that choose to certify as articulated programs. The General Service Technician Program does not dilute program standards, as rigorous requirements must be met.

Program Requirements

The **General Service Technician Program requires a minimum total of 500 hours of instruction**, although there is no designation per area (such as 105 hours for Brakes). Under the current automobile standards for certification through articulation, programs must meet the requirements for certification in two of the four required areas. A program could meet standards with as few as 200 hours if they chose to certify in Brakes and Suspension & Steering. (By September 2004, programs will be required to be certified in Electrical/Electronic Systems and one of the additional three areas, which increases the minimum hours for certification from 200 to 325.)

Under the current automobile standards for program certification, each task is assigned a priority rating of P-1, P-2, or P-3. Programs must teach 95% of the P-1 tasks, 80% of the P-2 tasks, and 50% of the P-3 tasks. This is intended to give programs some latitude due to time constraints, tool and equipment availability, and local needs. The **General Service Technician Program stipulates that 100% of the tasks must be taught**. This is possible since the tasks are a subset of the complete NATEF task list.

Instructors in a General Service Technician Program must be ASE-certified in A4, A5, A6, and A8 since the majority of the tasks are drawn from those areas. The current requirements for automobile program certification specify that instructors must be ASE-certified in the areas they teach. If a program is articulated, the instructors may be ASE-certified in as few as two areas.

The 2002 automobile program standards stipulate that **instructors must attend at least 20 hours of in-service training**. Instructors in a General Service Technician Program would also have to meet that requirement.

All General Service Technician Programs would be required to articulate with an ASE-certified post-secondary program.

The cost of certification for General Service Technician Programs is the same as for Automobile Technician Training Programs. A two-day on-site evaluation is required for initial certification, which is valid for five (5) years.

Conclusion

ASE and NATEF chose to be proactive in responding to the needs of employers and educators, rather than leave it to chance and lose a potential opportunity to attract students into the industry. The General Service Technician Program was designed specifically as an alternate plan to improve automotive education in secondary programs that choose to certify as articulated programs. It is not meant to replace the current

standards for certification. The General Service Technician Program was developed to address the need for entry-level technicians with a broad range of skills, as expressed by some employers, and work within the constraints of some school systems. Students who complete a General Service Technician Program will have had the opportunity to learn skills needed for career-entry employment in the automotive industry. Additionally, those students who wish to add depth to their knowledge and skills will also be prepared to enter an automotive training program at the post-secondary level.

The General Service Technician Program is a win-win-win strategy as it benefits employers, schools, and students alike.