HARPER COUNTY TRANSTION TO CAREERS PROGRAM

Back in January of 2016, the GOP lawmakers in Kansas began taking a different look at the education offered in K-12 schools. Five outcomes were adopted for measuring the progress of students. “More focus was to be put on each individual student and less emphasis on standardized testing.” Said Kansas Commissioner of Education Randy Watson. “These outcomes will help direct the board’s new vision.”

According to the Kansas State Department of Education News the new outcomes that will be measured for progress areas follows.

* High school graduation rates
* Post-secondary completion/attendance
* Kindergarten readiness: An essential building block for future achievement and academic success.
* Individual plan of study focused on career interest: This roadmap started for students in middle school that includes development of a flexible career focus and an education plan that is clearly defined, rigorous and relevant to ensure a successful and efficient transition to post-secondary education and/or workforce. Each Individual Plan of Study (IPS) will include graduation requirement, approved coursework for the student’s educational and career goals and work-based learning experiences.
* Social/emotional growth measured locally. Social-emotional learning integrated with character development will help students learn, practice and model essential personal life habits that contribute to academic, vocational and personal success. The development of these skills will play a critical role in achieving the state board’s new vision.

The five outcomes were developed following months of seeking input from Kansans during community conversations, state board retreats, and discussion with business leaders.

From this initiative the, District 361 and District 511 of Harper County have formed a project termed, Transition to Careers Program. Britt Hedlund is the project leader for the new joint-effort of the two districts.

The Transition to Careers Program is a joint-effort among the two districts to improve opportunities for Harper County students to explore various career interests. This program is designed to meet the state emphasis placed on the IPS and the emphases to build soft skills among high school students.

The IPS includes several areas that are shared with the parents, teacher advisors and counselors. Two to three teachers make up the advisory groups. The advisors maintain a file for the student which has the results of the self-assessment inventory. This inventory is one where the student recognizes their values, needs, interests, hobbies, career goals, extra-curricular activities, issues and concerns about life, and tentative plans following graduation. In the file is also the four year plan of course study for the individual student. A reality check list and an academic performance record is kept in the file of information. The list of colleges or vocational schools the student has visited or is interested in attending helps keep the student focus on making a living on their own.

The design of this program will place Harper County business and industry in direct contact with high school students. It will bring business people into the schools to explain their specific field of work, job expectations, requirements, education or technical training needed, and wage and benefit expectations. Throughout the school year this will be accomplished with business luncheons, primarily with freshman and sophomore students.

Currently, during the 2016-2017 school year thirteen business luncheons are scheduled featuring speakers from business and industry. Students are encouraged to attend all of the events. They are required to write a report answering ten questions about the presenter and the topic. The final impetus is to whether the student would be interested in a potential job shadowing or internship opportunity in the career or business.

The Career Cruising List provides the advisors with what luncheon speaker the student attended and reported on. Thus indicating to the advisor if the student actively gained information about a career or job after graduation from high school or if they are interested in the job shadow or internship. The goal for the juniors in the county is to develop career interests in four areas of their choice and do a day job shadowing in those areas. These shadowing opportunities will be done one per nine week period in their selected business field. As a senior, students will have been exposed to a variety of career opportunities. They will be asked to pick one career field of interest for a semester long internship. This internship will be mutually developed by the student, parent, school, and business. The entire program will include soft skill requirements from students as well.

Soft skills encompass interview and application processes, reflections on various experiences, work ethic and work behaviors, and other related topics.

This program will allow students to gain a better understanding of the various career fields that exist in Harper County. This will also allow businesses the opportunity to see the potential work force that exists in Harper County. Although this program is a high school based program, both districts are taking strides to introduce this this information to students and parents throughout elementary and middle schools. The overall purpose is to provide students with a wide variety of choices to explore, give them the opportunity for some practical experience, and help them determine what their career interest might or might not be.

We are not an industrial age where mass manufacturing is important. Therefore, the customized teaching and learning with job shadowing, projects with tangible educations and life-long lessons, along with internships will certainly improve the lives of the students during school and after graduation when they enter the work force making their own living.