

# SBPS to apply for CareerConnect program/grant opportunity

Posted: Tuesday, January 14, 2014 12:00 am

By JOE DUTTON Staff Reporter

Scottsbluff Public Schools is making plans to apply for a large grant that would instill a new Youth CareerConnect program at Scottsbluff High School.

During the Scottsbluff Board of Education meeting on Monday, board members listened to a variety of school and business representatives throughout the community to help gain support for a \$3 million to \$6 million grant that would create a Youth CareerConnect program for SHS students.

The Nebraska Department of Labor announced the program and grant opportunity in November and created a short deadline of Jan. 27 to get the grant submitted. There is \$100 million available through the NDL and it is a competitive grant for all schools in the state to apply for. Only 25 to 40 grants will be awarded. SBPS will ask for between \$3 million to \$6 million and it will be over a four-year implementation beginning in the 2014-15 school year.

SBPS Superintendent Rick Myles said a lot of representatives from the schools and community have come together in working on the grant project and told board members that it has been the most ambitious grant process he has ever been a part of.

"This will be a good first step depending on what happens," Myles said. "We anticipate that other similar types of grant opportunities will appear in the future as well and we will be prepared for it."

SHS Principal Mike Halley said everyone in the district has been working very hard to put the grant together and if the high school were to get the money, it would be very significant to the school and they will be able to help a lot of students.

"The good thing about this grant, the conversations we're having and the things we are doing are going to be very valuable regardless of whether we receive the grant or not," Halley said. "Between three to six million dollars sure would help."

Halley said the main reason for the grant is to allow students to have more options when they graduate and be able to move on with a more meaningful diploma. The overall goal is to have students graduate with certification, have post secondary training, ready to work and be placed in a job field right away. At the college level, Halley also wanted students to have the option to receive an associate's degree by the time they graduate with dual credit classes and be able to transition into a four-year college.

"One thing that we've been concerned about is some kids don't really know what they want to do when they finish high school," Halley said. "We want to try and give them exposure to things to allow them to find something that they can work toward and have a goal in mind." Halley said.

Some of the goals of the program are to get work-based learning through internships and work experience with local businesses and to provide them with focused and intentional career counseling to give them an idea of what the industries are in the area beginning with ninth-grade students as they enter high school.

SHS Assistant Principal Justin Shaddick said he feels very passionate about the program if it were to become a part of the high school.

"I think that as a community we need a larger population of skilled employees to pull from and in order to pull from those skilled employees it's our job as an educator to provide those skilled employees," Shaddick said.

Shaddick said he recently attended a community meeting where residents stated that 20 to 30 year olds are leaving the Scottsbluff area and as educators they can make that change with this new model in order to make a community

difference. In the CareerConnect program, students will be exposed to introductory career courses in six different career academies aligned with what the state deems necessary as what careers and occupations are the highest in growth opportunities with flexibility in offerings, if needed. Students will get a full perspective of all the different careers that are available during their freshman and sophomore years. Shaddick said once students reach their junior year, they will make a selection of the career academy they want to enroll in and then choose how concentrated they are in that academy.

"This in no way determines the students' projection for the rest of their lives, but it does give an indication on where they could go," Shaddick said.

Twin Cities Development Employee Recruitment Manager Darla Heggem addressed the board and said why not create the workforce that is needed. She added that as a company, TCD will provide data for the purposes of the grant to articulate the future needs that employers are going to have. Heggem continued to say that when talking about the integrated academic and career focus, what a great way to align the educational system with what they are going to need in the area.

"From the business perspective, it's a pretty exciting opportunity," Heggem said.

Heggem said there are 17 to 18 ways that employers can participate in the program and it is specific outcomes that include job shadowing, internships, worksite training, career awareness opportunities and more to help successfully collaborate students and those already in the workplace.

"When you bring that employer piece into this it becomes a much more compelling argument and discussion for the grant," Heggem said. "Even if this doesn't happen, this is something that I've been wanting to happen for a long time." Western Nebraska Community College Vice President of Educational Service Terry Gaalswyk said to the board that he works with more than 60 school districts in higher education and they are moving in the right direction by applying for the grant. Gaalswyk added that WNCC is fully committed and behind the project and they see this as a way to leverage the resources, facilities and programs that are in place and an opportunity to be responsible to the workforce.

"Folks, you're moving the needle in the right direction, so you need to be proud of what you're doing as a board and a school district," Gaalswyk said.

Myles said the district is learning how much they can leverage with what is available in the community with the support that they have and even if they don't receive the grant, they will be ready for the next big grant opportunity. "With this grant we know the odds are against us, but because of what is happening now not only to some specifics with beginning with the high school and conversations and expanding to include others, but also the next time a grant comes along we are going to be prepared," Myles said.