

Expressions!

OF OKLAHOMA VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Interim director says increased academic standards need to be carefully developed

Dr. Ann Benson, interim state vo-tech director, has offered qualified support to a State Board of Education proposal increasing academic standards, but she warned it could devastate Oklahoma's vo-tech system unless thoughtfully and carefully developed.

The Board has proposed increasing academic standards to four years of English and three years each of mathematics, science and social studies.

Benson said Oklahoma's vo-tech system strongly supports more rigor in high school coursework because "it's the right thing to do."

"High standards are necessary because today's jobs demand understanding complex concepts involved in advancing technology," she said.

However, increasing academic standards must not limit opportunities for Oklahoma's students to take vocational education courses, the interim director said.

"Scheduling is a real concern for us," she said, "both in our comprehensive high school programs and in our technology centers. The additional time required to transport students to and from our technology centers is a big hurdle."

In addition to the Education Board's proposal, Gov. Keating has proposed his own "4 x 4" proposal, which requires four units each of math, science, social studies and English. That proposal compounds the scheduling issue, Benson said.

She said flexibility is key to making the increased academic standards work. Department officials presented five proposed modifications in two public hearings conducted by the State Board of Education in Muskogee and Woodward in April. The proposed modifications include:

- Allow for greater flexibility in course selection to meet the math and science requirements, for example, requiring "three laboratory sciences" rather than defining specific coursework. If courses are specified, additional courses beyond the three listed should be permitted. Alternative coursework, which would meet the math requirement, should be clearly identified and specified vocational courses should count for academic credit.

- Require all eighth-grade students to complete a four- to six-year plan of study prior to admission into the ninth grade and encourage involvement of parents in this process.

- Require satisfactory completion of six hours of coursework during the senior year.

- Seek funds and resources needed for additional support services to help students meet these more rigorous requirements.

- Grant high school credit to eighth-grade students taking proposed high school graduation core courses, provided the teachers are certified to teach courses at the high school level.

Benson said the modified requirements would well prepare Oklahoma's vocational students with the solid academics they need to succeed in their classrooms and their careers.

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Vo-tech training attracts firms to Duncan

A quiet job revolution, spawned by a tremendous amount of community cooperation, is underway in Duncan, and the area's economy is booming as a result.

Duncan has added more than 4,000 new jobs in the last four years and has commitments for about 1,000 more in the coming 12 months, said Wes Devero, president of the Duncan Area Economic Development Foundation.

The town is making major strides at diversifying its economy, which was previously heavily dependent on the large employment base at Halliburton Oil Services' Duncan facility. Current woes in the oil industry have dramatically reduced Halliburton's labor force.

New jobs are the result of Family Dollar Stores' decision to build a massive distribution center in Duncan, employing up to 600, and the announced 500-job expansion of Health Plan Services' Duncan center.

A driving factor behind the job growth is Red River Area Vo-Tech School, said Dennis Jett, the Foundation's chairman and president of Duncan's Oklahoma National Bank. The school has agreed to train the new workers to company specifications.



Pictured above is the site of the new Family Dollar Stores' distribution center in Duncan. The new facility is expected to create about 600 local jobs. Family Dollar Stores was attracted to Duncan because of Red River Area Vo-Tech's ability to train new workers for company specifications. Funding is provided by the Oklahoma vo-tech system's Training for Industry Program (TIP).

Funding is being provided by the Oklahoma vo-tech system's Training for Industry Program.

"Red River was a major factor in drawing those jobs to Duncan," said Jett, "especially in the case of Family Dollar and Health Plan Services."

Pat Rosen, Health Plan Services' director of operations, agreed. She said the vo-tech school is providing both supervisory skills training and customer skills training to company employees. When the company was doing its own training, it took six to eight weeks to train new employees. "Vo-tech now does it in two weeks, using a customized training process," Rosen said.

Rick Lowe, human resource manager for Sooner Trailer's Duncan manufacturing center said Red River's Safety Training program has been a godsend for his firm. In the last couple of years, Sooner Trailer has reduced accidents from 30-40 per month to almost nothing, he said. This has reduced the firm's insurance premiums from \$500,000 per year to \$250,000.

Another beneficiary of Red River's services is Roger Valdez, president of Valco Manufacturing, Inc., a parts manufacturer for the aviation industry. That company, which started with three employees when it relocated to Duncan in 1994, has since grown to 140 with an annual payroll of more than \$2.5 million.

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Doctor says vocational skills helped pay for college, medical school

Like many high school teenagers, Dr. Mark Gregory had little idea what he wanted to do with his life after graduation.

Today, Gregory thanks a vocational program and a student organization for helping him find the key to his career as a family practice physician.

An Individualized Cooperative Education (ICE) program and the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), a vocational student organization, started him on his journey.

That journey to success took him from a job as a hospital orderly, while in high school, to running his own family practice clinic in Okarche.

His wife, Terri, is the clinic's office manager. Terri is a former member of DECA, the vocational student organization for marketing education students. Together, they oversee both the business and medical side of the clinic, which serves patients in three counties.

At Crescent High School, Gregory's ICE program allowed him to participate in an internship at a local hospital after school. Skills he learned there allowed him to work his way through college and medical school.

"I learned early what life was like at various levels in the medical field," Gregory said.

Vocational training gave him skills he could use while he was getting his education at Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma Medical School.

While in college, Gregory worked as an orderly, a respiratory therapy technician, an emergency room technician and, finally, as a physician. Through these firsthand experiences, he has seen the medical profession from all angles.

Gregory said his "apprenticeship" has made him a better doctor.



"Being an orderly made me a better physician," he said. "The experience I received augmented my education. I understand many of the roles of medical professionals."

Gregory, a former VICA state treasurer, said that organization played a significant role in his emotional and educational growth.

As a state officer, Gregory traveled across the state and the nation — opportunities not normally available to a boy from a small, rural town, he said. One of the highlights of his VICA experience was participating in a national conference in Washington, D.C.

"VICA showed me that in any profession you need fundamental skills and a work ethic," he said.

Gregory, father of three children, also recommends vocational education to other parents. He said vo-tech gives young people the skills to establish a solid foothold in the workforce.

"Vocational education puts students in on the ground floor," Gregory said. "From there, they can decide how far they want to move up."



Dr. Mark Gregory, a former VICA member, currently runs his own family practice clinic in Okarche. Gregory said his Individualized Cooperative Education (ICE) program at Crescent High School enabled him to participate in an internship at a local hospital. The skills he learned there allowed him to work his way through college and medical school.

Mid-Del Career Connection wins 'All Means All' School-to-Work Award

As coordinator of Mid-Del Career Connection Dr. Ellen Wortham's goal is to make sure all students in her School-to-Work partnership have access to opportunities that link the classroom to the real world. Mid-Del Career Connection, which includes Mid-Del Schools, Mid-Del Technology Center and Rose State College, recently received an "All Means All" School-to-Work Award. This award recognizes efforts to include all learners in School-to-Work activities.

The "All Means All" School-to-Work Project is a joint effort of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Wortham said that making sure all students have opportunities to become involved in School-to-Work was one of the partnership's goals when it was started two years ago.

The partnership has developed a strategic plan for implementation of School-to-Work activities on three levels, Wortham said.

The first level is comprehensive elementary awareness. To help promote this, teachers and counselors in the partnership created career information materials that were distributed to all schools.

The second level, geared towards career exploration for junior high students, involves the Teachers As Guides (TAG) program. In the TAG program, teachers serve as academic counselors to students in Grades 7-10. The third level focuses on career direction. Wortham said at this stage, academic advisers help students in Grades 10-12 work on wise career choices and decision making.

Partnership activities also involve local post-secondary and higher education institutions. Some of these include summer teacher workshops at Mid-Del Technology Center, and having local ninth-graders explore different occupational areas at the area vo-tech school. In addition, students can receive college credit for some courses taken at Mid-Del Technology Center through cooperative agreements with Rose State College.

Wortham said the partnership has also created alliances within the community to help provide additional School-to-Work opportunities such as job shadowing and teacher internships.

Local businesses such as General Motors, Oklahoma Gas and Electric (OG&E), *The Midwest City Sun*, Midwest Regional Medical Center, Midwest Trophy and Tinker Air Force Base have all opened their doors to teachers and students.

Parents have also proved to be valuable supporters of the partnership by hosting field trips and speaking to classes. Wortham said parents were instrumental in developing a resource directory (of businesses willing to offer School-to-Work activities) in the first year of the partnership.



Applause

Crow Receives College Scholarship
Tami Crow, a student at Northeast Area Vo-Tech, Pryor, has received a Morris J. W. Gaebe entrepreneurial tuition scholarship to Johnson and Wales University. The four-year scholarship is worth \$40,000.

Essay Contest Winners
The winners of the 1998-99 Oklahoma Association for the Advancement of Black Americans in Vocational Education (OAAHAVE) essay contest are Demetria Bonds, Central Tech, Drumright, first place; Shasha Warrior, Indian Capital Technology Center, Muskogee, second place; and Paulette Carson, Wes Watkins Technology Center, Wetumka, third place. Bonds received \$150, Warrior received \$100 and Carson received \$50.

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Toolbox links classroom to workplace

Students in several Oklahoma schools are discovering new ways to partner with local newspapers, thanks to a newspaper “toolbox,” developed by the Oklahoma Department of Vo-Tech Education, newspaper representatives and classroom teachers.

The toolbox was designed by educators and media professionals including Mike Kellogg, publisher of *The NewsPress*, and Barbara England, Newspaper in Education (NIE) and literacy consultant for the Oklahoma Press Association and Oklahoma Newspaper Foundation. It is one of a series of toolboxes developed for use as part of Oklahoma’s School-to-Work initiative.

The toolbox, titled “Linking Classrooms with the Workplace Using the Newspaper,” offers several partnering tools that include lessons plans and career exploration activities. By helping students increase their usage of newspapers at an early age, the industry hopes to promote literacy and improve reading skills, explained England.

Stacey Roggendorff is NIE coordinator for *The Tulsa World*. A former classroom teacher, Roggendorff said using the newspaper in the classroom is a great way to expose students to local and current events.

The toolbox can also be a great aid to classroom teachers because it offers them activities that are ready to go, she said.

Oklahoma newspapers are playing other important roles in Oklahoma’s School-to-Work initiative, said Dr. Ann Benson, interim director of the Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education.

“Several newspapers have partnered with local educators and students to provide mentoring and job shadowing opportunities,” she said.

Crystal Rainwater, a senior at Stigler High School, is getting valuable real-world experience by shadowing reporters and editors at the *Stigler News-Sentinel*. Rainwater works at the *News-Sentinel* for about an hour every day after school. She is using her internship to find out if she really wants to pursue a career in the newspaper industry.

Rainwater has discovered that some of the vocational classes she took in high school — typing and computer design— are useful in the newspaper industry. She also realizes that a college education will be handy if she decides to continue in this field.

The newspaper industry is opening its doors to educators as well. Jo Ann Webb, a sixth-grade English teacher with Lawton Schools, participated in a week-long internship last summer at *The Lawton Constitution*. Webb used her experiences at the paper to create five lesson plans at her school. However, her collaboration with the paper did not end with her internship. *Lawton Constitution* reporters visited Webb’s class and taught students about news writing and editing.

By using the newspaper as a classroom tool, Webb hopes her students will become more excited about reading and also become well informed about what’s going on in their community.



Stillwater High School students from Curtis Davis’s yearbook class use a newspaper for a weekly current affairs quiz. The Oklahoma Department of Vo-Tech Education has developed a newspaper toolbox that offers educators examples of how to integrate the newspaper into the classroom curriculum. The newspaper toolbox also offers ways to link with local businesses in career exploration activities. Pictured from left to right are Bree Stephens, Ryan Griffin, Jennifer Meyer and Amber Axton.

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Superintendents will serve two years on advisory committee

Fourteen Oklahoma superintendents are providing advice on school issues to the Oklahoma Department of Vo-Tech Education.

Each of these educators will spend two-year terms on the agency's Comprehensive School Superintendents' Advisory Committee, which meets four times each year.

Dr. Ann Benson, interim state vo-tech director, said the committee's advice and counsel is extremely valuable.

"These superintendents represent many of our customers, and it is important for us to hear their thoughts and opinions. They give us a perspective from the front line," she said.

"We need to know how the decisions we make at the state level will impact the local school –

before those decisions are made – and this committee is a great way to determine that," she said.

Topics regularly discussed by the panel include academic standards, budget requests, state and federal legislation, state rule changes, and other important issues.

Superintendents serving on the committee this year include Phil Berkenbile, Morrison; Furman Clark, Hydro; Gloria Griffin, Millwood; Paul Griggs, Empire; Jim Hines, Kingfisher; Pat Martin, Stilwell; D. B. Merrill, Hilldale; Don Rader, Vici; Harry Red Eagle, Skiatook; Gary Reid, Newkirk; Jim Smith, Clayton; Randy Stickney, Ninnekah; Rocky Stone, Rock Creek; and Bill Weldon, Maysville.



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