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LOOK AND LEARN – JOB SHADOWS HAVE CHANGED

For the past 10 years, the Great Falls Public Schools have offered a job shadowing program. Since that time, the program has been evolving. Today it is a curriculum based program that is adding value to classroom learning activities.

When the program was introduced in 2006 it was designed to give all juniors in the district an opportunity to observe a professional in a job or career the student had an interest in. In a Tribune article that year, job shadow coordinator Pat Loucks was quoted as saying “The goal is to supplement our counseling curriculum. We needed to give the kids some hands-on involvement in addition to the things already taking place, including interest inventories.”

That goal has changed just a bit. For the past two years, the shadows have not been based on a student’s year in school but rather on the classes they are taking. The majority of students being placed are enrolled in career technical education classes such as, medical prep, early childhood development, business, computer science, and industrial technology. The shadow is a hands on learning experience that the students look forward to completing in conjunction with their specific course work. Following the shadow the student must recount their experience. Some teachers require a written report while others prefer to have the student share their experience with their classmates through an oral report.

Assistant Superintendent Tom Moore said, “Pat did a wonderful job of administering the program from its inception but with her retirement at the end of the 2013-2014 school year we decided to give the program another look. We felt the program could be restructured to make the shadows more relevant to students in particular career paths as well as more meaningful for our professional hosts.”

Kerry Bronson currently manages the program. As a part of a course assignment, each student submits three choices of professions they would like to shadow. Bronson then contacts businesses to find a professional willing to host the student. She said she is pleased with the response from the community. “For the most part, the professionals I have asked to be hosts are open to the idea. The shadows are only one day and most are for about 4 hours. Some are longer depending on the profession and the host’s schedule so it is not a huge time commitment for the host but it is invaluable for our students.”

According to Bronson, the local medical community has been wonderful to work with and she is excited about the possibilities available for students with the opening of new Great Falls Clinic Hospital. She said “Great Falls Emergency Services, the company that provides ambulance service for Great Falls, is always

willing to fit our kids in and when I thanked them for being so accommodating they told me “these are the doctors and nurses of the future. We want to make sure they know what takes place with a patient before they get to the hospital or emergency room.”

New to the program this year are the curriculum based requests from students interested in graphic design. They have been a bit challenging to place but Dan Perbil from Banik Communications agreed to have a student shadow him and other members of the Banik staff for the day. Bronson was delighted with the email she received from Dan following the shadow.

“Ryan was a pleasure to have around the office today. He was very polite and articulate! He really stands out from the average students we usually get at these job shadows. What a nice young man. I’m glad you talked me into this and I hope we all inspired him a little.”

“I think the difference is that we are placing students who have studied specific subjects and are truly interested in the fields they are requesting to shadow,” Bronson said. “The earlier system of letting every junior shadow someplace they may have known little about was a great idea to help them look for different options but the shadows didn’t always work for the host. Now because the experience is tied to their course work and career plans, students are more engaged and able to ask pertinent questions to determine if this is the career for them.”

Bronson expects to place well over 300 students in job shadows during the 2015-2016 school year.