

75 Columbus seniors meet work ethic requirements

By **Matthew Kent** - 5/2/18 5:04 PM

A pilot program designed to ensure high school seniors in Columbus are ready for the workforce with skills and traits is wrapping up its first year.

Bartholomew Consolidated School Corp. is on track to have 75 seniors earn a Governor's Work Ethic certificate based on preliminary numbers, said Autumnne Streeval, integration specialist with the Columbus Area Career Connection.

That represents about one-third of 230 students who had initially signed up for the program, said Streeval, noting that she expects the final count to increase.

The program overseen by the Indiana Department of Workforce Development is open to all high school seniors and requires that they meet five competency areas.

The district was awarded \$35,000 in December 2016 to implement the program, which began in

August, and was among 18 Indiana entities to receive funding through a pilot program.

The five competencies that students are required to meet include demonstrating they can persevere through challenges and problem-solve; are accepting and demonstrate service to others, possess a positive attitude and communicate clearly; are a self-starter and critical thinker; are reliable and demonstrate responsibility, in addition to being organized, punctual and can show self-management.

In addition, students must meet four objectives in demonstrating academic readiness with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0 that includes being on track to meet all graduation requirements. Other than an attendance rate of at least 98 percent, individuals must also have one or fewer discipline referrals and complete a minimum of six hours of community

service or volunteer work during the school year.

"It will serve them well no matter what their post-secondary opportunity may be," Streeval said. "We felt like the criteria to earn a work ethic certificate was in line with our BCSC goals and our qualities of an expert learner."

High school seniors who meet the five competency areas — which requires signatures from three school employees who can attest that students have met those skills — receive a work ethic certificate signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb and Department of Workforce Development Commissioner Frederick Payne.

The work ethic certificate makes students eligible for scholarship opportunities and guarantees job interviews with employers, Streeval said.

One of the program's most rigorous requirements is the 98

percent attendance rate, meaning students cannot miss more than four days that are excused or unexcused. That is one primary reason why more students are not on track to earn work ethic certificates, Streeval said.

However, students have the opportunity to appeal that if they have exceeded the four-day limit before a four-member board that consists of Columbus Police Chief Jon Rohde; Steve Pride, director human resources, training and customs compliance at Toyota Industrial Equipment Manufacturing Inc.; Chip Orben, spokesman for Duke Energy; and Karina Willats, chief development officer at the Foundation for Youth.

Streeval said the board will review paperwork and documentation tied to the absences, noting that 15 to 20 high school students have already filed appeals, which are slated to be heard next month in the C4 conference room at Columbus North High School.

The board could choose to agree with the students — many of

whom who have written letters — that could result in them being granted a work ethic certificate, Streeval said.

What students say

Madelyn Sanders, a senior at Columbus North High School and student body president, is on track to complete the work ethic certificate.

“It’s a great opportunity for anyone who wants to set themselves apart ... and an easy way to boost your resume,” said Sanders, who was easily able to meet the requirements.

Sanders, who plans to study biology and Spanish at Butler University this fall, hopes to become a surgeon and encourages other students to pursue a work ethic certificate.

Jacqueline Cowan, a senior at Columbus Signature Academy – New Tech High School, said her experience working toward earning the work ethic certificate has been easier than expected, despite the strict attendance requirements.

“Even if there are no benefits right now, there

might be down the line,” Cowan said.

Cowan said she listed the work ethic certificate on her college applications. She will be attending Indiana University in Bloomington this fall to study biology and believes the certificate will benefit her after she graduates.

“It will be really nice to put on job applications,” Cowan said.

Katherine Richardson, a senior at Columbus East High School, said the certificate will show prospective employers that she is willing to work hard, which will benefit them as well.

She will attend Ball State University and plans to major in journalism this fall.

The program is also targeted to students in grades 6 and 8 who want to earn a work ethic certificate. Students in those grade levels must meet all of the competency areas and objectives with the exception of the 2.0 grade point average requirement, Streeval said.

Sixth-graders who complete the requirements will earn a certificate signed by Mayor Jim Lienhoop, while eighth-graders will earn the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce work ethic certificate signed by chamber president Cindy Frey.

The district felt it was important to introduce the program at those grade levels to allow students an opportunity to practice different work ethic skills that will benefit them in the future, Streeval said.

Preliminary data indicates that 161 sixth-grade students, or one-third, are on track to earn the mayor's work ethic certificate out of 495 individuals who initially signed up.

In addition, 100 eighth-grade students out of 227 who signed up for the program are on track to receive a work ethic certificate, which represents 44 percent of individuals, Streeval said.

Richardson also encouraged sixth- and eighth-grade students to continue earning the certificates, which she noted will help prepare them for high school and

other opportunities as well.

"It's a great way to set yourself apart," she said.