

State grant will help LHS develop intern program

By Elizabeth Pearl, The Lebanon Reporter | Dec 23, 2016

A state grant will allow Lebanon High School to provide more workforce training opportunities and certificates to students who wish to receive credit for internships.

The school has been awarded \$35,000 from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development to expand its internship program, which allows students to earn school credit as employees of local organizations and businesses.

Currently, 29 LHS students are participating in this year's internship program, the first of its kind in the county. The students work about 12 hours per week at various employers around the community, including Witham Health Services, The Arc of Greater Boone County, Hattie B. Stokes Elementary School and IGH Steel Fabrication.

The program — titled Perseverance, Organization, Work Ethic, Efficiency and Responsibility, or POWER

— was implemented this year as a measure to give students more experience in the workplace, said Jen Todderud, Lebanon Community School Corp. communications coordinator.

“We’re interested in continuing to make sure students are prepared for the future, whatever that may look like,” Todderud said. “We’re giving them an opportunity to get ahead of the game and find out whether or not they really love a career path. It gets them that real-world experience as fast as possible.”

This year, students had only to apply to the internship program to participate. But the state grant will allow school leaders to implement prerequisite courses before they complete an internship in their senior year.

Starting in eighth-grade, students will have to take four elective courses, including preparing for college and careers, digital applications and

responsibility, interpersonal relationships and personal finance. The courses are designed to prepare them for the workplace and their internships, Todderud said.

The \$35,000 state grant will be used to enforce those course requirements for all incoming eighth-graders who wish to participate, she said. No additional teachers will be needed for the classes. The grant also means that the POWER program has full recognition from the state.

The Indiana Department of Workforce Development gave grant money to 18 school districts and groups, including LCSC, to plan and implement similar programs. The goal of the grant is to create programs in which students can earn Work Ethic Certificates, according to a department news release.

The state has started taking bigger steps this year toward work-based education and technical learning than ever before,

said LCSC superintendent Bob Taylor.

“With the refocus of career education pathways the state is now looking at those with more emphasis than in the past,” Taylor said. “First, the awarding of the grant is a recognition of the work we’ve done. Second, we’ve been working hard to come up with an employability skills certificate so that in addition to a diploma, students could get a state-recognized certification that they have accomplished all that is necessary to demonstrate skills that the workforce wants.”

The Work Ethic Certificate will be awarded to all seniors who complete the coursework and internship program, as a way to show employers that the student will be a viable employee.

In this way the program benefits not just students, but businesses, Taylor said.

“There really is a lack of workforce in Indiana. This allows students to become aware of what opportunities are out there. And it benefits the businesses because now they’re getting a broader selection of quality young people who are ready for advanced training or certification like an apprenticeship.”

Boone EDC executive director Molly Whitehead said that part of the impact of the POWER program is that it works to match school curriculum and specific students with the types of skills that local employers are looking for.

And even when students don’t get an internship in a field they want to explore further, they still gain important life skills in the process, she said.

The EDC took on two LHS interns this year, one for a single semester and the other for two. Neither intern was interested in economic development, but they were able to learn about the basic skills of having a job, including showing up on time, communicating with co-workers and understanding what employers expect from their workers, she said.

“They are getting real-world skills and it’s eye-opening for them,” Whitehead said. “We’re getting those kids at a younger age, so that when they enter the workforce they are so much more prepared.”

One of the interns also got to work toward her dream of becoming a graphic designer: the EDC put her

to work on marketing and graphics, Whitehead said.

The grant money from the state is only the first stage of possible grants that LHS can use to expand its program, Todderud said. In the 2017-18 school year, that will mean implementing the required coursework for the POWER program. Further into the future, if more grant money is awarded, it could mean adding more classes or teachers, or hiring a school work counselor or career counselor, she said.

As the state continues to develop standards for work-based programs LCSC will work to improve and develop POWER to meet those standards, Todderud said.

“They are working on putting those requirements in place and we are making sure we’re at the forefront of those requirements,” she said.

A condition of the grant is that LCSC will be required to develop a “Train the Trainer” plan to teach neighboring school districts how to replicate the workforce programs in their communities, according to a news release.

