

MESA COUNTY VALLEY 51

BACKGROUND

The points noted by the Perkins Field Council members who reviewed Local Plans for Best Uses of Funds that were key to the selection of the Mesa County Valley 51 Local Plan included:

- Good involvement with community and partnerships;
- Good linkages with employers and advisory committees;
- Strong attention to special needs populations;
- New, innovative bike building/reconditioning element in ACE;
- Very diverse request for funding;
- Integration of math rigor into CTE; and
- Numerous innovative action steps and purchases.

In 2015 Mesa County Valley School District 51 added two new administrative positions to support Career and Technical Education: A CTE director and a CTE support specialist. These two positions are under the direction of the Executive Director of High School Programs and are charged with overseeing all CTE program approvals, making recommendations for improvements, and developing a vision for CTE program expansion and growth. The Perkins Field Council team believes these two individuals bring much experience and vision to the district's CTE programs, greatly enhancing the capacity to be strategic with use of funds and program planning.

Currently the district and Western Colorado Community College have 38 secondary Career and Technical Education programs.

Economic recovery in Mesa County has been slow and the unemployment rate has remained higher than state averages. The labor force and annual wages have decreased. Retail sales have dropped along with sales tax collections. Lodging tax collections have declined as well. But a number of trends point to improving conditions. Mesa County remains a regional hub for shopping, education, and health care. Per the 2014 Colorado Business Economic Outlook, overall, Mesa County expects employment growth over the next five years in construction, aviation, aerospace, health care, and food and beverage manufacturing industries. These gains are expected to decrease the unemployment rate, attract new businesses and investments, and help expand existing local businesses. Examples of recent growth include:

- The health care sector in Mesa County continues to expand, including a \$40 million project at St. Mary's Hospital and completion of the new Community Hospital complex.
- West Star Aviation plans to expand its operations at the Grand Junction Regional Airport and add 150 new positions over the next five years.
- Construction activity is beginning to pick up with new housing, commercial, and road projects breaking ground across the valley (such as new City Market, R5-TOC, Community Hospital, expansion of CMU).

- Food and beverage manufacturing is expanding in the valley, including a new brewery and hops processing plant.
- Tourism remains a “driving force” in the Mesa County economy with the attraction of outdoor recreational amenities and wineries. Many recent events have drawn record attendance.
- Grand Junction has recently been recognized as a “Top Spot to Retire” (Kiplingers, AARP, Sperlings, etc.) and will need to respond to the service/entertainment/medical demands of this demographic.

Mesa County Valley District 51 is committed to providing programs that will prepare students for postsecondary education and with workforce readiness skills that will be in demand in high-tech, highly diversified, and growing industries in western Colorado.

How Funds are Generated

Career and technical education teachers submit budgets based on:

- feedback from the CTE program advisory committees;
- Perkins performance metrics; and
- Assessment of skills that students would gain from program improvements or from professional development of teachers.

Budgets are reviewed and needs are prioritized by a Perkins Advisory Team consisting of administrators, faculty, and staff.

Challenging Factors

During the economic recession, the district had to cut 15 secondary and middle school CTE positions. All middle school Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) programs were eliminated and several high school FACS, Business, and Technical Sciences programs were downsized. Restoration of positions and recruitment and retention of new, qualified faculty is a current challenge. Perkins provides professional development opportunities to support new faculty and encourages retention of existing faculty. (The Perkins Field Council visiting team noted a large portion of the 2015-2016 Perkins funds designated for professional development and also noted that teachers easily articulated the benefits of their professional growth to their students.)

Some of the district’s facilities lack the capacity for supporting new technology-oriented instruction. Perkins has been instrumental in providing electronic devices and software for the CTE programs that make them more appealing to students and increase their technical skill levels. The district has some very old buildings, but recent and on-going construction projects are greatly improving and expanding facilities for CTE programs.

Opportunities

According to Sherri Arosteguy, CTE Director for the District, “We believe our district is poised to capitalize on the growth industries in the valley: health science, tourism, outdoor recreation and sporting events, construction, aerospace, food and beverage, and personal services, and we are in the process of developing, implementing, and enhancing programs such as health science occupations, media productions, technology engineering, and

culinary. We are creating high-interest courses such as the bike maintenance work internship and revamping our Info Tech programs with courses such as cyber security, media productions, and advanced programming languages. We hope to bring on a cosmetology program in the next year and are looking at other personal service types of programs.”

Students Served

The district serves approximately 22,000 students. Almost 80% of the high school students (5000 of 6300) participate in CTE programs along with 2500 middle school students. There are three main CTE clusters in each of the high schools: Business/IT; FACS, and Tech Ed. The Agriculture Education program is one of the largest in the state. The District CTE schools offer construction, floriculture and landscaping, early childhood education, culinary arts, computer technology, health care, veterinary technician, sports vehicle tech, and Alternative Cooperative Education (ACE.) Western Colorado Community College, which shares the Perkins grant, offers secondary programs in marketing, transportation, machining technology, health sciences, welding, computer networking, digital arts, and STEM.

Students enrolled in CTE programs mirror the general student and community populations with approximately 45% who qualify for free and reduced lunches, 28% minorities, and 6% second language learners. About 12% of the students are on IEPs (students with disabilities.) All of the programs serve students with special needs and students at risk with the greatest concentration being served by the Designated Career and Technical Education School and the alternative high school. Over 400 students were enrolled in the Western Colorado Community College secondary CTE programs last year. Most gifted and talented students complete at least one CTE class. IT programs include AP courses and there are also CTE-based business courses embedded in the IB program. Information was not provided regarding how many gifted and talented students actually complete a CTE program. However, the district believes that the new High School of Business program will attract many honors students. Programs typically match the gender bias within occupational areas and thus this is a Perkins Performance Metric that the District continues to seek strategies for improvement.

Accomplishments through Perkins Funds

- Funding for CTE consultants to conduct mini-workshops; provide one-on-one coaching; and assist teachers with curricula development;
- Annual Perkins workshop to assist teachers with identifying how their requests will address Perkins Performance Metrics;
- Welder – Construction Technology;
- Mobile cooking cart demonstration mirror and induction heating surface – Culinary Arts;
- Teambuilding and fitness – Early Childhood Education;
- Modular diagnostic station-otoscope/ophthalmoscope – Health Sciences;
- CPR dog manikin – Small Animal Care – Veterinary Technician;
- Snap-On™ 504 Meter Training Course (20 meters/boards) – Sports Vehicle Technology

- Virtual business finance software, Point-of-sale System – Business Education
- Solidworks™ CAD software, 3D printer – Technology Education
- Laptops and tool sets – Agriculture Education
- Multimedia stations – Information Technology
- Infant simulators – Family and Consumer Sciences
- Bike maintenance bundle – ACE
- Plasma torch – Welding

In addition, instructors from most CTE programs will participate in Perkins-funded professional development. The instructors know why they are attending training and what they will bring back to their students.

KEY INNOVATION(s)

One of the more impressive programs noted by the Field Council visiting team was the bike maintenance activities in the ACE program. It was developed through the efforts of the instructor who has a passion for cycling and has gone from a tiny operation in an outside shed to a thriving program that teaches employability skills. This instructor cleaned out a forgotten storeroom in the basement of the old high school to make room for scores of bikes and parts.

Other innovations include:

- ***Hire Me First*** program: A collaboration of local businesses, the Workforce Center, the high school, and the Chamber of Commerce that allows high school students to receive workforce basic skills, explore careers, and gain elective credit. Successful completion of the course, based on “WorkKeys” assessments, provides the student with a *Hire Me First* certificate that can be shown to businesses when the student seeks summer employment.
- Professional Learning Communities/Professional Development Training – Business Education/Technology Education.
- CTE credentialing courses offered at no cost to teachers.
- Integrated Career and Technical Students Organizations (CTSOs) at the Designated Career and Technical Education Center.

Some key innovations that help students transition to the next educational level include:

- Technical Math instructor support for CTE teachers/students;
- High School of Business will enable students to earn college credit and ease their transition to college;
- Health Science program enables students to explore multiple health related occupational areas; and
- Addition of Industry Certifications and Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Assessments.

Secret to Success

The district feels that their successes are due to the development of the CTE office, which provides both:

- Support and advocacy for all CTE programs; and
- Ongoing communication and collaboration with the Executive Director of High Schools, the Director of Instruction, Western Colorado Community College, and the supporting finance, payroll, and transportation departments.

The Perkins Field Council team also notes that the district gives teachers freedom to innovate and to follow their passions for the benefit of the students. The district is open to giving new programs a chance. The CTE programs also make excellent use of Advisory Committees and community support.

High demand STEM skills are vertically aligned from a middle school Technology Education to high school Technology Education and to a new STEM program at Western Colorado Community College.

Support Systems

Support for recruitment and retention of underrepresented genders in CTE Programs for non-traditional careers is achieved through instructor role models in these fields. The district includes female instructors in agriculture, landscaping, technology education and in information technology. The Business Education programs have male instructors. Guest speakers are invited to classes who represent non-traditional roles in business and industry. Also, counselors are kept aware of the issues and provided with recruiting materials. There are counselors who are CTE specialists in every high school and even in some middle schools.

Obstacles to Implementation

The District's aging infrastructure has been getting much-needed improvement recently. New spaces were developed with program-specific needs in mind. Also, broadband speed was needed to support newer technology. That involves additional costs as well. CTE programs depend on general fund dollars, Colorado Technical Act (CTA) state funding, and Advisory Committee support. Perkins funds supplements these base funding options.

RESULTS

Summary of Results

For students:

- Acquisition of advanced technical skills
- Better student retention in programs
- Better engagement of students
- Improved postsecondary workforce readiness
- Improved ability to meet graduation requirement

CTE Programs were strengthened through:

- New technologies and equipment implemented within the curricula
- New teaching strategies and technical knowledge adopted by instructors
- Improved engagement and retention of students
- Increased interest in and support for CTE programs by district, parents, and the business community

Can This Success Be Replicated by Others?

The CTE Director for the District, Sherri Arosteguy, believes yes! “In a very short time we have improved our CTE programming with the addition of new technologies, equipment, and teaching practices. We are strengthening our relationships and collaborative efforts between and among our CTE community of teachers, counselors, and administrators. We are starting to see renewed energy among teachers, more confidence in promoting our CTE programs by counselors, and greater student interest in CTE. We believe we will now be able to garner additional support through our advisory committees and business partnerships.”

Words of Advice to Others

The CTE Director provided the Perkins Field Council visitors with this list of recommendations:

- Invest in CTE administrative positions that provide leadership, instructional, and accounting support.
- Educate the school board, administrators, counselors and teachers on the purpose and requirements of the CTE programs and Perkins funding.
- Provide mechanisms for transparent, open, and ongoing communication among administrative departments (Finance, IT, Transportation, etc.), school administrators, counselors, and CTE teachers.
- Provide Perkins training to teachers for writing Perkins requests aimed at meeting performance metrics.
- Provide instructional and administrative support to enable implementation of Perkins purchases promptly.
- Capitalize on the commonalities of programs across the district while providing flexibility for program diversity, teacher strengths, school culture and student interests.
- Once purchases are received and in place, follow up with teachers to ensure purchases are working; give acknowledgement for efforts; and plan for next steps.