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## Mineola board hashes out plans to expand career-tech

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By Amanda Duncan  
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The Mineola ISD held an informal workshop to gather information and plan the expansion of the career and technical education (CTE) program on Tuesday, Sept. 24. The meeting was productive, with all board members and new interim Superintendent Randy Hancock present. Also attending were Mayor Kevin White, City Manager Mercy Rushing, other city officials and Mineola Foundation representatives.

Plans for CTE expansion within MISD over the next two years and plans for a CTE regional hub are moving forward.

“Short term, we have the money for that. Long term, we will need a grant. We’ve got a plan and we’re taking baby steps,” said board President John Abbott.

Mark Parkerson, director of special programs, and Hancock will be meeting with an architect Oct. 3 to discuss ideas and costs for short term CTE expansion and long term CTE regional hub goals.

There are other considerations to the decisions about CTE than just a regional hub versus no regional hub.

CTE accountability through Texas Education Agency changed on the federal and state levels two years ago. Students should be able to graduate with points in college, career or military readiness. Some MISD students are able to graduate with a point through dual credit. Other students can only get points through CTE if they are in a program and obtain certification. If MISD doesn’t have the programs of study, they don’t get funding in CTE.

Mineola High School student population has outgrown its facilities. The current CTE has to be expanded to give area students what they need and deserve, including the tools they need to learn a career and get certified in a trade.

“The bottom line is, we do it or we don’t. If we don’t do it, we get the F from TEA and don’t get funding,” said Parkerson.

The immediate need by the end of this year, to be able to accommodate students next year, is two classrooms for HVAC and industrial maintenance and a science lab.

“Three years ago, we were filling 400 seats in CTE. Each one-hour class is considered a seat. Today, we’re filling over 900 seats just from our school district,” said Parkerson.

CTE enrollment doubled in three years, as did the funding it brings into the district. MISD was able to hire teachers and expand the program, but more expansion is needed. Students are coming in and there is no place to put them.

Mineola High School enrollment, at 491 students, is nearing the cutoff of 504 to become a Class 4A school.

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With the increase in CTE enrollment, MISD was able to write grants to bring in \$636,000 worth of equipment. The last grant was an agreement that MISD would work with other small rural schools to have a centralized location for the equipment.

Grand Saline, Alba/Golden, Yantis and Lindale signed the agreement that they would send their students to MISD to work in the CTE program. Mineola would supply the teachers and facilities, and the other schools would pay MISD.

These partners could do the first year on their home turf, but those first year students will be moving up and choosing industrial maintenance or HVAC next year. Classroom space is absolutely necessary for those two pathways. Part-time teachers, who have a degree and have worked in the industry, will be vetted through Tyler Junior College and hired by MISD in order for students to get dual-credit.

“We are completely out of space for new students,” stated Principal David Sauer.

According to high school counselor Melisia Foster, expansion is absolutely necessary to meet the needs of the current students. Dual-credit science classes can not even be offered at this time because the current labs do not meet the specifications of TJC.

Several options for short term expansion are being considered. Sauer suggested having all health science classes in the annex, and the board has talked about relocating the maintenance department and refitting the existing building to accommodate vocational classes.

Waymon Ragsdale also made the suggestion to get a portable lab trailer.

Ragsdale expressed concerns about MISD board members getting comfortable with short-term expansion and throwing away the opportunity for a regional hub.

“I don’t want to see us go into something temporary and get stuck long term there. The foundation is not behind that. We will back building something new, but not going into a barn. We need a commitment that we will go long term,” Ragsdale said.

City manager Mercy Rushing agreed that for the city to participate, the CTE program must be regional.

“For us as the city, it’s regional or nothing,” stated Rushing, “The hub will put eyes on Mineola and show us as being progressive. If we train these kids, they can stay and live in Mineola instead of moving off.”

The Mineola Economic Development Corporation has committed \$500,000 and will hire the consultant needed to apply for the Easy A grant that would put \$1.5 million dollars into the development of a regional CTE hub. The Easy A grant is an annual federal grant that is based on collaboration with other small communities and partnership with a junior college or major college.

Before applying, land must be dedicated and an architectural drawing must be done.

Grants are paid after construction. A bond issue may need to be passed to begin the building process.

Mayor White pointed out that a regional hub would be good for the city of Mineola and the entire area.

“Education is an industry also, and the hub would bring industry in,” said White. “We want people to get to Mineola.”

Warren Brown with the Mineola Foundation has met with TJC and knows they are excited about working with MISD.

“TJC has said that if we build it, they will fill it up by directing area students to the hub for dual credit,” said Brown.

Additionally, TJC is also interested in doing night and weekend classes for adults and Texas Workforce Commission is interested in adult training. It’s still unclear if homeschooled students in the area would be able to take advantage of the regional hub.

Hancock said, “If homeschoolers could participate in CTE, it would have to be after hours because we can’t get any funding for those kids. Something will happen in the future with homeschoolers though.”

Board president Abbott believes that after meeting with the architect on Oct. 3, the board will have good information to discuss moving forward with short-term and long-term CTE plans at the October board meeting.

Hancock ended the meeting by praising Parkerson for the work he has done on the CTE program and encouraged everyone present to think about the students.

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“These opportunities are state wide. If we don't do it, someone else will do it,” he said.

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