

New Ulm Public Schools – Home of the Eagles

Career/Technical Education (CTE) White Paper

For decades, New Ulm Schools had strong vocational programs for students in many of the traditional vocational careers (Automotive, Construction, Business, Drafting, Home Economics). Over time, the shift in the nation and state was to prioritize college prep courses and core curriculum over vocational training. Federal funding for vocational programs were cut, as were state resources for area vocational centers.

From the late 1990s and up until around 2012, schools throughout Minnesota were forced to make budget reductions as a result of fewer students and a lack of sustainable funding from the state legislature. In order to meet state requirements, schools made cuts to programs that weren't tested or required. The combination of the shift to college prep/core curriculum and budget woes were key factors in vocational programs disappearing in most schools. Schools were forced to ask local taxpayers for resources to maintain programs and begin building back programs cut due to funding shortfalls.

Over the past four years, New Ulm Schools has been focused on bolstering the vocational program. Vocational was changed to Career and Technical Education (CTE) in the past decade as a way to attract students to the many careers available. In the past, many adults and parents assumed vocational meant dirty careers and no place for their student. Everyone wanted their children to do better than themselves and so a four-year college was the place to go. We are now seeing the effect of huge college debt, a lack of employment in many career fields chosen and a mismatch of employment needs and skilled labor available.

Five years ago, our high school provided information to parents, staff and students about the need to change the belief of everyone must go to a four-year college and instead look at all post-secondary options available. The idea was to provide career information to staff and parents earlier about all post-secondary options, not just four-year college programs. We have been providing a focused career awareness program in both our middle and high school for the many years. We did provide career programs in the past, but we needed to re-tool what we were doing and bring it to what is occurring today.

Over the past two years, our CTE instructors at New Ulm High School and New Ulm Middle School have developed innovative and workforce focused curriculum providing students exploratory, basic development and advanced learning in many of the CTE (trades) areas. We have advisory committees made up of local businesses and industry. These community groups are important for our staff and students as they provide us information regarding current industry

and business trends, provide guest speakers in the classroom, offer work-based learning opportunities and establish connections for future employment possibilities.

We partner with the New Ulm Chamber and the Business and Education Network (BEN) and with our regional Carl Perkins Consortium to continue to enhance and expand our reach and experiences for students. We also partner with the City of New Ulm EDA and Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to offer programs for students and adults.

Our CTE programs cover topics and curriculum in Agriculture, Industrial Technology, Computer Applications, Business, Family and Consumer Science, and Medical Careers. We continue to refine and adjust our offerings to meet what our students are asking and what is currently out in our communities for jobs and careers. The School Board has prioritized CTE programs for resourcing and support as they see the need for our students and our businesses.

There has been a strong interest with our community to provide educational opportunities for our students and other adults within our community. As a result of the New Ulm Visioning 2020, a few committees were started with the focus on job creation, education and recruitment. This has matured into the BEN initiative with the priority to work with business and industry to maintain the current workforce.

We have a timeline for the High School CTE programs to meet. This timeline includes new courses, re-tooled courses, new partnerships and designing the next steps of a regional CTE center for youth and adults. This would be a partnership with many businesses and industry and educational institutions, working together to provide resources, experts and opportunities to train and/or retrain workers to fill our jobs and also to position ourselves to attract new business to New Ulm, an economic imperative.

We need to look at our internal community resources to design educational/training options for our businesses/industry so that we can maintain what we have and be ready to grow and meet the needs of employers well into the future.

Steps Completed in the past four years:

- Collaboration between school and business/industry on certification plan
- Identify economic talking points for community
- Identify community and school champions
- Prepare resource plan and budget options
- Community engagement information/meeting
- Student and Teacher Internships – Summer 2018
- Training our teachers with the MC3 Building Trades Curriculum – June 2018

- Offering Summer CTE courses/academies – Summer 2018
- Updating/changing programming at both the middle school and high school
- New equipment/program design for middle school FAB lab – Fall 2018
- Hired additional counselor at the HS to focus on career awareness/development – Fall 2018
- Work with South Central Carl Perkins (Federal Vocational Act) Consortium on internships for students and staff, program design, connections with post-secondary – Summer 2018
- Working with South Central Technical College on Welding certification programs – Fall 2018
- Provided \$250,000 towards CTE Equipment upgrades to MS and HS programs.
- Started Eagle Enterprise, a student run manufacturing business – Fall 2019

Focus for the next 24 months

- Design/Develop regional CTE/Vocational Center of Excellence
- Add additional certifications for students in: CNA, Quickbooks, Solidworks, CNC Milling/Lathes/Plasma Cutter, Construction, HVAC systems, Mechatronics.
- Develop curriculum for CTE Center courses and certifications
- Find additional resources to operate and maintain the CTE Center
- Continue to build upon the momentum of the work completed in the community to become the place businesses want to locate, families want to live and where the economy is sustainable.

Summary: In 1980 – we were told we were a nation at risk because our schools were failing. That was never true, but it made for great talking points. Unfortunately, due to federal and state legislation – adding requirements, inferring that all students should go to college, and stating that automation will replace the skilled worker, we now have a skilled labor shortage and we are truly a nation at risk – ECONOMIC RISK. The decisions from the past are reasons why we lack a skilled labor force that will continue to fuel the economy. Students have loads of college debt, their degrees aren't lined up with the requirements of the labor force and we lack the skilled labor to fill our vacancies. It's not too late, but we need real solutions, not kicking the can down the road. Schools can only do so much.