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Education diverse in local high schools

Vocational education programs in Lincoln high schools seem to be successful despite reports from the General Accounting Office (GAO) that most occupationally oriented programs in high schools are failures.

Buford Jones, Chairman of the occupational education program in the Lincoln Public Schools and consultant for business education, said the majority of students enrolled in vocational education courses complete the courses and find jobs in related fields.

Courses are offered in health, business, industrial and distributive education, Jones said, which often provide students with an opportunity to work outside the school through cooperative education programs.

These programs allow the student to take a class in the high school during the day and work a minimum of ten hours a week in a related field.

Dual benefit counseling

Students in vocational education programs receive counseling from individual teachers as well as a regularly assigned counselor, Jones said.

These "teacher coordinators who counsel the students in their work, provide dual benefits, Jones said.

"The student benefits from classroom instruction which can relate to his job, and it keeps the teacher updated so she can see the changes taking place in business," Jones said.

The school coordinates the program but the student finds his own job, Jones said.

"The school can point him in the right direction but the student has to sell himself," he said.

Enrollment increasing

Enrollment in vocational education programs has increased in recent years, Jones said, and vocational counseling is becoming more important in the high schools.

Because many students in Lincoln are not continuing their education, he said, the public schools need to be able to help those students as well as plan higher

educational programs.

"As out of school learning experiences are available to students, counselors must be more aware of work opportunities in the communities," Jones said.

Lincoln High School has the highest enrollment in industrial education programs, Jones said.

Limited facilities

Bob Law, head of the industrial education division, said the program is limited by the room and equipment available and some students are turned away.

Courses are offered in drafting, electronics, crafts, auto mechanics, construction, cabinet making and other industrial fields.

Law said the vocational education programs in individual high schools are geared to meet the student needs. He said the vocation programs have not been as strong at Southeast High School because the majority of students there are college bound. But the programs are expanding, Law said.

The health education program at Lincoln High School will expand into the other high schools within the next few years, Jones said.

Three areas

Students enrolled in the health programs are allowed to explore three separate areas of concentration during their first year. These include patient care, records management and food service. During the second and third year the students can specialize in one area and find related jobs.

Jones said many students keep the same job after graduation and continue their work.

Another area providing on-the-job experience for students is the home economics division, headed by Ann Irvine.

In this program students are not paid for the work they do but act as volunteers in child care centers and nursery schools, Irvine said.

All classes are open to males and females, Irvine said. In some of her

classes, as many as one-third of her students are men.

Men take food classes

"They especially take the foods and family living courses," she said.

The home economics department also offers courses which not only aid in finding employment but give the student some personal benefits, Irvine said.

"Even though we are a vocational education program we have some courses oriented toward personal use," such as consumer economics and family living, Jones said.

Some students enrolled in vocational education programs in high school do go on to school, especially technical and business schools and two-year programs, Jones said.

"It is a misconception to believe that people in vocational education don't go on to higher education," he said.

Certificates given

A student graduating with many vocational courses on his record may receive a vocational education certificate which can be used for future employment.

The certificate lists the courses taken, qualifies the student's abilities and lists his strengths.

"To get a certificate in the industrial area the student must have a grade of 3 in the courses taken," Law said.

On the numerical grading system of 1-7 a 3 is considered average.

Job opportunities are available and some are increasing in demand as the job market fluctuates, Law said.

Areas now in demand are child care, service work, including appliance repair and nursery school work, Irvine and Law said.

Machinists needed

A student in a vocational education program still must fulfill all the regular requirements for graduation from his or her high school, Jones said.

He said plans to expand the follow-up program of students who have graduated in recent years are being conducted and the program itself is expanding.

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