

Steamboat Springs Education Fund Board and Grants Commission
Work Session – Innovation Grants
December 19, 2018
5:30PM
Human Services Board Room

Education Fund Board Directors present included Sam Jones, Jeanne Mackowski, Cristina Magill, Gilbertson and Adam Alspach. Grants Commissioners present included: Amber Delay, Stuart Handloff, Katie Armstrong and Jenny Maxwell. Also in attendance were Jay Hamric, Kip Rillos, Tim Miles and Brad Meeks (SSSD); Christy Sinner and Brian Hoza (HSD) and Michael Girodo (MVMCS). Sarah Katherman prepared the minutes.

Innovation Grant Work Session

Sam said that he has been struggling with the efficacy of the money going into Innovation Grants. He said that despite increased efforts to promote the program, very few applications have been submitted in recent years, and the projects proposed are rarely inspiring. He said that the SSEF is interested in discussing how to use the funds more effectively by tapping into programs already in the curriculum, such as the Pathways Career and Technical Education (CTE) program at SSSD directed towards career development and college readiness. Sam reviewed a handout summarizing the programs currently available, which generally end up in a capstone project or internship.

Jay Hamric said that he and Kip had visited the St. Vrain Innovation Center in Longmont. He described the state-of-the-art facility, emphasizing that it is designed and equipped to be flexible and able to respond to new trends and changes in industry's needs. He noted that the program offerings are developed by teachers within the district in conjunction with businesses and industries in the area. The programs address real world problems that real businesses are in need of solving. Jay said that most of the students at the Center are high school students, but there are also reach-out programs that involve elementary and middle school students. He stated that the focus is on design thinking that allows for exploration, experimentation and failure. The curriculum fits within the state's career cluster model.

Kip said that SSSD has many components within the Pathways programs and elsewhere that, if put together creatively, could be developed into a program similar to that at the St. Vrain Center. He said that three new courses (2 in computer science and 1 in engineering) had been approved that will fill in the gaps to create a better progression through a computer coding course and an engineering course, resulting in useable certifications.

Christy said that CTE is a very important component of HSD. She discussed the welding program and said that they are looking at ways to implement capstone projects. Brian discussed the challenge of identifying kids' interests without pigeon-holing them too early. He also discussed the challenges of developing programs outside of the core curriculum with a very small staff. Brian noted that each of the districts has particular strengths and specialties, and offered that increased opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing across the districts would be beneficial to all. He added that HSD is trying to incorporate many of the concepts being discussed into the design of the new school.

Michael stated that although MVMCS is currently limited to elementary students, the school does have a middle school task force. He commented on how well the project-based learning being discussed

dovetails with the Montessori middle school model. He also described the upper elementary STEAM enrichment program, which includes the creative arts.

Cristina asked how the Pathways program might be able to include a creative arts component. Courses in film and video were suggested. Jay provided the example of a tiny homes project that would involve not only the engineers, carpenters, etc., but could also involve students interested in design and the visual arts, as well as in marketing and graphics. He offered that many of the projects involve a very interdisciplinary and collaborative approach.

Sam noted that in addition to career preparedness, he is interested in ways to improve the college readiness of students from Routt County schools. He noted the relatively few counselors at SSSD.

In response to a question from Jeanne, Christy said that kids have the opportunity to learn about the CTE programs through exploratory modules as early as 8th grade.

Stuart noted the lack of liberal and creative arts in the proposed programs. He stated that while technologies change, the human components of critical thinking, creativity, communication, expression and adaptability are a constant, and will always be valuable skills. Stuart offered that a liberal arts curriculum offers that flexibility. He stressed the importance of teaching kids not just particular types of currently useful technology and content, but teaching them how to learn and how to adapt. He emphasized the creativity that is needed in real-world problem solving. Jay agreed and offered that the focus should be developing a spirit of collaboration across disciplines to solve real world problems.

Implementation

Sam suggested that the Innovation Grants as we know them should be discontinued. He proposed that the funds currently earmarked for innovation could be made available to the district administrators to be included as a distinct element within their grant applications. He suggested that certain teaching positions or programs funded by the SSEF could be tagged in the application as Pathways projects. There was a general discussion of how to incorporate this concept into to the existing application process.

There was general agreement that some of the most interesting and promising innovations are interdisciplinary and cross-curricular.

Sam stated that the money available for Innovation Grants has traditionally been a very small percentage of the overall funding, but could increase in future years through the Pathways concept. He encouraged applicants to be bold in their requests of Pathways programs. Brian expressed concern that in order to include these enrichment programs in their grant requests, HSD would have to sacrifice essential elements in the its curriculum that have been funded by the SSEF. Michael noted that in making these types of programs a priority, the SSEF could be influencing curriculum. Stuart offered that the goal is simply to improve the efficacy of the SSEF funding by directing it toward more valuable programs. Sam added that these grants would also be subject to the accountability reporting that the Innovation Grants were exempt from.

There was a discussion of how the shifted funds would be distributed. Sam said that in January the EFB would be discussing the allocation model that in any case is only a guideline to assist the GC in its grant recommendations. Cristina suggested that how the designated Pathways grant requests would fit into the districts' rankings of their applications should also be considered in January.

The EFB meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.