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Job training program saved by area schools

Tech Prep provides 10,800 area students with high-demand skills.

By Margo Rutledge Kissell, Staff Writer

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In a move triggered by federal funding cuts, Sinclair Community College and 27 area school districts plan to increase funding by \$500,000 for a program that has become a pipeline for thousands of high school students college to pursue fields with a strong technical base.

Many of those kinds of jobs are going unfilled. That's why several officials involved in the Miami Valley Tech Prep Consortium say the program was worth saving when \$450,000 in government funding disappeared last year.

The Tech Prep Consortium, based at Sinclair since the early 1990s, reaches more than 7,000 juniors and seniors at high schools in districts such as Centerville, Kettering, Northmont, Butler Tech, Springfield City and the Greene County Career Center, plus another 3,800 students attending area colleges or universities.

The program prepares students for high-skill, high-demand technical careers by putting them on pathways that emphasize math, science and technology. It connects high school teachers with college faculty, aligns high school curriculum with college expectations and provides the chance for high school students to earn college credit, said Terry Riley, the consortium's interim director.

Cedarville resident Chloe Jervis, 18, graduated from Greene County Career Center last year and is attending Sinclair on a \$3,000 Tech Prep scholarship. She is studying exercise science with a dream of becoming a personal trainer and eventually opening her own gym.

—Before I went to the career center, I had no colleges in mind," she said.

Sinclair's Board of Trustees recently authorized putting \$350,000 annually into the program in the next three years. That's five times more than the \$70,000 it was contributing annually.

Together, area school districts had been contributing about \$30,000 a year. The consortium's governing board of superintendents in December approved increasing school district member payments to approximately \$250,000 a year to close the gap in the consortium's \$600,000 operating budget.

While many participating districts were paying \$2,000 to \$4,000, that would jump to \$30,000 based on how many students are participating, Riley said. Some, like the Miami Valley Career Technology Center in Clayton, the largest participant with approximately 1,500 Tech Prep students, will pay even more.

Harold Niehaus, the CTC's director of instructional development, said its membership fee will rise from about \$15,000 this school year to \$45,000 in 2012-13. It's based on a new formula that charges districts \$3,000 and \$30 for each student. Miami Valley CTC is able to use federal grant dollars that it receives to cover that cost.

Miami Valley CTC Superintendent John Boggess called it "a great investment" in a program that officials said would have disintegrated without permanent funding replacement.

Greene County Career Center Superintendent Dan Schroer said his district will be paying about \$20,000, double what it paid last year.

Schroer sees tremendous value in the program, including that students may qualify for \$3,000 scholarships to Sinclair, an incentive for many who may not have seen college in their future.

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–Because Sinclair has done that and has positively affected so many students, we at the Greene County Career Center have no problem paying more,” he said.

Ohio Department of Education spokesman Patrick Gallaway said the state lost \$4.4 million in federal Perkins funding that benefited 23 Tech Prep consortia throughout the state.

State lawmakers did commit \$2.8 million for the 2012-13 budget, about 65 percent of what the funding would have been, he added.

As a result of the federal funding loss, Tech Prep consortia throughout the state were restructured into six regional centers that receive state funding.

Today, only two of the original 23 Tech Preps remain independently supported with local funding – the one in the Miami Valley and another in Stark County.

Gallaway noted that all states were affected when \$140 million in federal funding for Tech Prep was eliminated.

–Ohio is a little more fortunate than others in terms we were at least able to keep that piece in the state budget to fund the initiatives,” he said.

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