

Board explores viability of scholarship program

The Education Foundation is exploring the viability of creating a scholarship program that would help graduates of Sioux Falls Public Schools attend colleges and possibly other postsecondary schools in South Dakota.

The discussion, which remains in the early stages, was inspired by The Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship program in Kalamazoo, Mich. The Kalamazoo Promise has inspired the creation of dozens of place-based scholarship programs across the United States.

The Kalamazoo Promise allows graduates of public high school in Kalamazoo to get a scholarship to attend college in Michigan. The scholarships cover between 65 and 100 percent of tuition and fees, depending on how long a student attended school in Kalamazoo before graduating.

Kalamazoo's program is funded by anonymous donors. The organization began distributing tuition checks in 2006. It has granted approximately \$60 million in scholarships and helped nearly 1,000 students graduate from college, according to Von Washington Jr., executive director of community relations for the program. Enrollment in Kalamazoo schools has increased about 24 percent since the start of the program, he says.

Washington made a conference-call presentation to members of the Education Foundation Board in November.



Von Washington Jr.

Kalamazoo is a small city about halfway between Chicago and Detroit. It is roughly half the size of Sioux Falls. The staff of The Kalamazoo Promise has the luxury of not having to raise money. They try to administer the program as effectively as possible and keep it open to all students, Washington says.

More than 45 communities in the United States now offer place-based scholarships that provide varying levels of financial support. Cities with their own scholarship programs range from El Dorado, Ark., a community of fewer than 20,000 residents, to Denver, Colo., a bustling city of about 650,000 people.

Sioux Falls could create a program, too, Washington said during a telephone interview. "I think there are enough people and businesses, so if they make it a priority, it can be a success," he said. Raising education levels is the best way to change a community for the better, he said.

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Program could help employers as well as students

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Discussions about creating a local, place-based scholarship program initially began in Sioux Falls about five years ago among community development leaders. At the time, there was concern about the education level of Sioux Falls residents compared with peer cities in the region. Vernon Brown was on the City Council at the time. He has helped revive the discussion as a member of the Education Foundation Board.

"I think it's something Sioux Falls should consider. I think there are people who have the potential and capacity to get us started," Brown says.

"It's an aggressive goal, but I think you always need one of those out there to raise the discussion of where we could go as a community," he says.

Brown and other local officials acknowledge that providing full scholarships for graduates of Sioux Falls Public Schools probably would not be feasible. However, they say, partial scholarships could be within reach.

Amy Scott-Stoltz, who chairs the Education Foundation Board, notes that state government recently stepped forward with an ambitious program to provide scholarships to students who attend technical institutes in South Dakota.

"There is obviously a need in South Dakota for employees that have education beyond high school, whether it is technical or college or another option. This should be explored further. The Education Foundation has a duty to explore options to enhance opportunities for graduating students and help raise education levels in the community," Scott-Stoltz says.

"We are starting to look at the viability of a scholarship program for Sioux Falls Public School students as one way to help local employers find qualified workers as well as a way to keep our children from moving away. This program would help make our kids ready for employment as well as help attract qualified employees from other states who are looking to raise their children here. It could also be a catalyst in helping to bring new businesses to the area," she says.



Vernon Brown



Amy Scott-Stoltz

Slater Barr, president of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation, is familiar with The Kalamazoo Promise. He is Friends with Ron Kitchens, the CEO of Southwest Michigan First, a jobs-development organization in Kalamazoo. Talks about creating a scholarship program in Sioux Falls remain in the awareness-raising phase, Barr says.

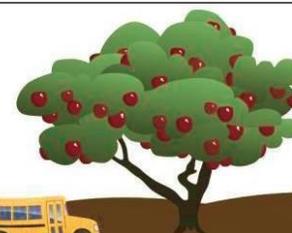
"Yes, I think it would be viable. The key components are having a community that is forward thinking and sees the importance of education," Barr says.

The Kalamazoo program was announced in November 2005. It has attracted national media attention and steadily inspired the creation of other place-based scholarship programs in the United States. "Behind the scholarship is an ambitious economic development agenda that seeks to revitalize the city and region through a substantial investment in public education," according to research from the UpJohn Institute, which researches and evaluates The Kalamazoo Promise.

Our Mission

The mission of the Sioux Falls Public Schools Education Foundation is to enhance educational opportunities and promote achievement among all students by supporting academic projects and activities not funded by tax dollars.

It is our belief that the good life we share here is a reflection of the quality education our students receive in our local public schools.



Powers grew up wanting to become a teacher

Anne Powers knew as a child that she wanted to become a teacher. She grew up in Mitchell, S.D. in a family of teachers. As a young girl, she liked to play school and help out at her father's elementary school.

Her father was a teacher and coach for more than 40 years, and her mother had taught before Anne was born. Anne's older brother, Mike, grew up to become a teacher, too.

Powers has taught in the Sioux Falls School District for 16 years – one year at Laura B. Anderson Elementary and the past 15 at John Harris Elementary. She has primarily taught first grade but this year is teaching second grade.



Anne Powers serves on the Education Foundation Board.

"I love watching children learn, and I enjoy helping them realize that they can do whatever they want when they work hard," says Powers, who has served for eight years on the Board of the Education Foundation. She initially was recruited to join the Board by Carla Middleden, a former school administrator and Board member. "I have enjoyed every moment," Powers says.

The Board grows every year in its ability and capacity to help schools, says Powers, referring to annual grants awarded by the Education Foundation that help teachers with innovative classroom projects. The Foundation also helps first-time teachers buy classroom supplies. "Everything the Education Foundation Board has done for teachers and students has been phenomenal," Powers says. She is grateful for the financial contributions from businesses and individuals that have allowed the Education Foundation to help improve education in local public schools.

Fellow Board members appreciate Powers' work on the panel. Recently retired member Doug Erickson served with Powers on the Board's grants and nominating committees. Erickson says he enjoyed serving with the hard-working Powers. "She's just a wonderful person, very dedicated in the classroom for parents and children and families. Just a very professional lady to work with," Erickson says. "She's made a big difference for parents and children in the school district."

Nancy Hagen, principal at John Harris, praises Powers' work as a teacher. Powers is a passionate, conscientious educator, Hagen says. "She is admired by her colleagues. She is respected by the parents of children she serves. Her work ethic is like no other. She is absolutely a remarkable educator," Hagen says. "I hope I work with her forever."

Powers, who is reluctant to talk about herself, says she is more of a contributor to Education Foundation projects than a leader of initiatives. "Whatever I can do to help, I'll do," she says.

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Nancy Duncan is the newest member of the Education Foundation Board. She is a retired teacher and administrator. In addition to Duncan and Powers, members of the Board are: Vernon Brown (Secretary), Catherine Dekkenga, Diane Dietsch (Vice Chair), Stephanie Gongopoulos, Teresa Jackson, DeeAnn Konrad, Mike Moore, Justin L. Reilly (Treasurer), Carly Reiter (Ex Officio), Amy Scott-Stoltz (Chair) and Jamie Simko. The volunteer Board is assisted by two part-time employees: Foundation Coordinator Angie Kuiper and Newsletter Editor Rob Swenson.



Project-based learning is focus at New Tech High

Zoey O'Brien wanted to attend New Technology High School. She understood that New Tech was different than other high schools in Sioux Falls. But as a freshman, she became frustrated and wanted to leave. Upperclassmen encouraged her to stay, and she's glad she did.

"It's been a ride, but it's definitely been a good one," O'Brien says. "I definitely feel I've grown at New Tech."

O'Brien began high school with leadership potential. But, by her own admission, she also had a tendency to be bossy and take on too much work. If something needed to be done right, she figured, she'd better do it herself, she says.

Her thinking changed when she began to realize that to complete projects at a high level, she had to work effectively with others, she says. The project-based, team-learning approach at New Tech taught her to appreciate the contributions of others.

"She's entering the workforce as a leader who can encourage people to be successful," says Jason Currie-Olson, a language arts teacher at New Tech.

As a senior, O'Brien spends three afternoons a week assisting at Harvey Dunn Elementary School. She plans to go to college and become a special education teacher.

She will be moving on as a graduate of a specialized but full-fledged high school with the Sioux Falls School District. New Tech is sometimes confused with Career & Technical Education Academy, which is a separate institution in Sioux Falls that students can attend part time to take career-oriented classes.

Teachers at New Tech take a different approach to teaching traditional high school subjects such as English, history and science. Students still must meet state standards, however. Typically, students are divided into groups of three or four, and they work together to solve problems and complete projects.

Projects often have a real-life, business-connected flavor. Students might learn a mathematics equation by reconstructing a car-accident scene, for example. Or they might write news reports about events described in a play by William Shakespeare.



Zoey O'Brien is a senior at New Technology High School.

Want to help improve local education? Make a donation

The Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization endorsed by the Sioux Falls School District. Its objective is to improve education by assisting teachers and students.

You can help. You can make a difference by donating to the Education Foundation to support academic projects and activities that are not supported by tax dollars. Gifts to the Foundation fund programs that reward and encourage innovative teaching. Grants also are awarded to help new, first-time teachers buy classroom supplies.

More information about making donations, as well as education news, is available on the Foundation's website, www.sfeducationfoundation.org. Businesses and individuals with questions about donation options also may call the Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation at 605-336-7055.

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400 students expected next year at New Tech High



Dolly Ellwein

Ellwein in third year as principal

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Students depend more on computers as learning tools than books, but they don't just learn about electronic technology. They learn to work in a collaborative environment, but also have individual responsibilities and are held accountable, says Dolly Ellwein, who has been the principal at New Tech for three years.

For students, being part of a small learning group is like being part of a real-life work team, Ellwein says. "They can't hide. They have to participate," she says.

"Our goal at New Tech is to help students realize what they can do in their life. We're really workforce development. We open the doors and let them explore," Ellwein says. "One thing New Tech does is open kids' creativity. When you do that, it's just amazing what they can come up with."

New Tech is one of about 150 schools of its type that have opened in the United States during the past 20 years. New Tech Network schools strive to make learning relevant while maintaining a culture that promotes trust, respect and responsibility.

The new-tech movement began in California's Silicon Valley in the mid-1990s and continues to spread. Initiators of the movement wanted schools to teach skills more closely related to changing workplaces.

New Tech's approach helps students in Sioux Falls find areas in which they excel, Currie-Olson says. "I've seen students succeed in this model that would have struggled elsewhere," he says.

New Tech is located on the campus of Southeast Technical Institute, in a building wing formerly occupied by the University Center. New Tech has a mascot – the Titans – and extracurricular activities are available, except for sports. Students who want to participate in sports or activities not offered at New Tech may do so at another public high school in Sioux Falls.

The school, which opened five years ago, graduated its first class of seniors last May. The school has 325 students this school year and is expected to have nearly 400 students next year. Students are recruited from the district's five middle schools, Ellwein says, and students apply for admission.

Diana Messick served as principal for New Tech's first two years. She worked as an administrator in the Sioux Falls School District for 19 years before retiring. She's now an adjunct college professor. She also volunteers as the community business liaison for New Tech.

Messick's job as liaison is to help increase New Tech's connections to the business community to expand educational opportunities for students. She considers New Tech a leadership academy for college-bound students.

"It warms my heart that the Sioux Falls School District has been forward-thinking enough and innovative and progressive enough to create a New Tech High School," she says.

Students are learning to learn and preparing for real-world experiences, she says. "That's what we have to have in today's workers. Learning is ongoing for all of us, all of our lives. We want to ignite that passion for learning."

