

Investigation: School complaint unfounded

Hillary Gavan

Sep 1, 2017

BELOIT - The School District of Beloit has concluded its investigation into its career advocate position, determining the legal concerns raised by school district staff to be unfounded.

Funded through a Hendricks Family Foundation grant, the career advocate position was designed to facilitate relationships between businesses and students seeking additional career experiences outside the classroom. The career advocate had worked out of Beloit Memorial High School.

The district investigated how the career advocate position integrated with existing business education programs after concerns were raised by school district staff members.

On March 23, three teachers sent a letter to the board regarding their concerns about the career advocate position as well as CareerTek, a separate Hendricks Family Foundation funded program with which the district partners.

However, Board of Education President Laurie Endres stressed the investigation only focused on the career advocate position.



Located at 625 Third St., Suite 300, in the Ironworks Complex, Hendricks CareerTek provides career development, education and mentoring for youth and opportunities in career fields such as coding, healthcare, construction and trades, manufacturing and entrepreneurship. The Hendricks Family Foundation provides funding for the program, however, the program is operated by the Stateline Boys & Girls Club.

In the letter, teachers wrote about their concerns regarding duplication of services and how the new career advocate position could hinder relationships with area employers. Staff said some students were placed in employer interviews without being vetted or having the necessary coursework required. They said the career advocate was taking class time away from students who received passes to get out of class, and partake in field trips not related to class curriculum.

Staff members also referenced their concern for the potential for a hostile workplace as former BMHS principal Tina Salzman works for CareerTek and former superintendent Steve McNeal works for a Hendricks company.

The letter also raised concerns about the potential for CareerTek to become a private school which would take vouchers once it has enough students.

In an interview Thursday, Endres said all documented staff concerns were deemed to be unfounded and the district remains committed to working with the Hendricks Family Foundation and all other business and community partners to improve academic performance.

Endres said the grant for the career advocate position was ended as of Aug. 31, 2017, making it a non-issue.

Executive Director of Hendricks Family Foundation and Director of Community Initiatives Lisa Furseth issued the following statement: "On behalf of the Foundation, we have been working very diligently with the school district administration over the last several months to ensure the services offered at CareerTek can be available to all Beloit Memorial High School and Beloit area students."

Furseth also said the Foundation is pleased with the programming CareerTek is developing.

"We had a robust series of programs this summer that were well attended and well run - great opportunities for young people to get exposure to a wide variety of skills. The feedback from kids and young people was positive, and we are really excited about continuing to do good work."