

News Release

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For immediate release

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Sonoma County awarded Middle Grades Career Technical Education Grant

The Sonoma County Office of Education has been named one of 13 recipients of a Middle Grades Career Technical Education (CTE) grant awarded by the Middle Grades Improvement Office of the California Department of Education. The \$145,000 grant will allow Sonoma County to expand and improve existing middle grades career awareness and exploration efforts, provide hands-on CTE experiences to Sonoma County middle grades students, and further institutionalize career development commitments in Sonoma County middle schools. These hands-on experiences will encourage students to think about their futures, allow them to explore a variety of career paths, and produce more successful transitions from middle school to high school and beyond.

The program structure and relationships that are in place as part of the existing Sonoma County Middle School Career Exploration Program and the SB 70 North Bay Regional CTE Collaborative will provide the foundation for this new grant-funded opportunity. This highly effective structure currently involves SCOE and seventeen local middle schools (representing twelve school districts). Currently, 4,000 middle grades students in Sonoma County are engaged in career exploration and planning. The additional funds of this grant will provide for the establishment and enhancement of career exploration courses, activities, and resources available to middle grades students and allow SCOE to expand its reach to an estimated 6,000 students during the 2011-12 school year and an additional 9,000 students over the next three years.

For the purposes of this grant, each school's partner high school(s) and Santa Rosa Junior College will also participate in providing hands-on CTE experiences and developing articulated programs of study from middle school through community college.

One significant advantage to providing this early exposure to CTE programs of study is that once students reach high school, they are better able to make informed pathway decisions in ninth and tenth grade. This allows them to progress further through a career pathway of interest and take advantage of the increasing number of courses and programs that are articulated with local community colleges.

Opportunities for middle grades students to participate in hands-on CTE courses and experiences will be addressed in two distinct ways:

- For those participating schools who currently have CTE courses in place, grant funds will be used to upgrade aging equipment, purchase software and supporting materials, provide professional development, update curricula, and provide release time for middle grades CTE teachers to collaborate with teachers at their partner high school(s) with regard to effective program articulation, course sequencing, and postsecondary pathway opportunities. Release time will also be provided to allow CTE teachers time to collaborate with teachers at their own site regarding the integration of CTE and core academic standards and instruction.
- Students in all participating schools (including new schools not currently participating in the Sonoma County Middle School Career Exploration Program) will have the opportunity to participate in CTE Step-Up Classes at their partner high school(s). Step-Up Classes are CTE courses designed specifically for middle grades students. To accommodate the widest range of students possible, these courses will be offered both as after-school classes and summer classes, and a “master schedule” will be developed to ensure that interested students are able to participate in multiple courses.

This two-pronged approach to providing CTE courses for middle grades students will allow both an in-depth opportunity to explore a career path of interest and a breadth of experiences for students in all participating schools.

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