

## Real world experience in high school

### Students team up with mentors to get job experience

BY: KATRINA ANDERSON

College is just around the corner for many seniors at Sandy Creek and isn't too far off for the juniors. To help prepare students for this monumental event, Superintendent Dr. Randall Gilson and the rest of the faculty spent the first semester of the school year setting up a mentoring program to help students prepare for their future careers. The teachers and staff have reached out to potential mentors in the fields that the students are interested in. The mentors will work with students to give them job experience in that field.

"With this program, I foresee students becoming interested in a field and getting the experience needed to become successful in their chosen careers," said secondary principal Mr. Jason Searle.

Every student in the high school has been paired up with a mentor in the profession or field they want to go into. Juniors and seniors will meet up with their mentors on Fridays for a couple hours to observe and work with their mentor. Freshmen and sophomores will have the opportunity to meet with professionals, but it will be more like job shadowing rather than the interactive experience that juniors and seniors will have.

"It's important for students at a high school age to have at least one mentor, if not more, to help them understand the process that goes along with the career they are interested in. It takes a lot of deliberate practice to be good at a job," said Superintendent Dr. Randall Gilson.

Depending on the career, students will either actively participate in the job or they will observe. On the Fridays students don't visit their mentors, they will spend time working on their projects. Each student's project will be tailored to fit their specific interests and allow them to learn about the career they are interested in. The students will

work with their mentors on these projects, and receive feedback and advice from their mentors.

"It's nice to know that I can receive help and get more information from someone who has experience knowledge concerning the project I will be working on," said senior Brianna Sorgen.

These mentors will allow the students to form relationships with people in the career field they have chosen. No matter what career it is, networking is essential and by pairing students up with professionals in their chosen fields, students now have more opportunities than before. The connections the students make through this program will let students start out with a good reference in their field of study.

"The mentoring program will give the students opportunities to create relationships with people who are already in the field that they are interested in," said art teacher and graphic design pathway supervisor, Mrs. Crystal Hassenstab.

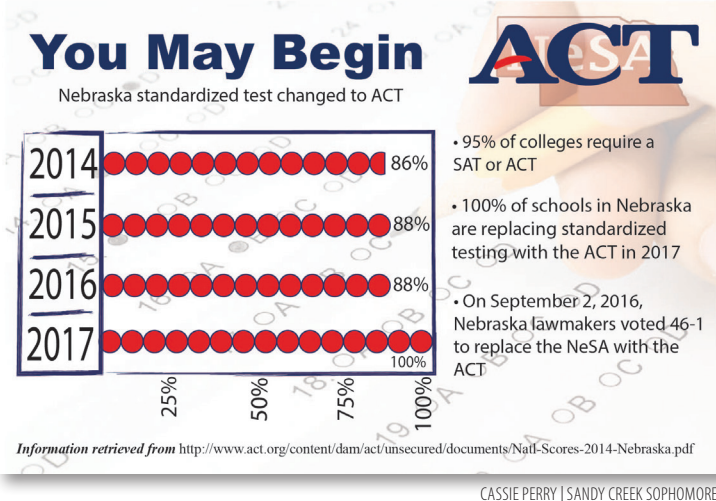
From May 1-5, students will give a thirty minute oral presentation based on their experiences during this program and what they have learned through their project and observations. The presentation will be followed by fifteen minutes where the audience can ask questions regarding the presentation and provide feedback to the student. The audience could be composed of the mentor, teachers, parents, alumni, third party researchers and a demonstration panel of volunteers. Each student's project will be tailored to fit their interests and allow them to learn about the career they are interested in.

"I look forward to seeing what I can learn from this program. I think the connection I will make with my mentor will really help me when it's time to start applying for jobs in this field," said senior Desma Hamilton.



## ACT replaces NeSA testing for juniors

### Standardized testing creates new waves



BY: KATRINA ANDERSON

Nebraska juniors are used to taking the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) test in the spring, but soon that will be a thing of the past. On September 2, Nebraska lawmakers voted 46-1 to replace the NeSA with the American College Testing (ACT). The ACT is a standardized test that allows colleges to measure high school achievement and college readiness among students. There are four mandatory portions on the ACT: reading, math, science and English language arts. Colleges require students to take either the ACT or the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). The ACT takes approximately three and a half hours including the writing portion, so students would lose half a day of school.

"I think it's better than taking the NeSA test and it's a good opportunity because you have to take the ACT for college anyhow," commented junior, Maci Maldonado.

The ACT is used to measure college readiness and high school achievement by testing students in core areas, which allows schools to gauge students level of education. It allows schools to track how well their students are doing in core areas along with seeing how ready for college their students are.

Director of assessment with the Nebraska Department of Education, Valerie Foy, said "The ACT would cost less and it better matches the academic content that the state currently tests: math, science, writing and English language arts."

Nebraska law requires the state to cover the expenses so this is a good option

for students in low income families.

Matthew Blomstedt, Commissioner of Education, said, "All juniors will now have access to a college admission test, as there will no longer be a registration fee."

On April 19, juniors will take the ACT at Sandy Creek for the first time. The test will start around 8:30, and the juniors are required to have a photo I.D. and must bring their own calculator. The test will take place in the elementary gym and last about half a day. The juniors will take tests in English, math, reading, science and writing. Before the test begins, the proctors: Mr. Jason Searle, Mr. Darrell Pernicek and Mrs. Carissa Eberhardt will confiscate all electronics to prevent any cheating and disqualifications from occurring.

"Juniors should be more motivated to take the ACT because it affects their futures. The ACT measures your ability level in the areas that you have taken, core classes, and it is also an indicator of how colleges will divvy out scholarships to the incoming freshmen class," said Searle.

Although SC students will take the ACT on April 19, students are still able to take the ACT as many times as they want on their own, as long as they sign up and pay for the test. The SC test date will not interfere with the actual ACT test date in April.

"I think that is a great opportunity that the school is going to have us take the ACT, because we won't have to pay for it, and then we will only have one day of testing rather than multiple days," said junior, Kyra Sorensen.

## Schedule change for success

### South Central Unified School District #5 creates career based schedule for students

BY: MACI MALDONADO

In an effort to expand its current pathway programs, South Central Unified School District #5 is transitioning to a modified block schedule in both Sandy Creek and Lawrence/Nelson High Schools.

While the new schedule is partially based on the current middle school model, which has been hugely successful; the high school is taking the idea of a block schedule further, trying to create a new form of education that other schools in the state will model after. The schedule is tailored to allow underclassmen to take core classes on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and electives and pathway classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The upperclassmen will have core classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays with electives and pathway classes on Mondays and Wednesdays, leaving Fridays open for students to work with their business partners or job shadow. Both the underclassmen and upperclassmen will have classes split into 90 minute blocks, so that they may have more time for project based assignments.

Lawrence/Nelson High School will continue to travel to Sandy Creek on Monday and Wednesday for the whole day, if they choose, to take pathway and elective courses. This will give the Lawrence/Nelson students the opportunity to take more college courses if they would like or travel back to Nelson for the remainder of the day. Shuttles will run between both schools throughout the day to accommodate student needs.

One of the driving reasons for the dramatic change is the new mentoring program where students will have opportunities to test out occupations they are interested in studying. Currently, the district offers college classes in various career fields through the pathway system, but beginning in January, all student classes will be tailored to enhance pathways. Additionally, all upperclassmen will have free time on Friday's to travel to join a professional in the career field they are interested in. Students will work closely with their assigned mentor to gain real-world workplace experience in their chosen field of study. The district hopes these unprecedented opportunities will provide students with a better understanding of

what their future jobs could consist of.

"Connections while mentoring will curve students' interest and lead them into their careers, or it may make them realize that a certain career might not be for them. We want students to have as much information as they can. Connecting to local experts will help retain more information and give them lots of connections for the future," said Sandy Creek secondary principal Mr. Jason Searle.

The district hopes that gaining real-world experience will make student learning more meaningful and help students to maintain engagement in all of their courses.

"I think working with the business partners will help me take information from the book in our pathway classes to real life experiences," said Lawrence/Nelson senior Gavyn Buschkoetter

While the plan is promising, all of the obstacles that need to be overcome to make this new schedule successful have many students, staff and community members wondering why the district is working so hard to fix something that isn't broken. One of the main reasons for the change is the district's belief that students will have more flexibility with their schedules, so they may take more of the college classes that are available. While many people are excited for the change, viewing it as progressive, others are wondering if the path that the district is taking with the schedules will truly benefit students, citing the seemingly rushed mid year implementation that is resulting in the cancellation of the last 2 days of the semester to train teachers, as a major concern.

"A teacher inservice will be held where we will show teachers how to use basecamp, contact mentors and how to use their 90 minute class periods to benefit students," said Mrs. Connie Porter

With the schedules being directed towards pathway classes and career ready skills, some are also concerned that students will miss out on college-ready curriculum that is needed to succeed in college. However, district administration are confident that students will be well prepared for their futures, whether it be in the career field or in college. Freshmen and Sophomores will combine for English and Social Studies classes as content in core classes will change to meet the criteria of the pathways, placing the focus on career based skills students will need to succeed in their future jobs.

"I do think that it will work with students who want to go on to get their bachelors or associates degree, and the mentors will help tremendously with choosing the path you want to take because there are so many different careers," said Sandy Creek secondary principal Mr. Jason Searle.

The district forging a new path with this scheduling and pathway system in the hopes that it will engage all students and help better prepare them for life after high school. Time will tell if a progressive new system like this one will catch on, making South Central Unified School District #5 a progressive leader and model for all Nebraska schools.

"I think that we are working to develop a new style of education that will better meet the needs of the students in our area. Once we work all the kinks out, we could serve as a model for other schools," said English teacher Mrs. Collinson.

