

# STEP lab helps students in ‘nontraditional’ way

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cent drop out, the rest making up classes,” he said.

There have been five students who graduated out of the STEP Lab this year, McLean said, which is about average. Swager said over the program’s six-year life, more than 200 people have been helped.

One person who the class has helped is Randy Dodd, a junior at Fort Hays State University who moved to Goodland in 1998 with his sister. Dodd, 19 at the time, said he was two credits short of a high school diploma, but needed to work (he was a fast-food cook) to help support his sister and her kids.

“The STEP Lab really helped out,” Dodd said. “There was no way I could go to school, having to work all the time, and I did not want to get a G.E.D.”

The class is flexible, Dodd said. He could work in the morning, and be in class in the afternoon, or the other way around if his schedule changed.

“I don’t know what I would have done without the STEP Lab,” Dodd said. “Maybe flipping burgers until the



Justin VanVleet showed classmates a history lesson on his computer Wednesday at the Goodland High School STEP Lab.

Photo by Doug Stephens/The Goodland Daily News

end of time.”

Not everyone who takes the class is able to get a diploma. Sometimes kids come in who think the class is going to be easy, McLean said, then balk when

they realize they will have to work.

“This isn’t a save-all,” McLean said. “If their attitude isn’t good, they’ll leave and drop out for good. It’s not a success for everybody, but it creates

another opportunity.”

“It helps keep kids on track,” Swager said. “The temptation to drop out is not there.”

The program really helps kids who have gone through unforeseen circumstances, McLean said, like high school girls who have become pregnant. They are allowed to bring their kids to the class, which they would never be able to do at the regular school.

McLean said it is hard to know whether a person learns as much in the STEP Lab as in a regular classroom.

“Some do,” he said. “They wouldn’t pay attention in a traditional school. Some learn more by lecturing. Those would do better in regular classes.”

The class has to be taught by a certified teacher, Swager said, and there also is an at-risk facilitator. The first two people to run the class were Dave Pierce and Laurie Abbey, he said.

“They really made this program successful,” he said. “Dave was really inspirational, and Laurie was like a second mom to some of the kids.”

Pierce died about three years ago, and Abbey now works at Goodland Regional Medical Center, but the pro-

gram lives on.

“We were really worried about the program when Laurie left,” Swager said, “but Mr. McLean has kept the program strong.”

Swager said Jami Bergman, the current at-risk facilitator, is getting married and moving to Germany, and the school is looking for a replacement.

“Jami has done a great job, and I hope we find someone who works as well with the kids as she does.”

Aside from helping people get their diplomas, Swager said, it benefits the school, too. Every student in the program is in the school’s head count, he said, which helps the school get state money.

“We invested \$120,000 in the pro-

gram, building and equipment, and thought if we made it up in four years we would be doing good,” Swager said. “We made it back in two years.”

“It benefits the kids, but also the district as a whole.”

It’s not just kids who take the program. There is no age limit, McLean said, as long as a person is at least 16.

“We’ve had some students in their 30s and 40s,” he said. “One lady was sent in by her boss to take our typing module. She took it 203 times until she really had it down.”

Swager says he would like to reach out to every person in town who doesn’t have a high school diploma.

“If someone is 88 and wants to join the class, we can do that,” Swager said.

## Colleges raising tuition

TOPEKA (AP)—Officials at the six state universities outlined proposals Wednesday to increase tuition by as much as 25.2 percent for Kansas residents heading to the campuses this fall.

As presented, tuition would increase by a low of \$55.50, or 6.3 percent, at

Fort Hays State to a high of \$294, or 25.2 percent at the University of Kansas.

For out-of-state students, the increases would range from \$99.75, or 2.2 percent, at Wichita State to \$379, or 11.5 percent, at Pittsburg State.

# Development group decides against dues

COMMITTEE, from Page 1

brought out ideas on both sides.

West said he felt a paid membership would give the person or business a feeling of ownership and that they would be eligible to vote on the members of the board.

Several others said they did not want to limit the organization by having memberships, but that the people could give money to the organization and participate in all the meetings.

Other ways of raising money were discussed, and the group decided not to ask for a special property tax in the beginning. The group decided to allow voluntary contributions rather than set dues, agreeing that anyone who lived or ran a business in Sherman County was welcome at the meetings, which

would be open to the public.

The steering committee voted to set up a board of seven members and to encourage them to meet for an hour twice a month.

A majority of the committee voted to have the board members serve staggered two-year terms with the three receiving the lowest votes serving one year initially. The majority set a two-term limit so that a person could serve four years. People said this would keep the membership fresh, but that anyone could be re-elected again after sitting out at least a year.

The committee suggested that a report be made to the city and county commissioners once a month.

Curtis Hurd, a steering committee member and city commissioner, said he thought the group would have the

support of the city commission, but he could not speak for the other members.

The committee decided to attend the city meeting Monday to ask for support. Members were encouraged to be at the meeting at 5 p.m.

The group agreed that its first priority would be to develop an incentive package that could be offered to prospective businesses. This would be worked out with the city and county so the economic development director could make a deal based on the program.

The steering committee discussed a budget for the project, and while estimates were from \$85,000 to \$150,000 a year, Goodwin said he would try to gather some figures. He said a person he knows who is doing business development for a city currently has a sal-

ary of \$54,000, but did not know what other things might be included.

Members suggested appointing committees on bylaws, finance, public relations, advertising, mentoring,

venture capital and research.

The next meeting of the steering committee will be 7 p.m. Thursday, May 23, but the location has not been determined.

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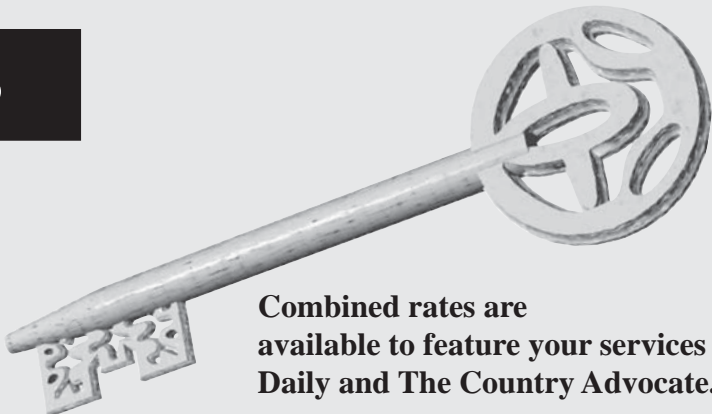
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