

By Carolyn Lee

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Five students are considering the “Career Academy” program at Chase County Schools. The program, initiated this past fall, allows a student to take an additional, or fifth, year of high school, to obtain an Associates of Arts degree.

The program is offered through Mid-Plains Community College and is a pilot program.

A student begins to take college classes during the junior year of high school for dual credit (a high school class that also counts for college credit), up to 18 credit hours. Classes may also be taken on line or through distance learning.

During the fifth year, according to Mid Plains Community College Imperial Campus Coordinator Brenda Ledall, the student will mainly be taking college credit classes at the extended campus in Imperial or through an internship.

A student will have completed 60 credit hours at the conclusion of the five-year program, and may then transfer those credits to a four-year school.

Family Consumer Science Teacher Cathy Hanna is now scheduled to work with students interested in the program. She checks with the students to see how they’re doing in their classes.

“Kids can come to me and figure out their course work, how to fill out applications for classes,” scheduling issues and locating textbooks, she said.

“I’m to assist them in being successful in their classes,” she added.

Many students are taking college credit classes, but aren’t necessarily on the five-year program, Hanna noted. “We have kids who are very interested, and are taking a class or two to see how it works, if it fits for them,” she said.

Hanna and high school guidance counselor Marcie Yaw said there are five students who are considering the program, two very seriously.

Hanna pointed out that the student’s major is a consideration. Some students who participate in Career Academy may go on to college or to a school specializing in a certain type of career.

Ledall said some students may take the Career Academy option with the intention of transferring to a higher education school. The advantage, she said, is that “the student can get a selection of classes through Mid Plains” that transfer to a college or community college.

“We’re at the beginning stages, and there are a lot of pieces of the puzzle to work out,” she stated. Ledall said the fact that five students are considering the fifth year option is encouraging.

“I’m excited about it. It’s a win-win situation for everybody.”

Ledall, Hanna and Yaw are working together to make sure the students are on the “right track with the classes they have to take,” Ledall said.

Yaw said the advantages of Career Academy are the cost, which is less than attending a college or technical school after high school; that students who aren’t mature enough to leave home may take advantage of college classes while at home; the array of classes offered by Mid Plains, and “The quality of education they’re going to get is excellent.”

“So many kids are taking one or two college classes now, and that’s the advantage to me,” she added.

Yaw does have concerns that a student who takes the fifth year option but then doesn’t graduate won’t get a diploma.

Ledall said CCS is the first school Mid-Plains has chosen for the pilot program. School Supt. Matt Fisher said it will be two to four years before Mid-Plains may take Career Academy to other schools.