



## Board learns about program to prepare workforce

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The USD 234 Board of Education on Monday learned of an opportunity to boost economic development and bridge gaps in the workforce.

USD 234 Superintendent Ted Hessong presented information to the board on the ACT WorkReady Communities program, which he said is an "economic development program" geared toward "closing workforce skills gaps."

One goal of the program is to create a more qualified workforce and help employers fill jobs based

on certain skill sets.

"It links education to workforce development," Hessong said.

According to [workreadycommunities.org](http://workreadycommunities.org), ACT WorkReady Communities "empowers states, regions and counties with data, processes and tools that drive economic growth. Participants are leveraging the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate to measure and close the skills gap - and building common frameworks that link, align and match their workforce development efforts."

The ACT WorkKeys is a skills assessment test for those who are interested in or are currently working for employers that place an emphasis on the National Career

Readiness Certificate, which is the credential achieved by those who successfully complete the exam.

Hessong said Bourbon County is involved in the program, but is "not officially approved" as there is training and planning to take place, but the goal is to build the program in the county the next two years.

By participating in the initiative, counties can identify skill gaps and quantify the skill level of their workforce. This helps educators build career pathways aligned to the needs of business and industry, and helps a community "stand out and be recognized for its workforce development efforts," according to the program's website.

Counties engage in the program

through successful completion of the ACT WorkReady Communities Boot Camp. For those interested in engaging in the initiative there is an application process managed via the program's website. Leadership teams should, at minimum, have representatives from: local government, economic development, workforce development, community/technical college, K-12 system, and business/industry, according to the website.

Hessong said educators will work with students in eighth through 12th grades on their individual plans of study.

**SEE WORKREADY ON PAGE 7A**

### Workready

*Continued from Page 1*

"The chamber and county will educate the community on the program," he said. "We're not officially approved. We will have some goals, put a plan together, educate businesses and use the data as a screening tool. We have two years to do it. It should be a strong component of our workforce."

Board member Jordan Witt asked if students have the option to take the ACT as part of the program. Hessong said the program is "related to the ACT WorkKeys" assessments and is "career related." The ACT WorkKeys assessments measure foundational skills required for success in the workplace, and help measure workplace skills that can affect job performance.

ing forward to see what happens in the next two years with this."

In Bourbon County, there are a total of 171 National Career Readiness Certificates that have been earned at different levels in various workforce categories.

In the "emerging" category, there are 121 at the high school level and 10 at the college level; in the "current" category, there are seven in the private sector, and in the "transitioning" category, there are 10 in the adult education category, and 22 in the unemployed category, according to the program's website.

The county will also set goals for the number of certifications in each category, as well as the number of employers that support the program.

According to the program's website, there are a total of 4,720,731 ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificates,

skills in workplace documents, applied math and graphic literacy - skills required for 77 percent of jobs based on ACT JobPro database, the website said.

Hessong said there are currently four employers in Bourbon County that recognize or recommend the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate. According to the program's website, those employers are The Courtland Hotel & Spa, Beachner Grain, Inc., Dairy Queen Grill & Chill, and the Southeast Kansas Community Action Program, Inc.

"Those four businesses are part of the training," Hessong said. "We're look-

466 participating counties, 25,218 employers supporting the program, and 22,096 jobs profiled nationwide.

The program provides community-based frameworks that link workforce development to education, aligns with the economic development needs of communities, regions and states, and matches individuals to jobs based on skill levels.

The ACT WorkKeys NCRC is a portable, industry-recognized credential that clearly identifies an individual's WorkKeys