

Community initiative to improve schools

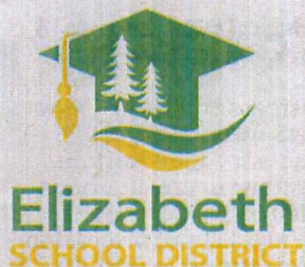
“Bold change.” That’s what Elizabeth School District parent Dave Eddy is working hard to bring about at Elizabeth Schools. And he’s not alone. A large team of local and regional partners are actively reaching out to collaboratively design, develop and implement a more dynamic, agile approach to student learning.

As Colorado’s Site Director for Boeing, Eddy is a prominent Colorado business leader and an active Elizabeth community member. With four children having graduated from Elizabeth, and one currently enrolled at the high school, he knows both the strengths and shortcomings of Elizabeth Schools. “While we do a great job for the 55% of students who pursue some kind of education after high school, we need to do a better job for the 45% of graduates who go straight to the workforce. And we can do more to partner with local and regional businesses to help meet their workforce needs.”

Eddy is heading up an innovative project for the school system, with support locally from groups like the Elizabeth Area Chamber of Commerce and the Elbert County Workforce Center. The project, called the Homegrown Talent Initiative (HTI), is a joint venture between Colorado Succeeds and the Colorado Education Initiative. The HTI is designed to support communities in

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local and regional needs.

Out of 16 applicants, Elizabeth is one of eight rural Colorado school districts selected to participate in the year-long design phase of the project. If the design phase is successful, the district could be selected to receive three years of implementation support to create new work-based learning opportunities and career-oriented educational pathways for Elizabeth students. According to Colorado Succeeds, all work-based learning opportunities help better prepare students for postsecondary opportunities, as well as prepare them for employment.

A key goal for the project is to change the framework of the district curriculum using academy/pathway models to expand the student experience with more career-oriented options, whether they are college-bound, trade-focused, or interested in giving back to their local community. An important outcome would be a significant reduction, or even absence of the question by students, “When am I going to use this in the real world?”

The project seeks to transform the

developing and strengthening student access to career-connected learning in the context of

existing, successful programs in arts, science/technology, and business into more robust and relevant pathways for students. This could include adding more college concurrent offerings, online learning opportunities, and workplace experiences. Career pathway ideas that could be created include (1) robotics and coding, (2) business, entrepreneurship and leadership, (3) film, video and performing arts, (4) communications and marketing and (5) food science and culinary. Eventually the project could lead to additional pathways, including agriculture and ranching, construction (and/or other relevant trades), animal science, aeronautics/aerospace, and engineering, design, and technology.

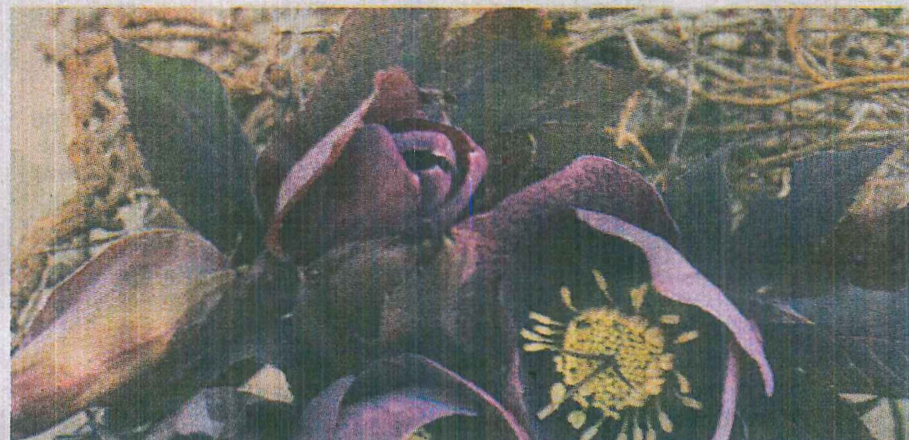
A lot of work and outreach has already been accomplished. Local business leaders, teachers, and students have participated in focus groups and completed surveys used to identify both near-term opportunities

for students and larger-term goals for Elizabeth graduates. Site visits to other schools have been conducted, and more are planned. Extensive outreach and engagement efforts will continue into the spring. The project team is leading the effort to build a profile of an Elizabeth high school graduate, aligned with local community values.

Creating this graduate profile and a robust implementation plan are the two most important design-phase objectives. With success, the project will receive continued implementation support from Homegrown Talent Initiative so the bold change Eddy and so many others envision can be brought into reality.

If you have questions or are interested in contributing to the project, please contact Jaimee Glazebrook in the Elizabeth School District office at: jglazebrook@esdk12.org.

Douglas Bissonette is superintendent of the Elizabeth School District.



PARKER AND ELIZABETH