

## **TFHS conclave targets careers**

**By Kathleen McKiernan Recorder Staff**

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TURNERS FALLS — Local business owners, educators and state legislators gathered early Friday morning at Turners Falls High School to plan out and discuss ways to prepare students for their futures in the professional work world.

“Everyone here is vital to students’ success. Every course we offer I consider to be a core course,” said Principal Thomas Osborn. “We educate holistically, socially, interpersonally, and physically— anything we can provide students with to move forward with their lives.”

The Gill-Montague Regional School District was one of five schools across the state to receive a grant last October from the state Department of Education to implement a college and career readiness program to help prepare students for the real world. The grant is in its first planning year.

Since that time, the high school has worked with the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board to implement several school-to-career activities. Specially, the school is working with Donna DuSell at the Franklin Hampshire Career Center in Greenfield.

As the coordinator for Franklin County, DuSell works with individuals, classes and groups creating resumes, searching for jobs, and practicing interviews. She serves as a liaison to employers and businesses and brings in speakers and guests to the school to talk about their work.

This year, DuSell has worked with 14 students on their resumes, job search and interview skills and 19 students in regular classes that she presents to on a regular basis. Another 26 students took part in two field trips, in which transportation costs were underwritten by regional employment board programs. A total 70 juniors are taking part in a work and college resume workshop.

Over the last few years, the high school has helped students get internships in the community.

“The idea is that every student at Turners Falls High School will experience different levels of career readiness,” Guidance Counselor Karen Hidalgo said.

The community leaders and local employers agreed that collaborating to get students work-ready and acquire job skills is essential for their growth and future. The regional employment board believes teenagers who work in high school end up with better adult jobs and higher incomes and learn interpersonal and communication skills. Working teenagers are also less likely to engage in drugs or violent behavior, DuSell said.

Although businesses such as Farren Care Center and Upinngil Farm demonstrated their enthusiasm for helping teenagers get to work, the regional employment board suggested they involve other business owners to also take part.

According to statistics by Young Invincibles, a nonprofit focused on education, health care and employment for young adults, cited by DuSell, on average, one unemployed 18- to 24-year-old costs the state and federal government \$4,100 annually in foregone tax revenue paid and safety net benefits paid out. One unemployed 25- to-34-year-old costs \$9,900 annually.

Recently, DuSell said there has been “an extreme dropoff for young people being employed.” Reasons vary from slow economic recovery, job competition with older workers, and, to a small extent, kids are not seeking the jobs.

State Rep. Denise Andrews said part of the challenge is getting businesses to step up and employ young people.

“Youth preparation is our number one priority,” Andrews said. “I’ll do my fair share to get kids employed and support agencies that do that.”

State Rep. Stephen Kulik said the Legislature is putting together an economic jobs bill. He plans to suggest a tax incentive for employers that employ youth as part of that bill.

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