

Jobs for juniors

\$2M grant will help teens get a foothold in the workforce

By DOMENIC POLI

Recorder Staff

A nearly \$2 million federal grant will come to Orange, Turners Falls and Ware to help high school juniors get solid footing in the workforce.

Turners Falls High School, Ware Junior/Senior High School, and Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School in Orange will benefit from \$1,998,168 being funneled to the Franklin Hampshire Summer Jobs and Beyond program as part of a \$21 million grant to be split among 11 programs nationally.

Between 20 and 30 juniors at each of the three high schools who need summer jobs or year-round employment will be recruited into the program initially, but it will eventually directly help 180, and others will get career counseling in other ways, said Patricia Crosby, the executive director of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board, which is organizing the program. She does not yet know how many students would get year-round employment because some will choose not to interfere with their studies.

Crosby said this process will happen next year and continue until 180 students are served.

She said priority will be given to those who most need the help — most likely students from low-income households who have little to no work experience, or who are uncertain about their post high-school plans. The students will remain in the program through next year, when they are ready to graduate and head into college or the workforce.

“All the research shows early labor force participation is a very strong predictor of success in the workplace for the rest of their life,” Crosby said.

Crosby also said the 180 young people will receive services that include help with transportation (possibly with gas cards), tutoring, and assistance with child care if they are parents. Crosby said more than \$600,000 of the \$1.9 million will go directly to subsidize youth wages in the public or private sector. The grant will also fund a Youth Pathways coordinator who will work with all juniors and seniors to develop career-development experiences like jobs, job-shadowing opportunities, career days and internships. Crosby said the employment fields will likely include manufacturing, food service, health care and hospitality.

She said all participants will have work-based learning plans, with oversight from a counselor/ case manager from partner agency Community Action, the regional anti-poverty nonprofit.

Lev Ben-Ezra, director of youth programs at Community Action, said the employment board will take the lead in incorporating additional employment readiness education in the three high schools and in supporting school staff to integrate school-to-career activities for all grades.

“It’s hugely exciting,” Crosby said. “There were only 11 awards across the country.”

She said the unemployment rate of 16- to 19-year-olds is 27.1 percent throughout the United States, but 33.6 percent in Orange, Turners Falls and Ware averaged. The figure is 59 percent in Orange alone.

The nationwide average of unemployment among 20- to 24-year-olds is 15.3 percent, but 23.4 percent in these three Massachusetts communities. More than 16 percent of youth in Orange, Turners Falls and Ware live in poverty, compared to 15.6 percent across the country.



Patricia Crosby, Executive Director of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board, in the Greenfield office. “All the research shows early labor force participation is a very strong predictor of success in the workplace for the rest of their life,” Crosby said. RECORDER STAFF/ MATT BURKHARTT

You can reach Domenic Poli at: dpoli@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 257. On Twitter: @DomenicPoli