

AVIATION: Career opportunities abound in field of flight

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aviation, including the cost of flight training, a signing bonus, and high starting salaries.

The message delivered at the symposium was twofold: the advantages of having an aviation program at the high school level, and how to develop one. As the educational system in the U.S. is struggling to be competitive in S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, aviation programs are becoming a conduit for interdisciplinary study of sciences and math. Many high schools are trying to implement an aviation program, not only to prepare students to fill the looming shortage in the aviation industry, but also to connect the dots as a STEM program.

"It's very difficult to teach today's students something they don't see a need to learn," notes Sheryl Yeager, a teacher for 23 years. "We teach classes like math and physics separately, with no correlation between them. Millennials don't learn in this compartmentalized way. But when they become interested in something like flying, and even passionate about it, then they suddenly WANT to learn the physics of flight."

This is nothing new to SHS, now in its fourth year offering flight science. Beginning with seven students, it now consists of 38

students enrolled in two full classes. The attraction to SHS is becoming evident as families with kids seeking an aviation education are moving to Sisters to take advantage of the offering. There are also several students from outside the Sisters School District who have transferred in to take the courses.

Another aspect of the aviation program that is unique to Sisters is the fact that the classes are taught by a state-licensed teacher who is also an FAA certificated flight instructor (CFI).

"Having Sheryl Yeager as a teacher and CFI is a huge benefit to the aviation program at Sisters High School," said Julie Benson of Sisters Eagle Airport. "We are incredibly lucky to have her here, with her combination of talents and passion for aviation."

While many high schools are initiating an aviation class, the big hurdle is students getting actual flight instruction. While some schools have acquired a flight simulator, there were only three high schools represented at the symposium that have access to a real airplane for training. One high school in Michigan, and one in New Mexico have each purchased their own airplane for students to learn to fly. Sisters students get flight instruction in a Cessna 172 through a unique partnership with Outlaw Aviation, a privately owned trainer plane at the Sisters Airport. Outlaw Aviation awards flight scholarships to SHS students who have the dedication and



PHOTO PROVIDED

Flight Science teacher Sheryl Yeager, with Sisters Eagle Airport owners Julie and Benny Benson in Portland.

determination to earn their wings.

One area of discussion at the symposium was articulating college credit for aviation courses taken in high school. Colleges that offer degrees in aviation are reluctant to give credit for high school courses, since there is currently no industry standard for the contents of curriculum. SHS is again on the forefront of solving this dilemma, as school administration is working with the aviation department at Central Oregon Community College to align the curriculum taught at SHS for credit at COCC.

As coursework at SHS is aligned with the content of courses taught at COCC, students will be given college credit for classes taken in high school. This credit could then be taken toward a

degree in aviation at COCC, or transferred to another university.

"For students pursuing a career as a pilot, combined credit could potentially save them \$10,000 in deferred tuition, and significantly more if they earn their private pilot certificate in high school," said Bob Ramsey, who procures funds for aviation scholarships at COCC.

One area of the aviation industry that SHS does not have in place is a "build" program. Several high schools across the country are developing vocational and career-skills programs, using an airplane as the project focus. Since SHS does not have the shop facilities required for a project of this magnitude, the Sisters airport is exploring possible options to host a shop where an aircraft build program could be started in

the near future.

The SHS program stands alone in one major accomplishment: they are graduating licensed pilots. With the first student achieving her private pilot certificate as a senior last year, the path was paved for more to follow. Two more students have passed their FAA private pilot written exam, and will soon solo in the Outlaw Aviation plane. There are currently six students actively pursuing their private pilot certificates before they graduate from SHS.

Although SHS is a small school, the dedication of students, teachers, school administrators, and community members who have united their passion for education and aviation, have created a unique opportunity for kids to discover that the sky is NOT the limit.

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