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EDUCATION | JOBS AND EDUCATION FOR TEXANS GRANT PROGRAM

\$1.1M aids in school's X-ray, welding programs



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Kimberly Ayala, a freshman at Dickinson High School, talks about the advantages to being in the school's new radiology imaging program on Wednesday. The program received more than \$1.1 million from the Jobs and Education for Texans Grant Program through the Texas Workforce Commission for the imaging program and also the school's welding program.

By JOHN DELAPP
The Daily News

» DICKINSON

A pair of grants totaling more than \$1.1 million made it possible for Dickinson High School students to operate the first onsite radiology imaging program in Texas and also allowed the district to upgrade its welding equipment.

The money came from the Texas Workforce Commission via the Jobs and Education for Texans Grant Program, officials said.

About \$750,000 of the grant money was for the radiology

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Kailey Williams, left, a senior at Dickinson High School, listens to welding teacher Clay Menotti explain the features and advantages of the new welding machines Wednesday.

FROM THE FRONT

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program and about \$500,000 was for the welding program, said Melissa Everett, Dickinson ISD's director of career and technical education.

The grant money was a bit of a windfall.

"The Texas Workforce Commission announced that we could apply for up to \$750,000," Everett said. "That was unusual because the cap is usually \$350,000, so it was a great opportunity for us."

The district also was able to apply for two grants instead of just one, as has been the case in the past.

Getting the funding for the radiology equipment was important, because labor demand in that field, which requires certification, is expected to rise sharply.

"Between 2020 and 2030, overall employment is expected to grow by 9 percent nationally, but in our Gulf Coast area it's projected to be much higher, about 24.9 percent by 2028," Everett said.



JENNIFER REYNOLDS/The Daily News

Kailey Williams, a senior at Dickinson High School, shows a photo of a Texas flag she made out of old horse shoes Wednesday in one of the school's welding classrooms.

The jump in the need for radiologists can be attributed to several factors, she said.

"Our area is getting a lot

more populated and there are a lot of health care systems popping up and each of those hospitals and clinics need imaging person-

nel," she said.

"Our population is aging as well."

The high school has two X-ray machines now. One is ceiling mounted and the other floor mounted.

"It will give students the opportunity to be more versatile," Everett said. "They can enter hospitals or they can go to free-standing clinics or doctor's offices."

The imaging program, which is in its first year, has proven to be popular.

"We have 42 students enrolled and we didn't know how popular this program was going to be," Everett said. "Usually, when we start a practicum course, we have one section, but with this we had to open two, so we had double the amount we usually receive."

Kimberly Ayala, 14, is a freshman at Dickinson High School and is part of that first wave of students.

"It's pretty interesting and I like that I have this opportunity to have my certification after four years," she said.

The idea of taking X-rays as a vocation entered her mind only recently, Ayala

said.

"I never really thought of it, but I've always thought of the medical field, but not necessarily X-rays," she said. "But when I heard about the program, I found it pretty interesting."

Part of the allure of the radiology program likely is the income that can be earned with a certification from high school, which can be pretty high.

Students with a high school diploma and the proper certification can earn a starting salary of more than \$50,000 a year, Everett said.

The income numbers for trained welders is comparable — graduates with the proper certification can start at about \$50,000 annually, she said.

Senior Kailey Williams, 18, has been taking welding classes since her sophomore year. She got interested in welding through a creative bent.

"I got interested in TIG welding because of the art they can do with the metal," she said, referring to tungsten inert gas welding, which often is used in high quality and precision welding.

Williams has created several pieces.

"I made a Texas flag out of horseshoes and I made a welcome sign with a buck and a duck on it," she said. "I've made a couple of other signs, too. Basically, everything is with horseshoes."

The grants enabled the district to purchase welding machines, pipe benders, a plasma cutter and other equipment.

The welding program at Dickinson High School is a bit different from those found at other schools, because it has been rolled into the agriculture mechanics program.

"As we make the transition from welding to ag mechanics, we can add more trade skills, more technology and more equipment that the kids can use to learn other trades, rather than just welding," teacher Clay Menotti said. "They will learn residential electrical, carpentry, plumbing and masonry work."

"In the spring semester we will really dive into the metal work and welding."

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