

Survey asks
how well
we're
educating
students

By Heather Evagelatos

Staff reporter

A unprecedented, comprehensive study of education in Sheridan County will draw a clearer picture of what students learn here and how they use that knowledge, according to Whitney Benefits Director Patrick Henderson.

The nonprofit Whitney group is sponsoring an educational needs assessment for the entire county to be completed in May. Mariam Manley

Thinking Smart

of Planning Research Evaluation Services Inc. of Jackson is spearheading the effort.

"We want to get a very clear picture of what's out there and what students need to thrive in the 21st century," Manley said.

The survey will be conducted in two phases. The first, a comprehensive literature review, will include data collection from such sources as community focus groups.

"We are in that data-collecting phase now," Henderson said. "It's really a cooperative effort. It's very gratifying that we have the opportunity to do this in the county."

Manley said she will conduct discussions with business owners, employers, community members and students in the community to find out more about education in the county "so we can find out what we know and what we don't know."

In January, Manley will start on phase two, a follow-up of former students in the county. She plans to track students who were educated here five years ago and where that education took them.

"We want to see the long-term patterns," she said. "Seventy percent may go to college, but do they graduate?"

Manley will locate the students through directory databases and family in the Sheridan area, since "the vast majority of students don't stay in Sheridan," she said.

She'll also survey employers of former students to find out about those students who didn't attend college.

The survey should be completed in May.

"We want to analyze the data, and then we'll see what we can do to improve the education here," Henderson said.

Manley added that no survey this complete has ever been conducted in the county.

"Other studies have been done, but in this study we are able to transcend individual and agency boundaries," she said, adding that she's focusing on longitudinal trends rather than current statistics.

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