

Whitney Benefits seeks to bring community together

By Pat Blair

Senior Staff reporter

Sheridan County's high school graduates lack what a consultant called "real-world problem-solving skills" — and the county's school districts need to work together and with parents, Sheridan College and others in the community, representatives of Whitney Benefits said Monday night.

"We have all the pieces" to provide the best education possible to Sheridan County youth, Whitney board Chair Tom Kinnison said.

"But we need to share resources. We can do it, but the only problem is not working together. The turf battles have got to stop," Kinnison told a gathering of board members and administrators from the three school districts and Sheridan College and the mayors of Sheridan, Dayton, Rancharchester and Clearmont.

"We're trying to facilitate bringing the communities together," Kinnison said. He added Whitney Benefits is offering a facilitator to each school and college board to help districts work together.

Also at the meeting were several Sheridan County legislators, legislative candidates and county commission candidates.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the Sheridan County Education Needs Assessment report prepared for Whitney Benefits to help identify local educational trends and needs.

Dr. Miriam Manley, whose consulting firm, Planning, Research & Evaluation Services

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Inc., prepared the report, presented its findings.

They included ways of preparing students to develop the skills — including what Manley called "soft skills" such as self-motivation, responsibility and punctuality — they will need when they graduate and enter the job market.

"There is a separation between academics and vocational learning," Manley said. "Students need to see how learning is relevant to the real world."

She cited one school district that involved students in community projects — such as building a playground — to show them how what they

learn in class applies to the skills they will need for work.

The students used reading and writing to research types of playgrounds and the needs; they used speaking skills in discussing the project with municipal officials; they used mathematics when construction got under way.

Manley said the study shows many Sheridan County students enter the working world after they leave high school, either at or in place of college.

The study reveals that students feel "very well prepared" if they are going on to higher education, Manley said, "but there is a substantial pro-

portion of students that aren't motivated.

"Twenty percent of students are foundering within the educational system," because of lack of motivation and direction or because they do not fit into the traditional system.

"Students going to college are generally well-prepared," according to the report. "But the preparation levels are more questionable for those not going off to college."

Copies of the report were expected to be posted on Web sites of Sheridan College and the county school districts later this week, according to Kinnison and Whitney Executive Director Patrick Henderson.