

# District 2 needs to rethink voc-ed

**By Lori Newman**

*Staff reporter*

Sheridan High School vocational graduates lag significantly behind their county peers in School Districts 1 and 3 in just about every job-skill category, according to the recently published Whitney Educational and Vocational Needs Assessment Study.

Categories range from computers to problem solving and cooperation, to reading, writing and math. The study cites SHS graduates who took the Wyoming Career and Technical Assessment.

The study adds that School District 2 needs to overcome its "somewhat negative" attitude about vocational education and also increase its awareness of the labor market, in which only 20 percent or fewer of today's jobs require a bachelor's degree.

The curriculum at Sheridan High School focuses on academics, and on preparing students for college, the study notes. But survey results point out that more than one-third of high school graduates will not go to college.

Two major findings of the Whitney

Foundation study are that students graduating from Sheridan County schools "are much less prepared for the world of work than they are to pursue higher education, and ... there is a substantial proportion of students who lack focus, motivation, and direction" because they feel their schoolwork has little relevance to "real life."

However, the study also notes that area employers report a high level of satisfaction with employees who are graduates of Sheridan County high schools.

According to survey results, "a large proportion of Sheridan County students are in the world of work upon leaving high school."

Of those who go on to college, many students must hold down a job at the same time.

The study reveals that 67 percent of former District 2 students were in the work force last fall — with 36 percent solely working, and another 31 percent working while attending college.

In District 1, with Tongue River and Big Horn high school graduates, 63 percent are in the workplace with 28 percent solely working and 35 percent working and going to school.

District 3 had the lowest percentage of students in the work force, the study notes, although its 43 percent represents "a substantial minority."

Nearly half of these respondents — 46 percent — last attended school during the

2000-01 school year, 86 percent of them graduating. The rest last attended high school during the 1999-2000 academic year or just before.

Most of the fastest growing job sectors nationwide during the next six years will require "short-term on-the-job training," with only a few requiring bachelor's or associate's degrees, the study predicts. And these skills should be learned

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## Study

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in high school classrooms.

The top 12 jobs, in terms of number of workers needed, are: systems analysts, retail salespeople, cashiers, general managers and top executives, truck drivers, office clerks, registered nurses, computer-support specialists, personal care/home health aides, teacher assistants, janitors and nursing aides or orderlies.

Of these, only jobs as systems analysts and managers/executives

require four-year degrees, the study states.

The Whitney study had its results charted, analyzed and prepared for the Whitney Foundation board during the first half of this year. The 150-page report was prepared by Dr. Mariam Manley of Planning, Research and Evaluation Services in Jackson.

The entire Whitney Educational and Vocational Needs Assessment Study can be found through the Web sites for School District 2 and Sheridan College.