

Chi-Hi receives a \$25,000 Nordson Capitol Grant for Fab Lab.



NOVEMBER 03, 2015 9:00 AM • [CHEYENNE WOLFE](#)
CHEYENNE.WOLFE@LEE.NET

Science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, jobs are growing at 1.7 times the rate of non-STEM jobs, but according to the Department of Education, only 16 percent of high school seniors are interested in pursuing STEM jobs.

Of the few who do receive a college STEM degree, 74 percent go on to non-STEM jobs.

With the need increasing, and the numbers decreasing, the school district is looking for ways to boost the number of students considering a STEM career.

That's why Angie Stokes, Career and Technical Educational Coordinator for the school district thinks a grant the school was awarded is such a big deal.

"I'm really excited," she said explaining that the Chippewa Falls Senior High School will receive \$25,000 to support equipment for its Fabrication Laboratory. Fab labs were introduced more than a decade ago by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Bits and Atoms.

Fab Labs allow users a variety of computer-controlled pieces of equipment that employ many types of materials to create a wide range of products. They are connected across the globe by a communications network that allows users to share files and other ideas for the products they want to make.

The grant involved a highly intensive application process and a presentation for the local Nordson Corporation.

"A majority of our funds go toward education," Shannon Potts, local Nordson contact said. "Because the proposed amount was so large, it became a capital grant, so we had to take it to the corporate foundation board in Cleveland."

The board agreed, and the grant became the first Nordson Capital Grant ever awarded in Wisconsin.

"Being a manufacturing company, kids learning STEM programs is huge," Potts said. "These core classes are the backbone of what is out there after high school."

The grant has allowed Chi-Hi to purchase a laser engraver, a vinyl cutter and a 3D printer.

“Kids will be able to go in and create things,” she said. “We can give them a means to find an end.”

Chippewa Falls’ goal in building a Fab Lab is to create a space where students can learn, innovate, create and invent. This space will be a platform for project-based, hands-on interdisciplinary education.

“We have teachers from art to science getting involved,” Stokes said.

The staff often talks about project based learning, but without the right tools, it is difficult to actually carry out. This grant will give the staff the space and equipment to integrate projects.

“We have a really talented staff,” Stokes said. “This will allow them to foster their skills and be innovative.”

For senior students, the big question is being asked more and more frequently.

What are you going to do when you grow up?

Chi-Hi senior Allison Prill has hopes to double major in biology and applied engineering or math.

“(The grant) is allowing me to be around equipment that I wouldn’t normally be able to,” Prill said. “It will be helpful to get into college and be not completely new to the equipment I will be using.”

Students will now have the ability to create an idea and then build on it. “It makes learning more authentic and engaging,” Stokes said. They will also be able to collaborate with other students and staff, a skill that will be useful in the job world.

Senior Tyler Mason has decided to pursue a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

“This gives us more resources and opportunities to get out of book based learning, and see how to actually do it,” he said.