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New Ag Sciences Magnet School

Submitted by: Valerie Egger—Nebraska Network 21—University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Soon, high school students in Mead, Nebraska will conduct experiments at the nearby 9,500-acre University of Nebraska Agricultural Research and Development Center (ARDC). Students will work directly with local agriculture businesses gaining experiences in applying agricultural techniques.

As the 2000-2001 school year began this past August, Mead High School unfolded a newly designed curriculum intended to benefit local students, and also to reach out to others, through the incorporation of a rural Agricultural Sciences Magnet School. Making Education in Agriculture (M.E.A.D.) is a magnet school within a public school. It is one of the few *rural* agricultural sciences magnet schools in the nation. Although it was estimated that about 25 students would enroll in the new classes this semester, enthusiasm for the program resulted in over 100 students enrolling, and some in more than one class. Along with this large group of high school students, M.E.A.D. has created *Agriculture Exploratory* classes for junior high, reaching 50 seventh and eighth grade students.

With initial financial support from Nebraska Network 21, a project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), the concept for a rural magnet high school located at Mead took off and garnered additional support from other departments at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Nebraska State Department of Education, the University of Nebraska ARDC, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and businesses.

Today's agriculture is about more than just production. The M.E.A.D. High School curriculum intends to better prepare students for leadership and support roles in agricultural science careers. Curriculum was expanded and redesigned as a more dynamic agricultural sciences curricula, focusing on four career paths: agriculture technology, plant science, agribusiness, and food science. Future plans include adding an animal science career path and one that will focus on the arts and humanities. The high school will utilize distance learning techniques to reach schools without agricultural science programs, or those interested in expanding their programs but without the resources to do so. Currently M.E.A.D. is sending a year-long course in *Ag Literacy* to six students in Bancroft, NE. A second distance learning class focusing on *Ag Issues* will be sent during the spring semester.

All freshman will be required to take an *Ag Literacy* course, just one of 16 ag-related courses that were added to the 2000-2001 curriculum. Sophomores are required to select between a semester of *Introduction to Business*, or *Entrepreneurship*. Problem-based learning strategies will create opportunities to write across the curriculum. Mead High School Principal, Angela Leifeld, says, ". . . we're hoping that if we give [students] a broader spectrum as to what agriculture is, by giving them an agricultural literacy class and the careers that are available to them, then they will be able to make better choices." Graduates from the magnet school will have fulfilled all high school graduation requirements, and all college entrance requirements.

Instructional facilities for M.E.A.D. are being greatly enhanced through a partnership with the University of Nebraska's ARDC nearby. With this partnership, curriculum can include hands-on activities with areas of agriculture that would not be available anywhere else in the state, such as global positioning, precision farming, global imaging systems, biotechnology, and other research experiences.

The agriculture program at Mead High School in Mead, Nebraska has been very successful in teaching agriculture production and agriculture leadership through FFA for many years. They have produced graduates that are highly successful in agriculture production and agribusiness. It is with this tradition in mind that the school reinvented their agriculture education program. The agriculture teachers for the M.E.A.D. program are Joe Baldassare and Jenny Gehle.

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