

## Natural Gas Impact on Local Schools Not Yet Fully Known

*This column is presented weekly by the Public Education sub-committee of the Clinton County Natural Gas Task Force in an effort to provide accurate, up-to-date information on activities surrounding the Marcellus Shale formation and the natural gas exploration industry. For more information on Task Force activities, visit the Task Force page on the Clinton County government website at [www.clintoncountypa.com](http://www.clintoncountypa.com).*

When it comes to knowing what impact the emerging natural gas industry will have on local schools, that chapter in Clinton County education history has yet to be written. But officials at Keystone Central School District say planning for the future is underway, with an eye on the industry.

“It’s a little unknown,” says KCSD superintendent Kelly Hastings of how the natural gas industry will affect area schools. “We are trying to plan for the future, looking at enrollment trends, building usage, and what kind of instruction we design. We’re trying to be proactive, to anticipate educational needs.”

Families coming to the area for jobs in the natural gas industry have resulted in a slight enrollment increase in Keystone Central. District officials say a couple dozen new students this school year can be attributed to the gas industry, coming from locales such as Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Canada.

“The increase in students hasn’t caused any issues,” says director of curriculum Terry Murty. “But we do need to look ahead because our school district has full classes, so it could, at some point, have an impact.”

Residents in some areas have expressed concerns about increased truck traffic on local roads as a result of the gas industry. Hastings says the School District has tried to stay ahead of those concerns, especially with regard to school busses and the truck traffic.

“We haven’t had any major problems because of the increase in traffic. Our transportation director has met with gas industry representatives and we’ve shared information about bus routes and times of day when busses are on the roads. When concerns were raised over the volume of traffic on Route 664, we worked with township officials and PennDOT to address those concerns. Again, we need to stay vigilant and be proactive.”

With regard to education, the School District is looking at what it has to offer students, as well as adults, who are interested in seeking employment within the gas industry.

“In general, I think it’s important to educate students about the impact the natural gas industry could have on our environment,” says Hastings. “In addition, we’re looking at what the school district has to offer, and could offer in the future, to help meet employment needs.”

“We’re starting to see a desire for individuals with electronics and electrical backgrounds,” says Scott Owens, director of career and technical education, adding that interest in those fields is coming from both within the gas industry and from other, non-gas-related industries. “We’re also seeing a demand for machining. We have all three of those programs here and are interested in helping to fill those employment needs with our graduates.”

In addition, Owens says other key program offerings already in place at Keystone Central’s Career and Technical Center (CTC), which is housed at Central Mountain High School, include welding through the Ag Mechanics program, drafting, and construction trades. Other fields of study that are of interest to the gas industry in a more indirect way include food service, and health occupations programs.

The CTC, in conjunction with the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology (CPI) in Pleasant Gap, is now poised to offer Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training, which is an identified need within the natural gas industry.

"Under the partnership with CPI, their instructors would provide some classroom and on-road instruction at Central Mountain High School and some at CPI," says Owens. "We have advertised for students and have had some interest, but not enough yet to meet the threshold needed."

Owens says at least six individuals are needed to run the class. Enrollees must be at least 18 years old and must undergo some preliminary testing, have a clean driving record, and complete the required paperwork. The cost for the course ranges between \$3,000 and \$6,500, depending on the classification being sought. "CPI has been great to work with on the planning for the CDL training," says Owens. "We hope at some point there will be enough interest to schedule a course."

Owens is optimistic that a Career Fair scheduled for May 5 at the Career and Technology Center will show students and the public the variety and quality of educational opportunities the CTC has to offer. It also will be an opportunity for area businesses looking for employees, to see the types of skills students are learning as they prepare for jobs after graduation.

"The Career Fair is designed to showcase what we do here at the Career and Technology Center," says Owens. "During the school day of May 5, we'll bring non-CTC students in to help raise awareness of what we offer here. But we'll also have evening hours that night so the general public can come in and see what's offered."

Each of the programs of study within the CTC will have displays at the Career Fair, with students staffing the exhibits. And Owens says the CTC is working with CareerLink to also attract area businesses as exhibitors.

"Our hope is that, for example, we will have our electrical students at one display, and an area employer who is looking for employees with electrical skills at the next display, which will provide a great networking opportunity."

Owens says the School District is seeing increased interest from local industries who are requesting to build partnerships with the CTC.

"We have industries who have approached us about starting 'co-op' opportunities (where students work several hours a week at an industry to gain hands-on experience). Some companies have lost employees to the gas industry, so they are exploring avenues for seeking skilled employees, and we're more than happy to work with those companies. We feel the School District has some great future employees for our area and if we can get those senior students some first-hand experience at a company, that just makes them all the more marketable once they graduate."

In addition to matching seniors with jobs in the community through the School District's co-op program, Keystone Central also has a transition coordinator who works with students to help them gain the skills needed to successfully transition from high school into the work world. Another program offered to junior students provides internship opportunities, similar to job shadowing, for up to six weeks during the school year.

"We're also willing to entertain ideas from folks in the natural gas industry about what they want to see in employees, both from a student perspective, and from an adult education perspective," adds Murty. "A diesel mechanics program, for example, is something we need to be looking at down the road, not only in support of the gas industry but for people in general who want to perform work on their own vehicles."

Like they have done and continue to do with other area industries, Murty says it's important to make opportunities for representatives from the gas industry to tell students what kinds of jobs are out there, so students know the opportunities do exist.

"We've had gas industry representatives come into the school to speak with students, and we'll continue to do more of that, just like we do with other industries."

In addition, the CTC has an Advisory Committee for each program offering. Owens says he would be interested in having representatives from the natural gas industry join in and provide input and guidance on those advisory groups.

"We're a great resource for area business and industry, including the natural gas industry, and we want to be," says Hastings.

*Keystone Central School District superintendent Kelly Hastings ([khasting@kcsd.us](mailto:khasting@kcsd.us)), director of curriculum Terry Murty ([tmurty@kcsd.us](mailto:tmurty@kcsd.us)), and director of career and technical education Scott Owens ([sowens@kcsd.us](mailto:sowens@kcsd.us)), collaborated on this article.*