

Announcing **CareerConnect**



Law Loving Addresses Media

At a Media Event held on Wednesday, January 11, at West Greene High School, the Niswonger Foundation announced **CareerConnect**, a new workforce readiness and career exploration initiative for 10th - 12th graders. This three-year program, in partnership with Greene County and Greeneville City Schools, is designed to provide students the opportunity to explore career paths, develop “soft” skills and academic credentials, and gain real-world work experience. The pilot program officially began in Fall 2016 with the selection of 100 10th grade participants, called **Explorers**. Twenty Explorers were chosen from each of the five high schools located in Greene County. Explorers and their parents participated in a program orientation in December.

The Niswonger Foundation has initiated this project to guide and support students in building the critical skills necessary for future workplace success. The focus of the project is on high school students who are most in need of developing an understanding of career opportunities. Other than jobs held by family members, friends, or seen on TV, students are limited in their understanding of careers available to them. Often, they have had little or no support for considering personal options and identifying their unique skill sets. Students who are not viewed as “college bound” are, historically, among the least likely to receive career counseling in their school environments.

These students will be provided simulated and real-world work

experiences, as well as mentoring support. There will be a focus on the critical skills that will help to ensure their successful transition to work. This project will allow them to more broadly explore career options and will better credential them for future job opportunities with such tools as the *Work Ethic Diploma* and *WorkKeys* assessment. The program will provide an opportunity for the students to have excellent role models and personalized support.



Law Loving Instructs Students

In his remarks at the media event, Niswonger Foundation Chairman and Founder, Scott M. Niswonger, stated: “The better job we do preparing young people for the workplace, the easier it will be to attract new employers to our region, and provide better opportunities for their futures.”



Program Sponsor, John Tweed, Addresses Media

Niswonger further commented: “This program will begin to give students a look at business and industry, and what is expected. I believe employers will be eager to put the **CareerConnect** students into jobs in our region.” He introduced John Tweed, President and CEO of Landair Transport, as the sponsor of the **CareerConnect** pilot program. Speaking from his personal experiences, Tweed shared the need to encourage and educate students regarding the skills that will provide opportunities for them to be successful in the workplace. He stated: “I believe this program will

enhance the prosperity of our community, improve the quality of life of our citizens – especially young people, help us create an environment where people will want to live, and be a place where they want to bring their businesses.”



Law Loving with Laura Bustos

Law Loving will coordinate the *CareerConnect* program for the Niswonger Foundation. Loving, an alumnus of the Niswonger Scholars program, has an undergraduate degree in public health from Tulane University, and master's degree in business administration from East Tennessee State University. He came to this position following five years of experience with a local marketing research firm. Loving shared an overview of the *CareerConnect* program. Following these comments, he introduced Greene County Director of Schools, David McLain; and Greeneville City Schools Director, Jeff Moorhouse. Both Directors spoke of the importance of this program to these students and the future of the region.

Loving, then, introduced Laura Bustos, West Greene High School student and *CareerConnect* Explorer. Bustos expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this program. Following these comments, members of the media and guests were encouraged to visit the first *CareerConnect* class for an opportunity to spend time with the Explorers.

CareerConnect will continue throughout the school year. Explorers will participate in monthly after-school meetings at their respective high schools. Through this effort, they will build soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and financial literacy. In between monthly meetings, students will work on take-home assignments that focus on career exploration and reinforce the soft skill development that takes place in the monthly meetings.

The program extends beyond the regular school year, as well. Over the summer, participants in *CareerConnect* will gather at Greene Technology Center (GTC) for the two-week *CareerConnect* Summer Experience. The Summer Experience will give participants the opportunity to take field trips to post-secondary educational sites, like Walters State and TCAT Morristown, and local businesses. Explorers will also be able to participate in hands-on projects and demonstrations at GTC that will give them a feel for different career paths.

Explorers will remain in the program throughout the remainder of high school. During 11th grade, students will continue to develop soft skills at monthly meetings and will participate in the Summer Experience. In 12th grade, Explorers will be eligible to complete internships with local industry sponsors and will receive personalized support as they prepare for post-secondary education and their careers.

The goal of *CareerConnect* is simple: to provide high-school students with the skills and opportunities to be successful when they enter the workplace. While the project will initially include 100 students per year, this pilot is designed to be adaptable to other Northeast Tennessee high schools.