

# Teaching Nebraska Trades (TNT)

**Nebraska Investment Finance Authority**

Special Achievement

**HFA Staff Contact**

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### Overview

The Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA) is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year, but we don't focus on the past. We're always looking into the future to innovate new ways to help Nebraska grow and thrive. With innovation being one of NIFA's core values we want to continue to advance our mission to grow Nebraska communities through affordable housing and agribusiness. In 2019, NIFA staff held a two-day retreat in Nebraska City where the executive director challenged staff and board members to brainstorm potential new ways of addressing Nebraska's affordable housing needs.

### An Idea Is Formed

One staff member shared that when he was a teenager, he didn't know that careers in housing development existed. This one statement sparked a discussion about teaching construction trades in the public school system. When do you introduce the potential career options and start teaching trades? Are students gaining not only the knowledge to build but also the recognition of construction trades as a career path? Are they learning about all levels of housing construction and how to access education and training?

The concept continued to percolate with the intent to spread a new program that would support the construction trades across the state of Nebraska. Momentum was building as it was embraced by NIFA staff and its partners. One such partner agency asked if we had any funding opportunities available to them. While we knew that this agency existed and had supported them in the past, the timing of this request couldn't have come at a better time.

### A Key Partnership is Formed

The purpose of the Builders of the Future program is to locate, encourage, and educate the next generation of construction trade specialists. To facilitate this, Builders of the Future had been working with 28 area high schools and other organizations; teaching construction skills to students by completing stick framed projects, such as playhouses, two car garages, decks, sheds/hobby dens, ticket booths, finishing basements and even pole barns, to name a few. These projects provided "hands-on" building experiences for high school students. The program also provided mentoring, funding for education, and employment opportunities in the residential and light commercial construction community.

Builders of the Future made a request to NIFA for support of their organization as they worked to expand their Train the Trainer concept. They wanted to increase the number of schools that they were working with by training more high school instructors in their methods and slowly spreading their program into more communities. At the time of their request, Builders of the Future had also launched their Train the Trainer concept at one post-high school location, Metro Community College.

NIFA was able to partner with Builders of the Future through the Rural Renaissance program, which provided a grant of \$25,000 in early 2020. At the time, this funding was key for the expansion goals of Builders of the Future and the NIFA team looked ahead to the next iteration of this innovative program concept.

### Responding to an Important State Need

In April of 2021, NIFA's new director, Shannon Harner began meeting with the Nebraska Community Foundation and three of Nebraska's Community Colleges to discuss addressing the

issue of retaining trade instructors at the community college level. As a result, we learned that college trade instructors were choosing to leave their positions and accept contractor positions because of the higher salary opportunity. This was placing essential college trade programs at risk. Fewer instructors meant fewer classes and fewer opportunities for students.

This has a direct cause and affect impact on the affordable housing needs of rural Nebraska. If a lack of contractors exists, then construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing becomes very challenging. NIFA organized a gathering of the Nebraska Community Foundation, Community Colleges, and Builders of the Future. The concepts of how we could collectively create solutions began to form. The need for career and construction trade education had to be addressed at both the high school and community college level. The group identified the following careers and education fields: electrical, plumbing, heating/air conditioning, and carpentry trades.

### Program Creation

From this gathering, the Teaching Nebraska Trades (TNT) program was born. NIFA and the Nebraska Community Foundation would work collaboratively by providing matching funds to support instructors teaching construction trade programs.

The state community colleges were paying salaries to their instructors in the upper \$40,000 range and educators were leaving for higher paying industry jobs. Community Colleges felt that offering salaries in the upper \$50,000 to the lower \$60,000 range with a full benefits package would allow them to retain the trades instructors. An additional bonus to the instructors is that they work 9 months at the Community College and could work in their industry outside of the school calendar year if desired. Everyone in the TNT collaboration agreed that the ability to entice the next generation of instructors required offering competitive salaries and benefits.

Matt Gotschall, College President of Central Community College, emphasized the impact of TNT “...these retention earnings should keep an instructor engaged over the first critical years of instruction when they are learning to teach the curriculum and managing a build with regularly changing student workers is the most challenging to master. From a donor side, it makes sense to invest in the instructor(s) as that one investment can make a positive difference in over twenty students each year, vs trying to scholarship twenty students a year, while risking the quality and commitment of the single instructor.”

At the time TNT was created, Builders of the Future had increased their number of high schools to 36 with the assistance of the NIFA partnership. They were interested in expanding their program to additional areas of the state. During our gathering, the Community Colleges were inspired by the work of Builders of the Future and invited them to expand in their communities. The Community Colleges introduced Builders of the Future staff to their area high schools, and they have now become participants in their program. In addition to retaining instructors, some colleges are utilizing TNT funds to add a Builders of the Future curriculum in their local high school.

### Providing Benefits That Outweigh Costs

NIFA created the Teaching Nebraska Trades (TNT) as a five-year pilot program. The program is funded through NIFA’s Nebraska Opportunity Fund. NIFA will invest \$250,000 over the five-year period. The funds are allocated to the participating community colleges and Builders of the Future

in the amount of \$25,000 to each annually for five years with a dollar-for-dollar matching fund requirement from each participant.

Included in the program framework is a set of guidelines to measure Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each recipient. This allows NIFA and its partners to measure progress as the program moves forward.

### Achieving Results

Since launching the program, we communicate regularly with the TNT partners. NIFA utilizes the Proteus Engage Workspace as a communication and sharing tool. This tool allows us to share documents, updates, relevant articles, and encourage participation.

This communication and open dialogue is helping to inform and support the program participants. At the end of the first year of the pilot program, all the TNT partners maintained or increased their KPIs. For example, Builders of the Future has already achieved their 5-year goal by increasing the number of high schools from 3 to 8. The partnership between the Community Colleges and local high schools has increased the number of students enrolling in construction trade classes. Mid-plains Community College had an initial goal of having 12 students enrolled in their Builders of the Future high school construction trade program and they ended their first year with 44 students. Hastings Community College anticipated 16 students and ended the year with 61 students in the high school construction trade program. 100% of colleges retained or increased instructors and 164 students applied for scholarships to their trade programs.

### Conclusion

NIFA and its partners are responding to an identified need. The 2022 Nebraska Strategic Housing Framework report indicates that 35,000 housing units will need to be created or rehabilitated within the next five years. A key to accomplishing this statewide goal is the investment we make in the next generation of educators and construction trade professionals. The TNT program is doing its part to encourage and support growth and development in our construction industry across the state. NIFA feels a strong collaboration with our high schools and community colleges, construction trades, and nonprofit partners has made this first year of the TNT program successful. Any state facing similar issues could easily follow these steps to identify their construction trade needs, create goals, execute solutions, and encourage the development of our future affordable housing builders.

# Visual Aids

## Photos of TNT Participants













# Page from NIFA's 2022 Annual Report



## Increasing capacity by training more construction trade professionals

In 2022, NIFA implemented Teaching Nebraska Trades, a five-year pilot program designed to increase the number of construction trade professionals in Nebraska, thereby increasing our state's housing development capacity.

To increase interest in the construction trades among high school students, NIFA partnered with Builders of the Future, an organization dedicated to finding, encouraging and educating the next generation of construction trade specialists.

Nebraska Community Foundation partnered with NIFA to address hiring and retention of trade instructors at community colleges. In its first years, TNT has helped Central, Mid-Plains and Northeast community colleges hire and retain trade instructors, ensuring construction-focused courses remain available to interested students.

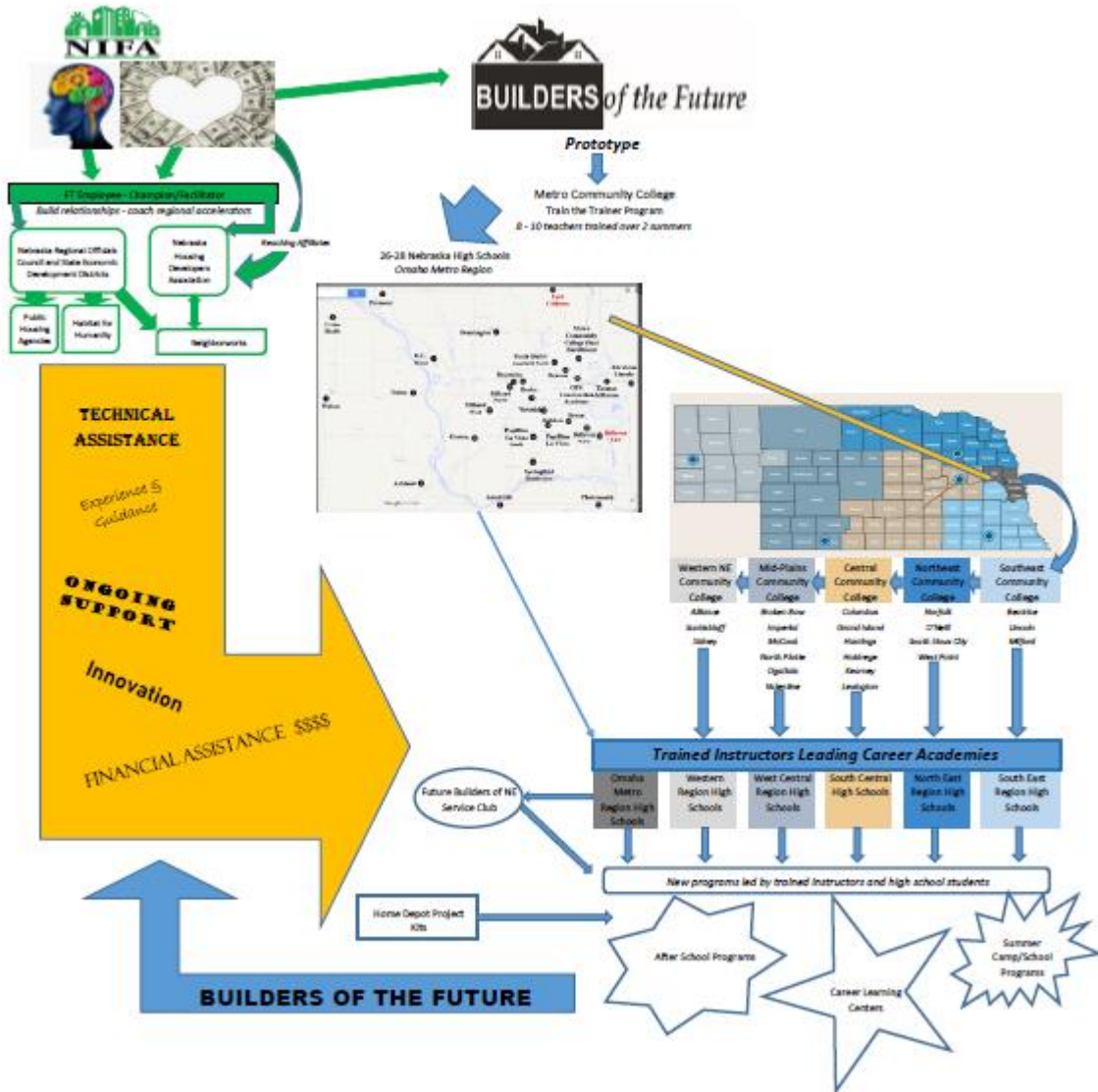
### 2022 IMPACT

**22**  
participating high schools

**164**  
students applied for scholarships to trade programs

**100%**  
of colleges hired/retained trade instructors

# Flowchart



# TNT Engage Workspace

The screenshot displays the TNT Engage Workspace interface. At the top, there is a green header with the NIFA logo and a personalized greeting: "Hello John, Good to see you!". To the right of the header are navigation icons for TO-DOs, ACTIVITIES, INVITE, and JOHN. Below the header is a sidebar on the left with a search icon and a dropdown menu for "TNT - Teaching Nebraska ...". The sidebar contains sections for "GROUPS" (with a "CREATE" button) and "TEAM" (with an "INVITE" button). The "TEAM" section lists several members with their initials and status icons: Alison Feeney (AF), Brad Ranslem (BR), Chris Waddle (CW), Dan Mitchell (DM), Elizabeth Fimbres (EF), Greg VanderWeil (GV), and Jason Buckles. The main content area shows a workspace titled "Lincoln Housing Authority and Northeast High School Home Build", added by John Turner on February 24. The workspace features a large image of three construction workers in a workshop. Overlaid on the image is the text "LHA Today" in large blue letters, "MARCH 2023" in smaller blue letters, and "Students learn" in large blue letters at the bottom. A small text box in the bottom right corner of the image reads: "Published by Lincoln Housing Authority 402-434-5500 www.L-Housing.com".



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# TNT Program Guidelines



## **TEACHING NEBRASKA TRADES (TNT) STRATEGIC PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

The TNT Partnership Program is a pilot intended to promote and sustain education of students to enter the construction trades, especially trades focused on residential housing. TNT supports this work at the community college level (the “Supply Side”) by partnering to create and recruit appropriate instructor positions and enable retention of instructors by paying them enough to reduce defection into the trades themselves, where demand and pay is currently higher than available in the community college system. To create demand for students to enter community college construction trade programs (the “Demand Side”) the TNT will support the Builders Foundation’s efforts to expand their model of teaching construction trades to high school students. When possible, the Supply Side and the Demand Side will work together to leverage skills, funding and plans. All partners have the goal of building sustainable programs supporting the trade education in Nebraska after the initial pilot of five (5) years has concluded.

### **A. COLLEGIATE INSTITUTION (“Supply Side”) Program**

In the initial Pilot, three community college institutions have been identified and they include the following: Mid Plains Community College, Northeast Community College and Central Community College - Hastings

#### **Program Information:**

- The maximum grant award for the community college portion of the TNT Partnership is \$25,000 per year. It is anticipated this amount will be split between the institutions equally, assuming required matching funds are raised by each institution. Any unmatched funds may be distributed to the other institutions if they are able to fund the additional match. NIFA program funds require a commitment for an increase of the salary of a trades instructor. Match funds from the institutions budget is an acceptable source.
- Applicant will be required to provide a 1:1 match in the first year, a 1.25:1 match in the second year a 1.5:1 match in the third year; a 1.75:1 match in the fourth year and a 2:1 match in the fifth year.
- Partner funding will be renewable annually for an additional 4 years (for a total of 5 years), subject to funding availability and progress toward the stated goals and objectives.
- Trades to be included as potential options in the Program:
  - Electrical

- Plumbing
- HVAC
- Carpentry
- [add as relevant]

## **B. HIGH SCHOOL (“Demand Side”) Program**

### Program Information:

- NIFA will fund Builders of the Future (BOF) in the maximum amount of \$25,000 per year.
- Applicant will be required to provide a 1:1 match in the first year, a 1.25:1 match in the second year a 1.5:1 match in the third year and 1.75:1 match in the fourth year and a 2:1 match in the fifth year.
- Partner funding will be renewable annually for an additional 4 years (for a total of 5 years), subject to funding availability and progress toward the stated goals and objectives.
- Trades to be included as potential options in the Program:
  - Electrical
  - Plumbing
  - HVAC
  - Carpentry
  - [add as relevant]

## **C. Other considerations:**

NIFA reserves the right to modify or withdraw the partnership program and may exercise such right at any time and without notice and without liability to any applicant or other parties for their expenses incurred in the preparation of a proposal or otherwise.

NIFA reserves the right to reject any applications that do not correspond with NIFA's current housing priorities as identified by the NIFA Board.

## **D. Community support/engagement:**

### TNT Program Partners will:

- Engage with area contractors to determine areas of highest need,
- Create opportunities for real world student experiences such as summer internships, apprenticeships
- Work with area non-profits, schools, businesses, and governments to develop area and community specific plans.

- Obtain match funding for the Program from community or private foundations, trade organizations such as Homebuilders and Realtors and other governmental programs.

### **E. Identified Goals/Objectives of the TNT Partnership:**

What goals/objectives do you wish to accomplish through the Partnership

To stabilize construction trade programs in both the Supply Side and Demand Side Partners.

To increase the number of Demand Side Partner schools being served

To create a sustainable plan to continue funding the Programs post pilot, and

To increase the number of students enrolled in (Demand Side) and graduating from (Supply Side) these programs, creating additional workforce in the local areas served by the TNT Partners.

### **F. Performance Measurements**

Complete Exhibit A to identify the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) with which you will measure progress with the NIFA partnership within your organization (i.e. community impact). These indicators must be measure or assessed at least semi annually and reported to NIFA.

### **G. Additional Documentation**

Documentation of current non-profit status and Internal Revenue Service designation.

Documentation of current Higher Learning Commission accreditation status.

Documentation of current Board of Director composition on a member-by-member basis and a list of all paid staff designated as a teacher of the construction trade, stating their position and title.

Documentation of Board of Director/Governing Board liability insurance in a minimum amount of \$1,000,000.

Documentation of the match contribution(s) and source(s) thereof.

### **H. Reporting**

At least semi-annually, have the Recipient's president, trades instruction staff, a representative of the Nebraska Community Foundation, and any staff coordinating and managing the Teaching Nebraska Trades grant program as delegated by the Recipient, participate in a meeting with NIFA staff to review goals, objectives and strategies, and to report progress in accomplishing same. Such meetings may be conducted remotely via a platform agreed upon by all parties; and

At least quarterly, submit a brief written report to NIFA demonstrating that it is actively pursuing and achieving its goals and objectives as outlined in the Strategic Plan and is making quantifiable progress towards its mission within its service area. NIFA may also require recipients to provide/upload data relating to the Program and/or KPIs annually or in conjunction with the quarterly reports; and

Upon request of NIFA, participate in seminars and/or presentations (including Board meetings) related to the Program not more than twice per year.

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Initials



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# **TNT Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

## Exhibit A – Identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

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Increase number of high schools participating in the trade programs by at least (% or #) \_\_\_\_\_. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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Increase number of high school students participating in the trade programs by at least (% or #) \_\_\_\_\_. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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Increase number of college students participating in the trade programs by at least (% or #) \_\_\_\_\_. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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Increase number of students applying for scholarships to trade programs (% or #) \_\_\_\_\_. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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Create relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ of trade company(s) for mentoring/donation of materials to trade programs

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Create/fill \_\_\_\_\_ trade program instructor positions by \_\_\_\_\_

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Retain \_\_\_\_\_ trade instructors on annual basis

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Increase number of program degree/certificates/diplomas to \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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\_\_\_\_\_% Retention of trade program graduates to the community/service area

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Create relationship with early college programs to increase (\_\_\_\_%) of students entering trade programs

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Increase retention rate (\_\_\_\_\_) of students enrolled in trades program per academic year. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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Increase job placement for trade program students by \_\_\_\_\_ an academic year. Baseline is \_\_\_\_\_.

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# **TNT Annual Report Checklist**

# Teaching Nebraska Trades (TNT) Annual Report Checklist

Due at the end of each contract year

Signed letter of request for next 12 months funding

Summary report demonstrating that it is actively pursuing and achieving its goals, objectives as outlined in the Program Guidelines and is making quantifiable progress towards its mission within its service area. Include progress towards your Key Performance Indicators. (No more than 2 pages)

Updated narrative outlining goals and objectives for the next 12 months

Documentation of current Board of Director's composition on a member-by-member basis and a list of all paid staff designated as a teacher of the construction trade, stating their position and title

Documentation of current Higher Learning Commission accreditation status

Documentation of Board of Director liability insurance in a minimum amount of \$1,000,000

Documentation of the match contribution(s) and source(s)

A general accounting of how NIFA funds have been utilized during the 12 months of activity

Updated budget outlining, in general terms, how the NIFA funds and matching funds may be utilized in the next 12 months

*All documents must be submitted to NIFA for review and approval prior to any disbursement of the next installment of funding.*

*NIFA funds shall not be used for, or in connection with, any Federal, State or local lobbying activities.*



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## Media Coverage

## \$25,000 grant will help nurture new crop of future rural homebuilders

By Cindy Gonzalez World-Herald staff writer  
Jun 28, 2020

A new crop of rural youths will get training in the homebuilding trades thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the Renaissance Nebraska Project.

The gift will help expand the Omaha-based “Builders of the Future” training program — which is now offered in several urban schools — into some of the state's rural high schools.

Spokesman Tim Kenny said the mission of the Nebraska Rural Renaissance group, started more than 15 years ago by a group of bird-hunter friends, is to promote and strengthen small towns in Nebraska. Members are hitting retirement age and wanted to pass what was left in their coffers to a nonprofit. Their funds are donated or raised through events, and include no taxpayer dollars, Kenny said.



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The Renaissance group chose Builders of the Future, which committed to extending training into nonmetro high schools.

Professionals in the construction field serve as mentors to the program’s budding builders, who get hands-on experience by building playhouses, high-tech chicken coops and other structures. The program also has a “Train the Trainers” arm that prepares instructors.

Kenny, also director of the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, said the Renaissance group sees housing as a way to help grow communities, and homebuilding as a career that could keep young people in rural areas.

## 11 key developments around the Omaha metro area

### Heartwood Preserve



ONYX Automotive in January became the first business to launch operations on the 500-acre redevelopment site poised to become a mecca of office, housing and entertainment venues. Under construction are office campuses for local business biggies including Applied Underwriters, Valmont

## HHS looks to build houses as added learning experience

Will Vraspir [wvraspir@hastingstribune.com](mailto:wvraspir@hastingstribune.com)

Mar 16, 2023

Hastings Public Schools is looking to offer students a chance at first-hand construction experience by building a house, which also will provide extra space for the high school.

Daniel Birnie, an industrial technology teacher at Hastings High School, presented the idea on Thursday during the Hastings Board of Education work session.

Birnie said the industrial technology area discovered a problem with classroom space. This year, the school added three new teachers in the area, with two of the teachers sharing a classroom.

When the weather is nice, he takes the junior and senior construction students outdoors to work on projects, such as a building at the Hastings Middle School near the community garden.

But when it's windy or cold outside, Birnie ends up sharing a classroom with another teacher. Though classes are capped at 18 students each, he said, there are 114 students using a shared classroom over four periods that should have no more than 72 students.

"I came to Jeff (Schneider, superintendent) about creating a classroom," Birnie said. "My proposal is that we can build a house."

During warmer weather months, students would work on creating a house frame. Once the frame is complete, students could work in the building when it's colder outside.

And there is precedent for the idea. Schools in Kearney and Grand Island also build houses. Construction students at Central Community College-Hastings build houses, and Birnie said he plans on working with instructors there to develop the program at HHS.

He plans to take the next year to work out the details of the project, but would like to find property on which to build a house for the 2024-25 school year.

"It will cost money, but it's recoverable money," he said.

The first student-built house would be sold, and the proceeds of the sale would be used to fund materials for a second home, and so on, to keep the program going. The concept is modeled from Habitat for Humanity.

Some work will have to be subcontracted out, such as the basement and foundation, plumbing, electrical and most drywall, but students will be involved in other aspects of construction.

There may be some lag time between the construction of a house and its purchase, but Birnie believes that will be minimal.

“I think there’s a huge demand that will help get these sold when we get to that,” he said.

After talking with Michael Krings, executive director of the Hastings Economic Development Corp., Birnie said the community of Hastings needs to add 1,100 homes by 2026 to meet the increasing housing demand.

The school would plan to produce homes that would cost \$150,000 to \$225,000, a price range that is lacking in the community. When Birnie checked in January, he said there were only 19 homes available in Hastings priced less than \$250,000.

And if the house doesn’t sell right away, he said, the school district could use the home as a rental to entice teachers to join HPS.

Schneider said he believes the idea is financially sound for the district. The goal would be to make a little money off each sale in order to continue the program as a classroom experience each year.

“It’s not going to be a money maker, but we’re probably not going to lose money,” he said. “I’m confident if we can build simple homes, we can get our money back.”

The board’s regular meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday.

In other business, the board is scheduled to:

- Conduct a student fee policy hearing and approve student fees for 2023-24
- Consider a foreign travel request for a 2024 France trip
- Consider approval of a tentative graduation list
- Consider a custodial supply bid Consider the purchase of security cameras for the high school
- Consider the purchase of an intercom system at the high school
- Consider bids for window purchases
- Consider the addition of a full-time position being added for an athletic trainer
- Consider a wage increase for classified staff for 2023-24

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**Will Vraspir**

Crime and courts reporter