

Cosmetologist: District needs barber program**Slug:** LANNWS-06-10-23 BARBER PROGRAM**Print depth:** 36.15 (5387 characters)**Start date/time:** Apr 19, 2023 05:58 PM**Section tags:** nc-lan
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hjones@thelancasternews.com**Content**

A local cosmetologist and owner of a hair-styling academy wants the school district to add a barber program to its vocational training.

Melissa Jones Horton, owner and CEO of Unique Hair Design and Unique Hair Design Academy, said she has asked Lancaster County School District to expand the cosmetology program to include a barber program so that more students can join.

Horton said she's been asking the school board for the barbering expansion for the last 10 years, through the district's last three superintendents — Dr. Pat Burns, Dr. Gene Moore and Dr. Jonathan Phipps.

"I've also asked all high school principals," she said.

The district's cosmetology program is run by the Lancaster County Career Center, under the Human Services section, which also includes culinary and family and consumer sciences courses.

Horton said the cosmetology program has a waiting list of students wanting to join, and adding a barber program would allow more students to become licensed. The cosmetology course offers just 20 seats at a time, and is open to students from all four county high schools.

The cosmetology course is a two-year program, which Horton said limits enrollment to once every two years. When students drop out mid-program, that spot stays vacant until the current class graduates and new students can join.

"The students have to get in both programs, barber and cosmetology, and you have to get a 1,500-hour credit," Horton said. "If you don't start at the beginning, that sort of knocks you out for your high school career."

According to Horton, there are 300 licensed cosmetologists and barbers working in salons across the county. She said there is only one salon that is fully staffed. Horton said this shows the growing need for cosmetologists and barbers county and statewide.

Horton also said that creating a barber program might invite more boys to pursue a career in hair, as it helps lessen the stereotype of being in a female-dominated environment.

“I noticed all of the barber programs in the lower state from Columbia down, they have programs and also in the Spartanburg in the upstate,” Horton said. “They have more barber programs in the public schools than we do here in Lancaster.”

Lancaster County Career and Technology Education Director Rodney Miller agrees that a barber program would be useful, but said it is not possible at the moment.

“I want a barbering program at the Career Center in Lancaster County School District,” Miller said. “Our superintendent does, my immediate boss Butch Dutton does, our COO Lydia Quinn — everybody thinks and knows it’s a good idea.”

But Miller said new programs and funding current programs is dependent on many factors, the largest being Perkins V legislation, which provides funding from the federal government for career and technology programs.

“We (also) have to write this comprehensive local needs assessments required by the Office of Career and Technology at the State Department,” Miller said. “We have to get the Department of Commerce involved, (as well as) Lancaster County Chamber of Commerce and Lancaster County Economic Development. You have to get input and data from these government entities.”

Miller said the district has to justify what programs they offer and how the money is being spent.

“The comprehensive local needs assessment says that manufacturing is much more of a need, but I, and my bosses, agree that (the barber program) would be a good fit for certain students,” he said.

Miller said the school board would have to make a serious financial commitment to make it happen.

Student’s view

Felicia Orange, a student at Unique Hair Design Academy since January, is from Kershaw County. A 40-year-old mother, she said this program gave her the much-needed flexibility to pursue her career passion, while also taking care of her family.

“I think expanding her program, if she can get more people on board to help her out, I can see the hair industry, even in the Lancaster area, just being different,” Orange said. “There’s a lot of people out there like myself, that wants to go to school and that need to go to school, but they’re not able to because of their work-life balance.”

Orange said that many hair schools are not affordable, which is another barrier to generating more licensed cosmetologists and barbers in the state.

More stylists needed

Kayla Medlin, general manager of Longitude Inc., a Great Clips franchisee, said staffing at Great Clips locations in Indian Land and Rock Hill are greatly affected by the Lancaster County cosmetology program, as most of their staff come from the county.

“Unfortunately, in South Carolina, we are no longer allowed to have an apprentice license,” Medlin said. “In North Carolina, you can get an apprentice license.”

An apprentice license allows you to start working in a salon after you complete a certain amount of hours. Medlin said this highlights an even greater need for the program in LCSD to expand, as other avenues to become a cosmetologist are limited.

“These hairstylists that are coming out of cosmetology programs, they’re the future of my business,” Medlin said. “Being able to go through a program that’s not going to break your bank and not put you in financial debt, but gives you the success or more success than you would have had with a four-year college degree, I think that’s very important, especially in small areas, like Lancaster County.”

Child images

LANNWS-06-10-23 BARBER PROGRAM 1





LANNWS-06-10-23 BARBER PROGRAM 2





LANNWS-06-10-23 BARBER PROGRAM MUG Melissa Jones Horton





