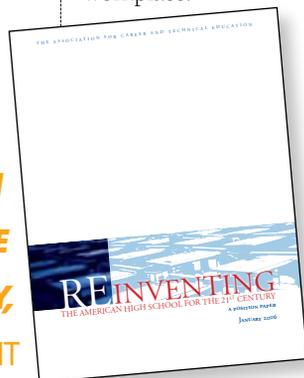


Establishing a Clear System Goal of Career and College Readiness for All Students

THIS ARTICLE IS THE FIRST IN A YEARLONG SERIES THAT WILL MORE CLOSELY EXAMINE THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN ACTE'S HIGH SCHOOL REFORM POSITION STATEMENT, **REINVENTING THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**, AND HIGHLIGHT BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING EACH OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS.



THE FIRST RECOMMENDATION IN ACTE'S high school reform position statement is to establish a clear system goal of career and college readiness for all students. What this means is that the entire education system needs to focus on the goal of having all students graduate from high school fully prepared to participate in postsecondary education and the high-skilled workplace.

Today's economic environment requires highly skilled and adaptable workers who are prepared to continuously learn and innovate in the international marketplace. Therefore, high school students need to be lifelong learners

who are prepared for the changing and "flattening" global economy, no matter their career and education goals.

All students need a strong arsenal of reading, comprehension, reasoning, problem-solving and personal skills to be ready for the world of meaningful postsecondary education and training as well as entry into the high-skilled workplace. Standards should be aligned to the demands of career and college readiness, and all students should be challenged to enroll in a rigorous college and career readiness curriculum.

Extra help, including structured transition services, should be provided to support this curriculum, and opportunities for additional advancement across broad areas should be provided. Traditional academic and career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers must share the goal of preparing students for both

further education and careers.

Many CTE programs from around the country are already working on systems and programs that focus on career and college readiness for all students.

Seamless Transitions

When asked about the unique features of Georgia's Central Educational Center, CEO Mark Whitlock says, "Why all the interest? Simply this: Central Educational Center seamlessly combines academics with CTE . . . high school with college . . . and education with businesses."

Central Educational Center (CEC) is a charter high school in Newnan, Georgia. It operates as a joint-venture partnership between Coweta County Schools, West Central Technical College, and business and industry, providing learners from high school through adulthood a seamless education for life.

CEC has been named a national Model High School, in large part due to its focus on preparing students for both postsecondary education and careers. CEC brings the resources of the technical college system to high school students, creating smooth transitions that make it difficult to tell where the high school education ends and postsecondary opportunities begin.

CEC opened as a publicly-funded charter school in August 2000 to serve students from Coweta County's three high schools. It grew out of a need to raise standards and prepare more students for the demands of postsecondary education and employment.

More than 1,100 high school "team members" attend the school either full time or part time. Most of these students are 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-graders—and while they still take some academic classes at their home high

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ALL STUDENTS SHOULD BE CHALLENGED TO ENROLL IN A RIGOROUS COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS CURRICULUM.

schools, the school is designed to include academic and technical education in a seamless fashion.

CEC ensures that advanced academic courses, such as anatomy and physiology, are imbedded within the technical coursework because businesses require employees to have this knowledge. According to Whitlock, “We can’t see any separation between the academic and the technical, it’s all interrelated. Through integrated CTE programs, we allow students to apply knowledge for better retention and transfer.”

Students may also take dual-enrollment classes in conjunction with West Central Technical College. Approximately 150 students a year take advantage of this opportunity, and many finish a sizeable portion of an associate degree before finishing high school. Because CEC was founded as a partnership and a branch of West Central, these courses are all offered within one building, with high school and technical college instructors working together on curriculum and instruction.

Business Involvement

Another important component of CEC’s

success has been the influence of the business community. From the school’s inception, representatives of local business and industry have been involved in planning and governing. An initial needs assessment was completed by local businesses to show critical needs in occupational areas such as health care, engineering and technology, manufacturing, IT and business.

One of the most important needs was for students to have strong work ethic and employability skills. As a result, Whitlock says, “We focus as much on soft skills (work ethic) as we do on courses, offering a work ethic grade in every class in addition to a course grade. We provide work-based learning opportunities to hundreds of team members each year, providing 470 internships and apprenticeships last year with 185 local businesses.”

This focus on work-based learning is one characteristic of CEC that can be replicated anywhere. It can provide all students, whether or not they invest significant coursework in CTE programs, with exposure to the needs of business and industry; add relevance to academics; and help students see what it means to be “career ready.”



CEC has high expectations for its students’ personal and professional achievement. Those expectations are being met. Academic performance on high school graduation exit exams for disadvantaged students has increased in science, social studies and writing; and the school district’s dropout rate is on the decline. Students leaving this innovative high school are prepared for college and careers, and for a lifetime of success.

Success in North Carolina

In 2004, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley launched the Learn and Earn Initiative to encourage students to remain in high school, earn an associate degree, and prepare for jobs in new and emerging industries.

This initiative, coupled with a smaller learning communities grant from the Department of Education and investments from the Gates Foundation, led administrators in Wake County, North Carolina, to begin examining how their good high schools could become great.

After a visit to the Michael DeBakey High School for Health Professions in Houston, Richard Murphy, Wake County’s senior director for high school programs, said that administrators and community leaders began to ask, “What if . . . ?”



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PHOTO COURTESY OF WAKE EARLY COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND SCIENCES

←← Getting to Know You

Students (left to right) Bradley Holt, Jordan Rose, Keiana Williams, and Heather and Lilia Hernandez attend orientation at Wake Early College of Health and Sciences, which opens Fall 2006.

Out of this was born the Wake Early College of Health and Sciences (WECHS), set to open in August 2006. While early college high schools have been a priority of the Learn and Earn Initiative, WECHS is unique in that it involves not only the local community college, Wake Technical Community College (WakeTech), but also WakeMed Health and Hospitals, whose Raleigh campus shares proximity to WakeTech's Allied Health campus.

WECHS will be located on this campus, providing students with ready access to postsecondary level courses and to the technology and resources the hospital provides. Students will follow the College/University Prep Course of Study and be able to graduate in five years with a high school diploma and an associate degree. The accelerated curriculum will incorporate core academics taught in the context of health sciences with technical training in a diverse range of health care professions.

All of the college credits earned by students enrolled in the WECHS will be tuition free and may be transferable to a four-year institution after completion of the program. If students commit to employment at WakeMed after graduation, the hospital will continue to pay for the completion of further undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Essentially, students who elect to attend WECHS can be assured that their entire postsecondary experience could be free—and that they will have the necessary skills to stay competitive in the health care industry of the future.

Failure is Not an Option

The small student body, which will eventually be no more than 400 students, will allow for personalization of curriculum and for structured extra help. According to Murphy, “Students will not be allowed to fail. We expect students to do well academically, and will provide the support necessary for achievement.”

Some of this support will be provided through an innovative program called PULSE—participation, understanding, learning, service and excellence. PULSE will be offered to all students during a special period every day to provide opportunities for personal guidance, service and leadership, and any extra help students need academically. Students will also be paired with mentors from the hospital who will help guide them through the curriculum, and provide tutoring and special support.

“After hosting the first freshman orientation in June 2006, enthusiasm levels are extremely high and energizing. We have a richly diverse group of entering students, and the response to the school highlights

the idea that when someone in a school knows every student well and will not let them fail, it is an appealing factor,” says Murphy.

The first freshman class of more than 90 students was selected by a blind draw from among students who elected to attend. In the future, the school hopes to raise academic entrance requirements, but to provide more opportunities for students to meet these requirements through structured ninth-grade summer transition programs.

Teachers and administrators at WECHS recognize that the same sets of skills are going to be needed by students in the future, no matter what their goals. Through acceleration and support, they believe that all students can succeed. Many of the elements of the WECHS are being replicated district-wide, with freshman orientations, innovative extra help, and personalized education helping to put all of Wake County's students on a path to career and college readiness.

Both of these programs help students achieve success by preparing them for further education and careers. Through accelerated learning, linkages with post-secondary intuitions and businesses, and the integration of academic and technical skills, as well as many of the other elements described in ACTE's high school reform position statement, CEC and WECHS are helping to reinvent the American high school for the 21st century. **T**



What About Your Program?

ACTE is very interested to learn about other CTE programs and initiatives that strive to prepare all students to succeed in college and the workforce. In addition, we are looking for information about CTE programs that work toward achieving the remainder of ACTE's high school reform recommendations. If you teach or administer such a CTE program, please send information to Alisha Hyslop and Seth Turner at ahyslop@acteonline.org and scturner@acteonline.org.