

Spotlight Strategy: Provide Extra Help to Strengthen Academic and/or Technical Skill Achievement

Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center

The 2007-2008 school year brought significant change to Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center (CACTC) as it transitioned into a comprehensive school. Eleventh and twelfth grade students now attend the CTC all day, where they receive instruction in core academic courses as well as one of the CTC's 14 technical programs. Ninth and tenth grade students continue to attend the CTC on a part-time, half-day basis, where they receive instruction only in the technical programs. With this change, CACTC is working to increase students' performance on the 11th grade Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). This prompted the leadership team to find more effective ways to prepare students for the PSSA tests.

Because the sole sending school did not meet its target achievement levels for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidelines, the leadership team realized that CACTC might face the same fate unless it implemented new strategies to support and bolster student achievement. The leadership team wanted to be proactive in developing a school improvement plan.

In 2009, the leadership team took action to strengthen math and literacy skills among students and to help CACTC meet NCLB requirements. With the guidance of a curriculum specialist consultant from Intermediate Unit 1, a public educational service agency that provides leadership and services to the schools of Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, the team decided to adopt the Learning Communities initiative that the sending school had already implemented.

The leadership team first analyzed the results of the 4Sight assessment for all eleventh grade students and identified students who were in need of additional academic support in reading/English and math. These students were further evaluated based on their course work and Terra Nova test results. They were then assigned to one of three Learning Communities, each grouped according to level: below basic to low basic, medium basic to low proficient and medium proficient to advanced. The leadership team also reorganized the schedule to accommodate an extra period every Friday during which students would attend their Learning Community.

During the weekly Learning Community taught by math and English instructors, students participate in learning activities that focus on math and literacy skills. Most of the lessons, which are drawn from widely accepted student tutoring programs such as Study Island, are conducted in small groups and address the anchors and learning standards covered on the PSSAs. For example, students may write summaries of reading passages, complete reading comprehension activities or review specific math skills. Learning support instructors provide additional assistance to those students who require more intensive remediation.

While the Learning Communities are a new initiative at CACTC, the leadership team believes they will improve student confidence and increase motivation, which will in turn boost the technical center's academic performance.

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Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center (CACTC) is located in Connellsville, Pennsylvania. It enrolls approximately 550 students in grades 9 through 12 and provides 14 career and technical education programs. While students in grades 9 and 10 attend on a part-time basis, eleventh and twelfth grade students attend CACTC on a full-time basis. CACTC serves the Connellsville School District.