

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

Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center

At Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center (GACTC), the leadership team takes great pride in the extensive support and guidance provided to all students. As Executive Director Dr. Lanny Ross stated, there is a “guidance approach” to operating the career and technology center (CTC) that strongly influences the types of practices and policies in place at GACTC and encourages staff members to develop mentoring relationships with students.

Members of the guidance department include the guidance chairman, three counselors, two special education transition coordinators, a cooperative education coordinator, a first aid assistant and 10 teacher aides. Each of the CTC’s 27 secondary programs is assigned to one of the three guidance counselors. In most cases, the same counselor remains with that program and student group during their three years at the CTC.

Guidance team members spend significant time in the classroom to assist students, and they also meet every two weeks to discuss issues such as IEPs, scheduling, attendance incentives, career and technical student organizations and other school-wide events. According to Dr. Ross, the classroom presence of support staff and the regular meetings among the guidance team help ensure that GACTC students most likely receive “more personal attention” than students at a typical comprehensive high school.

School administrators and the guidance team place a particular emphasis on sustaining active supports for special education students so that these students may achieve their full potential both during high school and upon graduation. These supports are largely implemented through the work of the special education transition coordinators and the teacher aides. The transition coordinators make sure students receive the appropriate type and extent of special education services required for them to be successful. One of the coordinators is employed by Altoona High School, but she works full-time at GACTC where she serves only special education students from Altoona High School (which accounts for approximately half of the special education caseload at GACTC). The other coordinator is on the GACTC staff and serves the special education students from the other six sending schools.

To help monitor the extent to which students with IEPs receive adapted instruction and instructors apply these adaptations, the leadership team uses a monitoring system. The ten teacher aides maintain a daily log that documents three behaviors related to the level of support provided to special education students and their achievement:

- How much time the assistant works with each student;
- Which adaptations classroom instructors implement for special education students and how often they implement them and
- The extent to which students complete required assignments and classroom work.

The aides submit the logs to the Guidance Secretary at the end of each marking period. According to the guidance department chairman, the special education transition coordinators use the logs “to determine which students need assistance and at what level.” The information in the logs also serves as a starting

point to discuss with instructors and aides how to use various instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of students.

According to the leadership team, the guidance department and the classroom instructors buy-in to the value of the monitoring system. The system plays a key role in helping the leadership and instructional staff to provide students the necessary support to reach their full learning potential.

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Greater Altoona Career and Technology Center (GACTC) is located in Altoona, Pennsylvania. As a part-time career and technology center, it enrolls approximately 1,000 students in grades 9 through 12 and provides 27 career and technical education programs. (GACTC is structured for grades 10 to 12, but it enrolls select ninth graders to attend as a dropout prevention measure.) GACTC serves seven school districts.