

## Schools Helping With Career Choices

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A new push is under way to get students thinking about and preparing for careers from their first day of high school. Waterloo Community Schools and Hawkeye Community College signed sharing agreements to create "career pathways" in the fields of teaching and information technology.

The pathways outline recommended high school courses for those interested in the career fields. By junior and senior year, students will be able to take some pertinent first-year HCC classes to receive dual high school and college credit. Students who choose a pathway are not locked into that career field if they change their mind later because the specific classes also will generally prepare them for college.

Nationally, the two-year college retention rate was 55 percent as of 2002, according to statistics compiled by the Education Commission of the States. "The concept here is to give students success while they're in high school that they can do college work," said Russ Clark, the school district's career and technical education coordinator. Sixty-eight percent of Waterloo's 2005 graduates told the district they planned to attend college. But Clark believes many students who talk about going to college never enroll. Of those who do enroll, a significant portion drop out --- especially at community colleges. Many of those students may not have been adequately prepared for college during high school.

The National Center for Education Statistics found that 61 percent of high school seniors who graduated in 1992 and first attended a two-year college over the next eight years completed at least one remedial course.

"We need to make high school so that it is helping the students point toward the future," said Clark. "It's not a matter of helping students march across the stage for graduation. .... Our goal is to prepare them for where they're going next."

"We've already been doing this with the career academies," said Linda Allen, HCC's vice president of academic affairs. "But what we really want to do is partner with the schools and reach back to ninth grade." The region's high school juniors and seniors have been enrolling in HCC's career academies for manufacturing since 2000 and nursing since 2003. The academies include paid internships and college credit courses that give students an early start on an associate's degree in those fields. Students who follow a particular pathway also would have the technical preparation to go right into the work force if they choose not to get a college education after high school.

The pathways approach was started more than three years ago by the League for Innovation in the Community College to create "a coherent, articulated sequence of both rigorous academic and career courses beginning in ninth grade" that lead to an occupational area. A total of 150 community colleges in 40 states and two provinces of Canada are now involved, including five in Iowa.

President Mike Morrison said Northern Iowa Area Community College has done 13 studies in recent years that compared dual-credit and regular college courses that had the same textbooks and requirements. In 12 of the studies, the high schoolers' performances were "at least comparable" to the college students. "They tend to be highly motivated, higher ACT scores, academically gifted students," Morrison said. "So it's not surprising that they do very well on the college level courses."

"We are really calling this the start of the next major community college movement," said Warford. He noted there was a time when community colleges wanted to distance themselves from high schools, but this initiative is changing that.

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