
Aurora Community – College and Career Readiness Activities

Redefining the High School to College Transition in Illinois

A long and productive partnership exists between School District 129 and Waubensee Community College to foster the successful transition of secondary students to post-secondary education. It is relevant to share a unique early college project from the recent past from which both institutions gained valuable experience. In the spring of 2007, the Dunham Fund, a local philanthropic organization, provided a grant for juniors from both West Aurora High School and East Aurora High School to enroll in dual credit college classes at the Waubensee Aurora Campus. The most salient characteristic of the student population was that the students were not “typical” dual-credit students, i.e. “the best and the brightest.” They were students most in need of help who represented first generation, minority, and/or low income demographics, possessing an average GPA of 2.5. The students were enrolled in two college courses per semester (fall and spring) as juniors and seniors. Upon completion of the program, students earned 24 college credits with a course completion rate which exceeded the overall college benchmark. These results were truly remarkable. Furthermore, the high school and the college worked together to establish core values to meet the needs of all students.

Despite the success of this early college academy, the partner institutions were not able to sustain the effort without external funding. District 129 reevaluated the situation and made the decision to incorporate dual credit coursework into their curriculum and enhance the college readiness/preparedness environment within the high school. Consequently, District 129 worked closely with the college to identify which of their faculty were qualified to teach college coursework. One aspect of the new strategy was to test high school students after three years of math and English to place them into the appropriate college readiness course. The second aspect was to offer general education/IAI courses. The process of evaluating faculty, arranging for on-site placement testing, academic planning, and counseling took more than a year to complete. However, once launched, the program at West Aurora High School “took off” in a big way.

The following table is an enrollment summary of dual credit and college readiness coursework taught by West Aurora faculty in the last four academic years.

Year	Semester	Dual Credit Classes	College Readiness Classes	Enrollment (Registrations)
2011-2012	Fall	3	0	59
	Spring	2	0	34
2012-2013	Fall	14	12	564
	Spring	8	14	403
2013-2014	Fall	19	23	936
	Spring	19	19	744
2014-2015	Fall	20	15	759
	Spring	23	12	606

With this growth and expansion, West Aurora High School and Waubensee Community College are pleased with the direction in which the project is going. The College is committed to continued growth of the program in order to ensure that every West Aurora high school student has an experience to properly prepare them for post-secondary transition, whether they attend Waubensee Community College or any other post-secondary institution. Our goal is to prepare them for success.