NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Narratives in South Carolina College and Career Readiness

A Collection of Case Studies Highlighting Promising Practices

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

We are thrilled to introduce the third in a series of working papers developed by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. The partnership between The Center of Excellence for College and Career Readiness and the National Resource Center began in 2014 when the Center was initially funded by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. Although the National Resource Center's work had focused primarily on student transition and success in college, we believed their insights would be invaluable to this new Center, which focused on helping students before their transition into college and the workplace. For the past three years, the National Resource Center has supported the work of the Center by compiling an overview of the state of college and career readiness in South Carolina, surveying schools across the state, and following up with those that have particularly promising programs and initiatives designed to help students prepare for post-secondary success.

Following up on survey results, the National Resource Center solicited case studies and conducted interviews to answer the question "How do educators, counselors, and school leaders describe their efforts in administering and delivering college and career readiness programs?" The resulting report is, in part, a collection of stories—from administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and community members who have much to teach us about preparing students for success beyond high school. Here you will read the stories of 11 institutions in South Carolina that detail the efforts, successes, and challenges of working to prepare students for success in post-secondary endeavors.

More than ever, our students need to see themselves as lifelong learners who can adapt to new circumstances, build upon existing skills, and transfer what they know to different contexts. Post-secondary education, although still a luxury for many, is a necessity for high school graduates today. In this report, you will learn about programs that prepare students for these challenges. You'll find common themes throughout—the importance of students taking responsibility for their education, the value of infusing soft skills into the curriculum and life of school, the necessity of a growth mindset, the high expectations that teachers have for their students, and the value of listening to both students and parents and responding with programs that address their concerns. Further, you'll be intrigued by how these schools have updated traditional methods of preparation and developed new approaches to meet the needs of their students.

The Center is proud of our partnership with the National Resource Center, and we are thankful to Dory Hoffman, Jasmin Chung, and Dallin George Young for their thoughtful and enthusiastic commitment to their work on this report. We hope you are inspired by the wonderful efforts going on in South Carolina schools.

Sincerely,

Meredith Love & Matthew Nelson
Directors, Center of Excellence for College and Career Readiness at Francis Marion University

Calhoun County High School

At a Glance - Calhoun County High School

Data Collection Method: Case Study   School District: Calhoun County
Written by: Cynthia T. Johnson   Participant Title: Principal
Number of Students: 475   School Website: *http://cchs.ccpsonline.net/*
Grades: 9-12

Description of Programs and Partnerships

Many years ago, Calhoun County High School (CCHS) stakeholders recognized a need to encourage students to become successful, productive citizens. Teachers and staff forged many opportunities to improve students' academic performance, including after-school tutoring; academic prep classes; Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), a one-to-one technology initiative; Project Lead the Way; Top Saints recognition; fine arts expansion; and Jobs for America's Graduates.

A partnership with the local technical college (Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College) has significantly impacted our students' efforts to become more college- and career-ready. This is a middle college program designed to allow students to earn college-transferrable credits; more than 100 juniors and seniors participate annually. Many students have entered college with at least 30 semester hours, and one accelerated student entered college last fall with enough hours to be considered a college junior. The student success rate in the middle college is 93%. This partnership stands out as exemplary in moving our students toward the college and career readiness (CCR) goals.

Our overall school goal is for 100% of graduates to be college- and career-ready. That said, each class sets its own goals for success at the beginning of each school year. Those goals aim for success on high-stakes examinations as well as in attendance and on-time graduation. Guidance counselors offer assistance with college and scholarship applications and sponsor a Free Application for Federal Student Aid night to assist parents with financial aid applications.

Implementing the advisement program was one of the turning points in the learning community of CCHS. Students can discuss CCR initiatives, explore different careers and colleges, and set CCR goals during grade-level meetings. Student data are shared and discussed during advisement with each grade level. Students look at trends and then develop grade-level goals based on the data. Career counselors use advisement time to discuss occupational outlooks, entry-level requirements, soft skills, and salaries for different careers. Student

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behavior at CCHS could be classified as excellent, with an expulsion rate of less than 2%, a dropout rate of less than 2%, and an overall retention rate of less than 5%. The number of classroom disciplinary referrals is minimal.

School leaders spend a great deal of time discussing soft skills and infusing those into the daily lives of CCHS students. An example of this commitment was demonstrated after our teachers spent a day at the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. The faculty and staff's commitment to CCR was enhanced by the opportunity to infuse *Essential Rules* used by the academy to prepare students for the real world. These rules included making eye contact when speaking to someone, respecting the opinions of others, showing appreciation, following established rules, the importance of honesty, and showing responsibility.

After reviewing student achievement data, student needs, assessment data, and the school-wide goal, the administration implemented SAINTS Success. This initiative provides a smaller setting for more one-to-one CCR counseling. SAINTS Success is embedded into the master schedule at the end of the day and does not infringe on instructional time. This time is used to assist students with reading, character education, CCR, and tutoring by content-area teachers. Freshmen can also receive tutoring after school.

The school's demographic composition is about 75% African American, 19% Caucasian, and less than 6% Hispanic. Most of the workforce in the county is agricultural, although there are a few industries in the northern portion. The lack of small businesses forces residents to work and shop in other counties. Being a rural, high-poverty school, college and industry partnerships are vital to fulfilling CCR initiatives.

Description of Vision and Goals

The district mission says it all: "Empower. Compete. Succeed." CCHS is located in a rural agricultural area of South Carolina where 74% of the student population is designated as impoverished. In 2005, the school was designated as unsatisfactory by the state Department of Education, and a new principal was hired. She held high expectations for all students and accepted no excuses from any stakeholder regarding student success. I followed in her footsteps. The first priority in the journey to prepare students for college and careers was gaining the support of all stakeholders. None were excluded in the process of setting a school-wide goal based on student data and expectations for improvement. Students had to know that stakeholders believed in them and their potential to excel.

It was also essential for the students to understand the important role they played in the success of the school and community. The administration capitalized on advisement time to help students understand what the data meant and their role in creating it. Students turned their knowledge into a challenge to improve over the previous year. Once setting a school-wide goal and determining class goals became part of the CCHS formula for success, the school climate shifted in a positive direction. School attendance increased, grade retention decreased, disciplinary referrals dropped, graduation rates increased, college enrollment improved, and the number of scholarships increased. The community became more supportive through School Improvement Council meetings. Efforts to engage, motivate, and move our learning community forward focused on revising curricula, pacing guides, and assessments. Intense staff development focused on improving instruction and understanding students.

Partnerships supported an increase in CCR opportunities. Career choices expanded through agreements with a nearby school district. A partnership was forged with the local technical college to support accelerated learning. Middle college enrollment ballooned from 50 to over 180 students, experiencing a 93% success rate. Many of our students enter state-supported colleges or universities as first-semester sophomores, while others are employed according to their career credentials.

Through collaborative efforts, performance on state and national examinations, and athletic achievements, the 2016 school year was the exemplar of our school's focus of "Offering the Total Package." Approximately 107 graduates earned over $2.5 million in scholarships. A graduation rate of 92% exceeded the state and national average. This was partially because of programs that supported our self-contained population in pursuing a high school diploma, and early intervention for at-risk students. A variety of interventions, including online learning, at-risk counseling, and administrator mentors for at-risk seniors, contribute to the exceptional rate.

The staff makes efforts to locate students who miss classes through personal contacts and social workers.

In addition, seniors instituted an initiative, *No Senior Left Behind,* in which the class worked to make certain that all seniors graduated. Students also excelled in performance on the ACT test and ACT WorkKeys. CCHS received the 2015 Palmetto Gold award for closing the achievement gap, and *U.S. News* and *World Report* recognized us with a Bronze award for the 10th consecutive year. Our educational environment has evolved into a true professional learning environment with immense motivation.

CCHS's success is due to the spirit of teamwork. In my nine years as principal, I have learned that empowering all stakeholders to actively participate in a shared vision is a recipe for success. These factors are essential in establishing and maintaining a team and being able to offer a total package. This learning community works hard to prepare our students to compete in a global society.

Assessment and Evaluation

The CCHS family fosters an "I care" attitude with students. Students are dedicated to their individual success and the success of the entire school. Last year, 100% of students completed college applications and more than half enrolled in a college or university. School counselors are proud that well over 75% of the graduating class pursues career goals of their choice. Students maintain high expectations for learning, evidenced by their willingness to report troubling social and instructional issues. Students graduate and come back in times of distress or for guidance and recognition. We believe in them.

Faculty and staff work together to offer test-preparation classes for all students participating in statewide testing. CCHS also engages an expert to work with students to overcome test anxiety. Since stakeholders recognize that student assessment results are correlated to classroom instruction, the school uses the Effective Learning Environments Observation Test (ELEOT) observation tool, which focuses solely on student involvement in classroom instruction. Teachers have learned to "let go and let students" be more accountable for their learning.

Assessment results for CCHS have been formidable. In 2014, the ACT recognized the school for closing its achievement gap, and in 2016, CCHS was recognized as the only state school to show improvement in every tested area of the ACT. Teachers use data books to identify school and student weaknesses and set goals to address specific areas through professional development. The administration has changed teaching assignments, provided intensive remediation for teachers with low scores on high-stakes tests, and supplemented services in mathematics by adding a teacher at the freshman level. Students are challenged and offered incentives to meet state mandates for individual performance.

Our learning community faces two challenges in CCR. Overall success would improve if the test data provided more definitive information to address specific weaknesses, but the greatest challenge comes in supporting students as they make career choices. Age and maturity are critical to making wise choices, even though many job opportunities of tomorrow do not exist today. CCHS does not focus on outside evaluation, opinions, or what *should be.* We focus on placement results and what *can be.* No one expects a school like ours to overcome obstacles such as poverty, funding shortages, or insufficient resources, but we do, and we have. Two state superintendents of education visited over the past three years. The first was shocked that we made such a difference in the lives of our students, and the second came to validate our efforts. We are not the norm because we maintain high expectations for every stakeholder and accept no excuses.

The secret to our success lies with the school family. First, the entire staff believes in the possibility of excellence. The overwhelming commitment, however, comes from our student body. They believe in the idea that we can be excellent, be the best, and overcome obstacles. Students know the school community believes in them, and they perform. The local community is probably the most reluctant to buy in to this vision. However, our data speaks for itself. Enrollment has increased, and we now constantly have to verify residency for new students.

Description of Student Impact

CCHS's commitment to CCR has transformed our learning community. Students walk, talk, and perform

with a sense of pride. As stated previously, the 92% graduation rate has been higher than the state and national rates for the past five years. ACT WorkKeys gold and silver passage rates are almost 90%, among the highest in our geographical area. Collaborative partnerships with a neighboring technology center and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College have afforded our students enormous academic and career course selection.

The CCHS learning community works as a team to ensure that every child is successful. Everyone plays a vital role, from the custodian to the principal. The advisee/advisor program was implemented to ensure the success of every child. Each student is known by at least one adult. The program allows the opportunity for intense discussions between students and teachers about the school's data, grade-level goals, academics, character education, careers, college selections, soft skills, life skills, and social and emotional issues. The results of the program not only increased student achievement but empowered students to become active participants in their education. The students took ownership in developing individual and grade-level goals. They defend CCHS data and critique the data of surrounding schools. It is a challenge to remain on top, but this is accomplished through grade-level meetings and motivational talks from individuals inside and outside the school community.

To ensure the success of English speakers of other languages (ESOL), special needs, and at-risk students, intensive staff development focused on working with children of color, those in poverty, and those with special needs. Tiered interventions and smaller classroom sizes impacted the success of our special populations. Recently, two students identified as severely at risk of not graduating on time were assigned to an administrator. Discussions during the weekly individual meetings focused on attendance, grades, post-secondary plans, school-to-work plans, and completing assignments and related applications. This intervention has been successful.

Our ultimate goals are to help our students see possibilities beyond high school, to instill hope, and to foster perseverance so they can become productive citizens. Parents and students are generally grateful for the support and assistance provided to their students. They are especially happy on graduation day!

Parent information nights focus on CCR initiatives, ACT WorkKeys, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test (ASVAB), and Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) performance. Parents, students, and community members are invited to College & Career Days, where local businesspeople speak about their careers and college representatives discuss enrollment requirements. Every child, along with their parent, completes an Individual Graduation Plan (IGP), which entails the selection of a career major and course progression.

After reviewing the data and several meetings with stakeholders, staff understood the need for more interventions in an effort to move our students to the next level of success. After-school sessions would have been ideal; however, when working with children of poverty in a rural area, transportation is a major obstacle. Therefore, the SAINTS Success Period was implemented. This time is embedded into the master schedule at the end of the day.

SAINTS Success is used to assist students with reading, character education, and tutoring, but more importantly, students and teachers have an opportunity to discuss students' career and college goals. The CCR conversations allow teachers to learn more about students' lives and cultures, ultimately building strong relationships. There is not a great deal of parental support because they are working to provide a living for their families. The faculty and staff understand the key to overcoming poverty is education.

Clover High School

At a Glance - Clover High School

Data Collection Method: Interview
Number of Students: 2,065
Grades: 9-12
School Website: *http://www.clover.k12.sc.us/Domain/16*

School District: Clover School District
Participant: Jennifer Forest
Participant Title: Counseling Department Chair

Description of Programs and Partnerships

Clover High School staff members are particularly proud of their college and career readiness (CCR) programs because of the way events are structured surrounding *Individualized Graduation Conferences* (IGC). Though South Carolina mandates IGCs for all students in grades 9-12, Clover High students benefit from an innovative approach that sets them apart from other high schools. Staff talk with parents and provide a variety of information at evening meetings. The school invites guest speakers from partner colleges and businesses that offer student apprenticeships in the junior year. Presenting this information to students two years before their apprenticeship allows them to explore college and career options to ensure they make the most of the apprenticeship experience.

In the fall, Clover holds a college fair, inviting speakers from mostly four-year colleges, a few two-year colleges, and the military. The event is required for students, and in the 2016-2017 school year more than 80 colleges attended. Senior-year students who are not yet decided on college have their own fair, created to focus on two-year colleges and a variety of career opportunities. Area employers are invited to both college fairs and offer summer employment to students, which can help them pay for the rising cost of college tuition and fees. In addition, Clover school counselors meet with all students to focus on finding the right fit for college and career. Other area high schools have also been invited to Clover's college fair, but none have been able to attend because of budget cuts and the price of busing students in.

School counselors also conduct career assessment inventories for each student and act on that information by discussing it during the IGC. Parents are also involved with IGCs, so they can be prepared to keep the college and career preparation conversation going during all four years of high school to craft a plan for their child. Jennifer Forest explains how educators have overcome some of the challenges in implementing the IGCs:

College fairs are helpful to students and parents but they do have their challenges:

We started out doing college fairs on Saturdays because we didn't want to pull students from

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class. After doing it for over three years, we realized some students couldn't come because of transportation. We wrote to Carolina Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (CACROA), who sponsors college fairs around the district. We partnered with Rock Hill because of the geographic distance, but it was difficult to take my students to the CACROA conference at Winthrop University. I asked CACROA if they would put us on their calendar so we could open it up to other students who also weren't able to attend the one at Rock Hill. We have great facilities, so they added us to that schedule and I reach out personally to that college. If I know an alumnus of that college, I'll have them call the admissions office and ask to please come by. We've been doing it for a few years, and I think it's been going really well.

In addition to offering college fairs to all students in grades 9-12, Clover High's CCR practices are highly innovative. The counseling department adjusts CCR requirements to the needs of each student. Although school leaders, educators, and counselors in the "Metrolina" region all have the same goal of success for their students, the needs of students at Clover High are different. Charlotte, a large city just across the N.C. border, has different demographics than Clover, which is more rural. Part of the challenge with delivering college and career fairs in Clover is that some students come from families living in Charlotte suburbs who tend to have college-educated parents, while there is also a sizeable population of first-generation college students.

With such a diverse group of students, how does Clover High meet the needs of its demographics? CCR cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, so Clover's CCR curricula and assessment are catered to each type of student. Clover's programs have also been successful at adjusting to students' parents' experiences and preferences. Some parents want as much information as they can get about future college and career opportunities for their students, so the school publishes that information online. In addition, counselors and educators meet with students one-on-one, as they recognize that not every CCR lesson can be learned online. These one-on-one meetings help students apply the knowledge they have learned online or in class with assistance tailored to their specific needs.

Further, with IGCs, Clover staff realized they were saying the same things to every student over and over, which made them question the one-on-one meeting approach. Staffers now use the counseling department conference room to gather students in small groups for 15-minute conferencing sessions. Here, students can access information from counselors in an iMovie format. Clover's seven counselors schedule six conferences every 30 minutes, until all students are seen. Parents can also view the conferences in iMovie to get information to meet their students' needs. Students and parents are mandated to meet at least once a year throughout high school, adding consistency to the counseling schedule.

In addition to meeting with students in various ways, Clover has a wealth of CCR partnerships. Jennifer Forest, the school's counseling department chair, explained their importance:

We partner with York Technical College and USC Lancaster. Our students can complete their senior year at the technical college or just the second semester. We have someone who works with York Tech to make sure students are developmentally ready even if they're academically ready. We have students doing welding certificate programs. We looked at adding that at Clover High, but it wasn't economically feasible and we need more certified welders in our area. It has been a wonderful opportunity for our students. We partner with USC Lancaster to offer college classes on our campus. We have another partnership that deals with careers [and] offers apprenticeships. The staff at our second partnership has done a great job partnering with businesses in South Carolina and Charlotte, North Carolina. These apprenticeships begin after 11th grade and the summer after 12th grade.

Description of Vision and Goals

Clover High's ongoing CCR projects provide a strong foundation for students preparing for life after college. CCR goals and approaches change based on students' needs. One of the school's CCR goals is to expand its apprenticeship programs, as there is a high need in South Carolina and the country. There are also

apprenticeship programs with a Trident Technical College in Charleston that prepare them to work at Boeing. When a student participates in an apprenticeship, Clover staff connects them with technical colleges and local businesses. The overarching goal for every student is to graduate with a plan for life after high school.

Clover has a good college acceptance rate, with most graduates attending four-year colleges, though some graduates still attend technical schools, such as Midlands Technical College, to work toward more specific careers. The culture of higher education has shifted from high schools' previous focus on college or career. High schools now offer variations, preparing students for both, hence the use of CCR programs. This shift allows more students to earn certificates and associate degrees, opening up a wealth of good employment options.

Description of Assessment and Evaluation

Forest described the ways assessment plays an important role in the progression and impact of CCR programs at Clover High:

> We ask parents after meetings, did the meeting meet your needs, did we advertise it well, etc. For eighth-grade parents coming into ninth grade, we ask them if the meeting helped with their student's transition to college. We usually have a half sheet with a comments section so parents can identify what they need. We also send it out electronically in case there is something we missed. At the end of our IGP, we send out a detailed electronic survey to assess the IGP content and processes. Last year, we registered for an alumni tracker so we can see how well our students are persisting in colleges. There are many different levels of data collection. It's not a formal process yet, but I would love to use our alumni's expertise because we have alumni all over the world doing wonderful things.

Using assessment data, the Clover staff can better understand what is working at the school and what might need reform. On a daily basis, assessment guides how the school's CCR programs function and how staff relates with students' parents. Forest explained the importance of school–parent relationships to students' success. She sends out several lengthy e-mails a year to parents on scholarship information, which is constantly updated. In a special e-mail format, the subject line shows two dollar signs (i.e., "$$") and the name of the scholarship, so these important e-mails are not lost in the barrage of online communication inherent to schools. Keeping up with e-mail also lets the counseling department immediately apply feedback from parents and counter misperceptions they may have about the CCR preparation process.

Of course, not all parent feedback can be incorporated, but the counseling department, faculty, and school administrators keep lines of communication open to help plan for the following year. Students say they appreciate the school's use of e-mail for communications. However, Forest recounts that when students were asked whether Twitter should be used instead of e-mails, and they said, "absolutely not."

While assessment data collection and implementation are vital to successful CCR programs, Forest explains that there are challenges:

> There is a lack of longitudinal data. I would love to see how our students are doing five years down the road and create a more active alumni network. We get data about our students' first semester in college, and we evaluate that data to see how well prepared our students are academically, and that's great. But after that first semester, how are they doing? The National [Student] Clearinghouse has a lot of information regarding persistence, but in terms of how our students are doing in their careers, we have to rely on anecdotal data. At this point, I would love more data like the National [Student] Clearinghouse can provide. I don't know how to go about that, so that's a challenge.

Description of Student Impact

Clover High's students have benefited in many ways from the staff's commitment to college and career readiness. The number of students completing the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) each year has risen because of faculty and staff's dedication to helping students understand the application's importance. This

has not always been the process; several years ago, the number of students completing FAFSA paperwork was not measured. Now that studentaid.gov allows high school counselors to see who has completed the FAFSA, Clover staff can view the data and take action. These data allow school counselors to track students who have not completed FAFSA forms and meet with them individually. FAFSA workshops are available but take place an hour away from most students' homes, so attendance remains low. Clover staff are devoted to these workshops, so the school reached out to local colleges to set up two FAFSA workshops on campus. So far, all of the workshop participants have completed their FAFSA paperwork.

Clover has one of the state's best graduation rates for its type of school. Its college acceptance rates are rising to a good rate for Clover's size and demographics. Yet, Forest explains that school test scores are still a work in progress:

> Our students' SAT and ACT scores are not quite where they should be. We know our academic teachers do some test prep with students, but our students did not have a good goal regarding those test scores. We told our students what scores they needed in order to get into certain institutions and receive certain scholarships. Our test scores rose because we talked about the importance of these scores and talked about the variety of ways our students can do test prep, including online and reasonably priced in-person classes. Because our test scores were holding back our students, I negotiated with companies to lessen the cost of these in-person classes. I don't like to over-emphasize test scores, but if you're being evaluated by colleges on those factors, students need to be aware of those factors. I attribute some of that change to our college and career readiness programs.

Clover faces other difficulties in implementing and assessing CCR. For students, financial aid and the rising cost of college are continuous challenges. There is an overwhelming concern from families regarding the cost burden for tuition, fees, and transportation. The school puts a greater focus on financial aid than it did 10 years ago because of the much higher cost to attend college now. Forest explains that Clover staff faced other challenges when implementing a higher focus on financial aid:

> I had to get over acknowledging that I wasn't a financial aid expert. I had parents coming in with their taxes and asking for help, but it encouraged and forced me to reach out to financial aid offices. I will never be an expert on South Carolina financial aid, but now I have the opportunity to have a more honest conversation with families. We are aware that college is expensive, so we lay out ways to pay those expenses. We had a student who attended our FAFSA nights, and she brought in letters with scholarships, but she was still unable to pay for college. But in March, we began to strategize more financially feasible colleges for her, and she found one and is doing great! I'm convinced that programming and bringing it back to the student level has made a difference in our students' lives.

Powdersville High School

At a Glance - Powdersville High School

Data Collection Method: Interview
Number of Students: 808
Grades: 9-12
School Website: *http://www.anderson1.k12.sc.us/pvhs*

School District: Anderson County 1
Participant: Meagan Scott
Participant Title: School Counselor

Description of Programs and Partnerships

Meagan Scott, a guidance counselor for Powdersville High School, talked highly of her school's college and career readiness programs. The most successful program has been *Advisory*, where students meet with teachers for academic advising for the entirety of a student's academic career—from 10th to 12th grade. In Advisory, teachers are alphabetically matched with students and meet with them three or more times a year. One of the first meetings includes a career inventory and having students think about potential careers, the second meeting focuses on transcripts and the courses needed, and then Advisory and *Career Action Planning Services* (CAPS) rolls into the school's registration program.

During CAPS, parents had the opportunity to get involved with their students' academic plans. Scott said, "We take two days—in fact, we just had it a couple weeks ago, where parents come and that's where they sit down with the advisor and say, 'Here's what your child has been recommended for, here's what they've chosen to do for their classes. Let's make sure that's what you want them to do.'" This past year's CAPS session, Scott said, "was very successful. Parents come in 20-minute rotations and sit down with the advisors and go over it. Then we have all the counselors in there. Administrators are in there in case parents have any questions. It runs very smoothly."

Advisory also has proven successful because of consistency in the teacher-student pairings, especially since a student's advisor will likely also be their homeroom teacher. With this consistency, teachers have taken advantage of the opportunity to get to know their students better—their likes, dislikes, and interests. Scott said Advisory "creates a partnership between the advisor, the student's counselor, the parents—they kind of work together," which in turn makes the program more innovative and successful.

Advisory's partnership with the Career Center also serves as a great college and career readiness program within the school. Although the school did not offer specific career classes, students could take advantage of various programs through the Career Center. Before attending Powdersville High, ninth-graders could tour

the Career Center and be exposed to the programs available to get an idea of how they could take advantage of the center in high school.

Additionally, the high school has a College Decision Day, originally spearheaded by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (SCCHE). This event, which mirrors Athletic Signing Day, is an opportunity for seniors to share where they are going to college and make it a big deal. Students headed into the military, receiving certificates, and working full-time jobs after graduation are also commended on this day. The high school partnered up with the local elementary school to have fifth-graders make signs for the seniors while they envisioned their own College Decision Day. Further, Scott recalled, "The night before, or that morning, we found out that the state superintendent was stopping by our program! That is something our seniors who graduated last year said that was, by far, one of the best things. So now our seniors coming up are asking, 'OK, so when is it? What are we doing?" College Decision Day was so successful, the school plans on making it an annual tradition.

SCCHE released a statement on April 26, 2016, recognizing College Decision Day in the state. In this statement, SCCHE announced its goal: "to recognize high school seniors for their future educational plans and to motivate younger students and families to prepare early for postsecondary education." SCCHE also encouraged high schools to participate and host various events. In the event's inaugural year, South Carolina hosted at least 50 events recognizing seniors and their decisions to enroll at various postsecondary institutions. Such strategies have motivated students and promoted investment in their education and futures.

Description of Vision and Goals

At Powdersville, college acceptance is a specific part of students' career readiness goals. Scott described sharing the enrollment profiles of colleges and universities in the state as "opening students' eyes to realities of 'Hey, this is where I really am' and 'Here's the average for Clemson [University] and [the University of South] Carolina.' These are things I think [that] definitely open students' eyes. It's a nice way of putting it to students without crushing any dreams, but just saying, 'Here's where you are. Here's where you need to be.' We try to talk about that as much as we can. It's definitely something that we try to focus on." College acceptance is the goal and sharing information about standards for admission has been a good motivator for students and a realistic way to explain to parents where their students are academically.

The high school also emphasized parent involvement in their college and career readiness goals where Scott stated, "A lot of first-time, first-generation college students [are here] so training parents, as well, is just as important. Teaching parents is just as important as the students." The school met with parents to talk about a student's freshman year and how it will look. The school also kept parents engaged and educated with meetings regarding the senior year and financial aid.

Scott said, "I have kids. I try to do as much as I can saying, 'Come in and meet with me.' I love when parents do that: 'I don't know what I'm doing; help me.' That's like one of the best parts of my job." With experience and a personal joy that comes from educating parents, Scott, along with others at the school, has done a great job getting parents involved as much as possible in their students' academic plans.

Although many of Powdersville's programs focus on college readiness, Scott talked about job placement becoming a greater part of students' career readiness goals. "I think that is definitely one of the things we will start to get judged upon by the state," she said. "I wouldn't say it's something that we keep at the forefront right now." Even without concrete career readiness goals in place, though, the Career Center did a great job helping students with internship opportunities and allowing them to learn more about careers. For example, Scott said, "We don't have a career class, but we have a couple classes like our law education class and things that try to incorporate the careers and take field trips and do those kinds of things." This has helped students gain experiences that challenge them to look at various potential career paths.

Description of Program Assessment and Evaluation

Formal assessment is something Scott admits her school is not particularly focused on. "We are given initiatives and we go with it. … I will say [assessment] is one area that we're lacking," she said. Without any formal methods, Powdersville has still been able to assess its CCR programs informally. This informal assessment and getting parents' feedback has proven to be the most indicative quality of its CCR programs. As a fairly new school, having had only three graduating classes, Powdersville has based many of its program success rates on graduation rates and statistics for students going to two- or four-year institutions.

Also, since the school is relatively small, teachers have kept in touch with students after graduation. "You can see the ones who you talked to about being prepared and whatever and you can see that they weren't," Scott said. "You can see sometimes, we have a high rate of students who go to college, but I don't necessarily know that all these students should be going straight to college or that they should be going straight to a four-year. I wish we could have that set-in place to talk about the realities of when you go to college: 'Here's what it's going to be like,' and I don't think we get to spend enough time on that."

The small community has allowed teachers to reach out to alumni and ask what the school can do differently to help students better succeed in the future. Through this process, teachers and advisors have taken students' input into account to tweak the school's CCR programs to better fit students' needs.

Teacher Training

Since Advisory is a mandatory component for teachers at Powdersville High, teacher training is required, but buy-in is not. As guidance counselor, Scott trains all teachers for Advisory and equips them with the necessary tools to help students succeed. Scott trained new teachers through the Advisory process while educating them on CAPS and graduation requirements. As these teachers did not have a choice in participating, it was difficult to create enthusiasm and excitement. "Sometimes getting [teachers] to buy in and getting them to know the answers for students is definitely a challenge," Scott said.

Description of Student Impact

Powdersville students have benefited exponentially from the school's CCR programs. Without formal assessment, we were unable to see the statistical jump from the pre-implementation stage of the programs to post-implementation, but Powdersville students had a 97% graduation rate, were accepted to four-year institutions at a 76% rate, and attended two- or four-year institutions after graduation at a 98% rate. Scott said the school's focus on CCR has resulted in students going to schools they want to go to, as opposed to going where they can get in, as was the emphasis in previous years. Powdersville has also seen higher percentages of students succeeding in college, not just getting accepted. These informal assessment data were collected via teacher and alumni interaction after students' graduation.

Students also showed high levels of engagement and buy-in, making CCR programs more effective. Scott said, "They love it! They eat it up. … With one of the programs that we did, we did it the year before, that was having students sit down and say, 'Look, here's my transcripts. Here's the parts of it. If you're going to college, if you're going to get a career, here's what they're looking at and what does that say about you? What about it doesn't say anything good? What can we do about that?' So [we're] discussing those things.

"They are definitely interested. They want more knowledge. Any time they can get that information, they respond to that."

Brashier Middle College Charter High School

At a Glance - Brashier Middle College Charter High School

Data Collection Method: Interview
Number of Students: 440
Grades: 9-12

School District: Anderson County 1
Participant Names/Titles:
Mike Sinclair (Principal) and
Nancy DeYoung (Master Spanish Teacher)

School Website: *http://www.brashiermiddlecollege.org/*

Description of Programs and Partnerships

We spoke with Principal Mike Sinclair and Spanish teacher Nancy DeYoung from Brashier Middle College Charter High School, a high school in Simpsonville, South Carolina. Asked which college and career readiness (CCR) program or course made them proudest, Sinclair discussed Brashier's philosophy, senior projects, and location:

> The biggest program we have that sets the tone for college and career readiness is our dual credit program. That's really what the school's founded on. ... Our senior project is something that personally, I think, prepares students well because we have a group of students who don't qualify for the college classes. They would have to pass the same placement test that you and I would have to take applying to college. We are partnered with Greenville Technical College. Our building is on their satellite campus. ... Students take all of their college courses there. We teach no dual credit courses in our buildings.

He also discussed the importance of navigational capital, referring to when students learn how to navigate a college environment. Brashier students take mixed-age classes in an independence-driven environment. School leaders and educators have connections to Greenville Tech staff and professors, and that open communication allows Brashier staff to be made aware if students have problems, though such reports are not the norm. Brashier students are very independent and are reliable in reporting information to their teachers.

Early on, Brashier school leaders and educators noticed students were not advocating for themselves in college classrooms at Greenville Tech. Students had trouble transitioning to an environment where their parents were not able to call their educator for a conference. Brashier staff addressed this by explaining collegiate processes, such as setting up a visit within a professor's office hours and how to prepare for it. This problem is not unique to Brashier, as many first-year college students are unaware of how to use resources provided by

their professors.

Navigational capital is an important part of CCR, as students need to learn how to best use their resources. Professors can help students make appointments at the campus writing center, explain financial aid and loan processes, go over student schedules, and help with assignments. However, not all professors communicate these services to students, and not all students are interested in them. Brashier staff members help students transition to the college environment by walking students to buildings, but they do not go inside with them. This process helps build self-confidence and problem-solving skills as students learn to advocate for themselves.

College has a social component not present in high school, so Brashier staff does everything it can to support students as they transition while instilling the expectation of independence that is present in postsecondary education. Brashier staff thinks it is important for students to know that not all professors write homework reminders on the board. Even small tasks such as navigating a syllabus can be challenging for students new to college. Staff members remind students how college assignments can be weighted heavily. With the exception of courses such as English, many courses have only three major assignments graded for each class, so it is important that students give their best. It is also important that they know that most professors are adjunct instructors, especially at two-year colleges. Students should be prepared on the best ways to interact with adjunct professors as they do not have office hours, often have limited time to meet with students outside of class, and many have not had extensive training on how to successfully mentor students.

One project that helps prepare Brashier students is the *Senior Capstone*, which every senior must complete before graduation. Students choose between two options: a research essay or a project, such as car restorations or architectural activities. Sinclair explains that students have additional options for the senior year:

> We have one student who ... did a dental internship. While interning, she shadowed different types of dentists, which helped her redirect her career goals to general dentistry. There are many components: coursework, product, and presentation. Students' products, such as the digital portfolio, are where the students create Google sites. During a college or job interview, the student shares a link to their portfolio so the college rep or interviewer can see their work. Finally, students give presentations. We have a senior project night with over 100 community judges. Seniors present their projects for a panel of three community judges they do not know. We go over professional speaking and coach students through 12-13 minutes of talk time, then facilitate a Q&A.

This process of producing and presenting a project helps students learn how to deal with adults as mentors. It also helps them with time management and exploring a college major or career.

Brashier's goal is to have all students enroll in at least one dual credit; the rate currently stands at 85 to 90 percent. Sinclair said this senior class seems to be less motivated than previous classes. With college tuition costs rising and the minimum wage stagnant, many students see college as a dream and not an achievable goal. During other school years, Brashier has had as much as 97 percent of the student body taking dual credit, with courses such as computer programming or public speaking. Brashier staff feels that students should experience at least one college course beforehand in order to be successful in college. The high school thinks this process can help break the barrier to a smooth transition into college. Brashier has another goal: for 50% to 75% of the student body to take at least 24 hours of first-year courses during high school to help bolster students' college readiness skills.

In addition to this curriculum, Brashier offers students an innovative CCR approach, as Sinclair explained:

> I think the support the students get is innovative. We build a course in the freshman year. We have two courses that are unique: our freshman and college seminars. The college seminar is a match with students taking college courses. We try to coach them on successful behavior such as college-level reading, setting up study groups, and how to do college research. Between these two classes and the senior project, we're still missing some of the intro skills. So we built the freshman seminar around surveys from teachers and students. The freshman seminar is geared around the senior project and college readiness. They learn how to do research on what college they want to attend and what it takes to get admitted. For career preparation, students learn

which resources to use and how to complete a job application.

To get an educator's perspective, we also asked DeYoung what makes the school's CCR approach innovative. DeYoung said: "One of our main goals in our professional development is to create independent learners by teaching these strategies to our faculty. This gives teachers a toolbox that encourages critical thinking to prepare for college. We do professional development in our clusters. By the end, students are trying to decide which strategy works best for the task at hand."

The advantage of Brashier's close partnership with Greenville Tech is that students get access to the college's contacts. Students can then build relationships with college faculty and staff as they work on their senior projects. Greenville Tech also sends guest speakers to Brashier to discuss grade-specific opportunities, as well as information about associate degrees and transfer processes to four-year institutions.

Description of Vision and Goals

The objectives for CCR programs at Brashier are central to their implementation. Several goals came up when Sinclair described ongoing CCR projects:

> We're working on an integrated STEM program. ... We have a faculty member who got her PhD at Clemson in science education, and she's teaching anatomy and physiology. She's working to help us design programs to look at science initiatives. We want to prepare students for a variety of college science classes, but we're a small school. We want to broaden our science programs to get students into the college courses. In the past, we didn't offer honors classes, nor did we have tracking. We found that we need something to propel that group to gain more exposure and confidence in college math and science. Now we are seeing a higher number enrolling in college math, science, and biology.

In addition, Brashier is in its second year of offering honors courses. The first year was challenging, and staff had to overcome a common misconception. Many parents were upset to find out their students were not honors students just because they felt they should be. The school's faculty and staff talked with parents to help them understand that the honors designation comes from data-based assessment. Over the course of a few years, Brashier staff created a pretest and correlated each student's test score with other scores to make an accurate assessment.

The honors courses are designed to be independent, with teachers walking a fine line of watching a student struggle and providing strong student support. These courses help students problem-solve independently, which they will need to do in college. The goal with honors and other courses is to support every student so they will be college- and career-ready before graduating high school. The key, staff say, is knowing when to step in and find more opportunities for students to problem-solve based on their prior learning. Brashier encourages both two-year certifications and four-year degrees.

Asked whether college acceptance is part of the learning outcomes for Brashier students, Principal Sinclair replied:

> Yes, it is. We look around our economic setting, as Greenville is very high-tech manufacturing, health care, financial, and banking. I'm from a small textile town. Part of it is overcoming the stigma of manufacturing. Our approach to career is through college, to have an associate degree to stand out. There's a huge applicant pool for places like BMW, and our kids are competing with trained adults. We do not track associate degrees like other schools; we focus on the individual. Our college does the *Thirteenth Year*, lottery, scholarships, and Pell Grants. Our students get all, if not most, of that first year covered. But if going to four-year college is their goal, things are more diversified. We strive to make our students more marketable and employable in a competitive job environment.

Brashier staff also reiterates the need for associate degrees and two-year certificates during *Friday Enrichment*. The school brings in guest speakers such as college representatives from different departments. Speakers talk to students about why they might need an associate degree. In turn, this process helps parents understand the

return on investment when their students obtain a two-year certificate or degree. Brashier teachers also run freshman seminar courses to build college and career understanding within students' freshman portfolios. Job-shadowing days help students find an apprentice-like experience through the contacts they have made. They then report back to Brashier and document the skills and concepts they have learned from the worker they shadowed.

Description of Assessment and Evaluation

Brashier staff conduct a wide range of assessment, starting with pre-baseline testing at the beginning of students' first year, to gauge CCR. The academic leadership team performs assessment through a freshman baseline test and ACT WorkKeys. The leadership team uses the data to communicate with teachers and students and individualize learning experiences for each student. Additionally, leadership team members hold a data session at the beginning of each year to ensure teachers understand how to interpret and act on student data. Teachers are asked to build a picture of each student using data from end-of-course exams, high-stakes testing, and other forms of measurement. Students complete surveys evaluating their college instructors, and Brashier staff and Greenville Tech faculty meet to discuss how students are doing in their college courses.

Asked about the most significant findings from Brashier's CCR assessment and evaluation efforts, Sinclair said:

> On our campus, the college calculus is a challenge. We tend to guide students through a formula-based approach to math, so our students were relying on our consistent tests. A good student tries to figure out how the test is going to look. So we were building assessments in a predictive way. Yet when they got to college, they were taught in a different way—algebra, trigonometry, etc. Our students were so frustrated. We looked at our math assessment. College courses used engineering-based math, so we moved to more application-based teaching and assessment. We got together with our math teacher to sit down to align the curriculum. We look at that every year to see how students deal with new skills. We teach a growth mindset.

The toughest challenges in assessing CCR programs and outcomes relate to Brashier's designation as a charter school. Brashier needs to develop more partnerships in the community, as it tends to be isolated because of its status and size. The school has moved away from meeting with partners regularly but plans to return to more consistent meetings. Funding for assessment is also challenging for such a small school. Despite some inherent obstacles, Brashier staff is resolute in its commitment to assessing students' performance."As Sinclair stated:

> We all own it. We don't put as much emphasis on high-stakes testing, but on the program, not the teacher. Our art teacher is the only fine arts [instructor] we have in house. We have to ensure we spend our resources on mission-driven programs. Even art has to be assessed on college and career readiness and success. With art, there's a lot of planning—it's academic. We try to create no new bureaucracy. We don't have a district office over us. We try to be as efficient as we can.

Description of Student Impact

Brashier is committed to students' success. Sinclair describes how school leaders, teachers, and counselors are dedicated to ensuring all students leave school prepared for college and a career:

> We fight the perception in the community that there's this magic pixie dust that prepares students, when it's really a result of hard work and commitment. One thing this year, we do have a mastery learning approach. Each student must have an 80% in their classes, and they have afterschool tutoring if they need help. Students can retake tests if they make less than an 80% to master that. The state has decided a 60% [grade] is passing, and we don't follow that. We could work with that 60% student using a growth mindset to stay engaged and get to 80%.

For Brashier, college readiness means creating a specific environment: From day one, all students are future college students, whether that means getting a certificate in welding or going through a four-year program.

Fairfield Career and Technology Center

At a Glance - Fairfield Career and Technology Center

Data Collection Method: Case Study

Grades: 9-12

Written by: J. Patty Reid
Culinary Arts Instructor

School District: Fairfield County

Number of Students: 445

School Website:
sites.google.com/a/fcsdchromebooks.us/fairfield-career-and-technology-center/home

Description of Programs and Partnerships

Fairfield Career and Technology Center (FCTC) is proud to present its success with the culinary arts program as a successful college and career readiness (CCR) initiative. This program is still a work in progress and continues to grow with industry requirements, community needs, and global demands.

Our staff, district, and community have supported this exemplary program by becoming a ProStart School (a nationwide, two-year high school program sponsored by the National Restaurant Association aimed at developing future restaurant and food service leaders) and building a new school, which includes a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen that is beyond high school level and on par with college-level culinary kitchens. This kitchen has contributed to our school's overall commitment to CCR by allowing students to gain skills and experience to apply in college and their future career, and with certifications for the culinary industry and college. Certifications are important for students as certificate holders earn 20 percent more, on average, than high school graduates (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012).

Culinary arts, as well as other Career and Technology Education (CATE) programs at our school, are innovative in giving our students real-life experiences that will apply in work, career, college, and community. We are located in a rural setting in Winnsboro, South Carolina, and at times have found it challenging to help students get the skills, behaviors, and experiences that industry and colleges desire. We challenged ourselves to be creative and give our students hands-on, soft-skill learning experiences.

The first step began as a weekly activity. We simply required students to shake hands properly, including eye contact, a handshake, and a greeting returned to the instructor, once a week for a grade. This became part of the school culture as the way to greet students at the door when they arrived to class. We also wanted students to be able to do this with others and apply this lesson directly to the workplace.

Because we are a career center, the whole staff works with students toward completing projects. We had

a wonderful school where students were making great products, and we needed to get the community more involved in our school; truthfully, Parent Night was not making this happen effectively. Several teachers began a monthly exposition to showcase the students' work and the school, with the added benefit of another opportunity for the students to develop soft skills. This formed the beginnings of our Student Expo.

We set up outside our school and provided booths for all the participating programs. People from the culinary program sold hot dogs, participants in the masonry program sold flower pots, and members of the carpentry department sold dog houses. In addition, members from the horticulture program sold flowers, and small-animal care program participants displayed baby chicks at our first Expo. Our students ran their own booths and were responsible, hardworking, and skilled. The community, teachers, district office, and parents all came to see our students in action.

It is now a monthly, student-driven event. Students usually choose something such as providing shaved ice or other food-related items. Each month we add more events, and more programs are participating. We are astonished that something so simple has turned out to be such a success and has benefited our students so much. These are skills they will apply throughout their lives. Each month gave us opportunities to improve and create better experiences.

Our last Expo of the year included a local vendor. We thought about how great it was to have business members come in and show our students what they do. It was also beneficial when the business members saw our students at work. We decided to have two vendors at each future Student Expo, one business chosen by the students and one chosen by staff. We want it to be student-driven, while also exposing students to different businesses. This choice will hopefully lead to our students get hired to work or intern for the businesses present at the Expo. We will address the local Chamber of Commerce this year and present our project. We also have shared this project at the Business & Education Summit in Greenville and at the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

Description of Vision and Goals

This year I plan to further expand on the soft skills and certifications for students. I am starting a community meal in addition to our Student Expo each month. I want the students to work in the kitchen and dining room as they would in a restaurant to get the full experience. This will encompass job interviews, customer service, management, and housework skills. Students will meet all standards of food service as well as the South Carolina *Culinary Standards and Competencies*. Each month it will be open to the entire community, but we will do special invites to targeted groups (e.g., college representatives, chefs, Chamber of Commerce members, government representatives, restaurant association representatives, local food services, school advisory committees, the district office and school board members, and others in the community). Our goal is to rotate duties and be graded on performance in all areas as well as testing and receiving food handler permits and *ServSafe Food Protection Manager Certifications*. We feel strongly that adding the application and interview component each time students rotate through different positions will help them gain necessary CCR skills. Students who complete their training also create a virtual portfolio for job and college use.

The mission of FCTC is to prepare students to achieve excellence in a global society. We may be a small school, but we deliver a big experience to our students. Being a small, rural school has had challenges, but we believe in embracing what we have and building to use every opportunity to give the students what they need to go anywhere and be successful. Our staff has participated in SREB conferences yearly to help gauge the changes needed to help students compete with those from larger and often better-funded schools.

Every year, we challenge ourselves to be the teachers who pave the road for every child's success. When SREB and our advisory committees said students primarily lacked soft skills, we worked together to bridge the gap, focusing on our subject area and understanding the students and our community. We realized we had to create opportunities for students to engage in soft skills and customer service, but it did not have to cost a lot. We started with handshakes, greetings, and eye contact and moved to interaction with customers, and now applications, interviews, a virtual portfolio, and running a restaurant monthly.

We use these programs to create and communicate a culture of success. Adding the virtual portfolio will help encourage the drive for college acceptance. We will include financial aid information as well as college applications and acceptance letters. Students are added to a Career Board when they bring in their first payroll stub or college acceptance letter. This will be framed and hung up again at the beginning of next year for all our new students to see and understand the culture of our school. We will also, for the first time, host a *Draft Day*. Similar in style to professional football's NFL Draft, colleges, businesses, financial aid officers, and others will be able to draft our seniors. Staff will dress like cheerleaders and players and serve food tailgate-style.

Among our goals for our students, we search for 100% student placement. Some graduating students will choose a military track or college or directly enter the workforce. Many will be placed into entry-level jobs, job shadowing, or experience internships before graduation. I am proud to say our seniors were awarded more than $9 million in scholarships this year. Additionally, we strive to have our students commit to goals after graduation. One step is an interest survey; they also write commitment letters for their post-graduation goals.

Description of Assessment and Evaluation

All teaching objectives of the programs at FCTC are based on state standards and competencies from the S.C. Department of Education. Our school participates in *High Schools That Work*, a national initiative focused on improving student achievement by using research-proven strategies. We also are evaluated yearly and evaluate overall teaching in-depth every three years. Our individual programs have advisory committees that work closely with each program and include representatives from industry, business, community, parents, former students, and higher education. They can add to standards to keep programs in touch with CCR.

We have struggled in some ways, including securing a teacher for our certified nursing assistant (CNA) program and maintaining sufficient class retention. It is difficult to recruit and hire a teacher for the CNA program because we cannot compete with the salaries the health care industry offers. Fortunately, we do have a CNA teacher under contract for this year. To address class retention, we realized scheduling for some classes clashed with Advanced Placement (AP) class schedules. We are offering different times for those classes, and this year's class rosters are up by 10%. We also have updated our class offerings in recent years, adding firefighting, barbering, robotics, and small-animal care courses. We have a STEM class for middle and high school students, and our CNA program instructor trains for STEM careers. We are pushing for certification in these areas when students complete the programs.

Our rural location poses some additional challenges, one of the toughest of which is the lack of work opportunities in the area for students upon training and completion. Another obstacle is finding housing for students who go to college. Many two-year schools do not offer housing; in our case, we are sometimes too far from the schools for students to commute, and local housing near the colleges is too expensive. These challenges impact traditional measures of student success, such as job placement or college attendance.

Another challenge facing our staff related to assessment is that the state standards competencies list grows while class time does not. Teachers map out their objectives and may have to really push to complete them. This was compounded when FCTC was at its former location, as we were losing almost 60 minutes a day busing from the high school to our Career Center. Fortunately, we gained a small amount of class time with our new school being located between the middle and high schools.

We often take on additional job responsibilities to give our students the best learning practices and experiences. Our monthly Student Expo is one example. We realized after the second Expo that it became easier, student-driven and operated, and by the end of the year it was no longer a challenge or a hardship. We always face funding limits—there are never enough funds to accomplish what is needed and sometimes mandated. We brainstorm together and usually find a way to make the best experience possible. We are currently staffed for the upcoming year. The FCTC Teacher of the Year meets with our school superintendent to discuss ideas for improvement and, as a district, we are trying to address issues of teacher shortages as well as retention.

Two years ago, our school lacked community involvement. However, the community believed in the Career Center, as voters supported a referendum to build a new Career and Technology Center. Our challenge seemed

to be to get members of the community physically in the building, but we are changing that culture day by day and month by month. To address insufficient resources, student travel is difficult, costly, and heavily restricted. This will be an issue I try to work on this year. Partnerships with businesses and industry in our area are great but scarce, as businesses often have high demands put on them by the community.

Description of Student Impact

Our students have benefited from our school's commitment to CCR so much over the past two years. The culture of our school has changed, and so have expectations of students and staff. The students expect jobs, careers, college opportunities, and certifications. Teachers expect the students to further their education and careers without exceptions. Teachers no longer ask "Are you going to college?" but rather "Where have you been accepted to attend college?"

Our staff works with special-education educators and students by holding individualized education plan meetings and addressing each student's needs. Student placement is carefully chosen by ability and drive for the program of interest. Students are evaluated weekly, with some using a shadow teacher to help with this transition. Instruction for English speakers of other languages has not been necessary; however, a translator and representative at the district level has been used to communicate with some parents on occasion.

We started a student-shadow program two years ago with at-risk students in some programs. Students who were at risk of failing from the middle and high school levels were rotated through our programs for a week at a time. These students double up on many subjects to try to get to grade level. To attend our classes, they must pass the core subjects, get to grade level, and maintain good behavior and attendance. We are trying to transition them by early high school level and give them an interest in CCR.

Our largest misconception about CCR is that many school counselors and high school educators think the educational offerings at FCTC are for students who will not go to college. This culture has changed some, but not enough. Now that many students actually apply, attend, and accept scholarships in our fields, some counselors have begun to see that we offer more than just job training or "McDonald's University." Some of our toughest challenges with CCR programs remain in changing the culture.

We have changed the culture in our school, however, and it truly makes a difference. Changing people's mindset and what they have experienced for so long is difficult. I realized some families had generations that had never seen a family member graduate from high school. Your environment, along with what you see, experience, and are told by others, impacts your life and actions. I take every opportunity I get to have a former successful student to come talk to my students, either in person or by teleconference. Seeing is believing, and seeing someone just like yourself be successful is even better.

This upcoming year, our school's programs will

- improve and commit to continue the monthly Student Expo;

- begin a monthly *Community Meal*;

- create *Commitment Graffiti*, as students and alumni will sign a board when they have a payroll stub and/or acceptance letter to a college;

- begin a *Draft Day for Seniors* to work on financial aid and applications for jobs and college;

- build a virtual portfolio for career and college, a place the student can show work and display related information, references, their resume, service-learning hours, certifications, and achievements;

- award national certifications for students in their program of study; and

- begin brainstorming solutions to our student transportation issues—an SUV, equipment trailers, or possibly a food truck.

In closing, so much is about experiences. FCTC changed its culture to give students better experiences to prepare them for career and college readiness. We may be small, but we are "going big" to enable students to succeed in an avenue they choose. It may take more work and creativity to make it happen, but it is all worth it.