

Pulse column: Career Readiness Academy

As part of our commitment to provide all students an excellent educational experience with personalized support for their unique needs, Lakota introduced an alternative high school program this past fall.

The option, which is open to both Lakota East and Lakota West students, is the definition of personalized education resulting in academic success. While there is little flexibility in the graduation requirements (students are held to the same requirements as any other Lakota student), a more flexible format allows students to self-pace their education.

I'm pleased to share how well it's working. In the first year, we've had 15 graduates from the Academy, with several other students very close to completing their graduation requirements. Just in their first semester, Academy students completed a collective 140 classes and now, close to the end of the academic year, are totaling 385 collective classes.

64% of Academy students increased not only their credit attainment but also increased their GPA.

Better attendance is another success indicator of the program. Students' collective attendance rate during first semester was 85 percent, as compared to 59 percent the semester prior. The same goes for discipline cases as the Academy has seen a 50 percent decrease among their students in discipline incidents.

Another aspect worth noting is the range of reasons why students are opting for the Academy. For some, the smaller environment helps them conquer the social challenges that come with attending a large high school, while others benefit from the flexible work schedule that permits students to fulfill personal and family obligations that may conflict with the traditional school day, such as work or medical care.

And still, for many others, the access to one-on-one teacher support and a pace that matches their own allows them to catch up on credits and sometimes even graduate early.

Soft skill development and regular exposure to post-graduation options are pillars to the Academy's focus on career readiness. At the start of their Academy experience, every student maps out a plan for reaching their personal definition of success.

Their individualized plan takes into account where they are in their path toward graduation. It considers credit requirements, post-graduation plans and even the personal circumstances directing a student's schedule. For many of the Academy students, it is this evolving sense of direction that builds their confidence, giving them a basis to succeed.

To increase its capacity and reach, the Academy will be moving next school year to the building directly in front of the Lakota West Freshman School. This larger space (currently housing Wokini Academy, a program operated by Butler Tech) is a better location for serving students from both sides of the district. The program will continue to grow its opportunities for students, especially in the area of career readiness.

Any interested student should talk with his or her home school guidance counselor about Lakota's alternative school option and enrollment options.