

## **Senate Testimony Regarding Proposed Legislation HB 4315-4318**

Dr. Bill Barnes, High School Principal, Charlotte Public Schools

Any discussion around the Michigan Merit Curriculum must begin with the recognition that it is important to understand that it is valuable and essential, particularly from a social justice stand point, as it sets the baseline for a system that strives to guarantee that all students, from urban to suburban to rural school districts, have access to high quality, rigorous curriculum. Perhaps because of this overarching goal, conversations around flexibility within the MMC sometimes raise concerns about decreasing the rigor or watering down the expectations. However, it is important to note that providing options for students, especially career and technical education options, does not inherently create a lower standard; instead, it provides opportunities for equally viable pathways in the system that allow students to pursue their post-secondary goals in a much more authentic way.

It is essential to look at post-secondary education as a wide array of programs, all leading to a career that will result in a quality of life that is consistent with a student's goals, aspirations, abilities, and talents. This includes four year colleges, two year colleges, trade schools, apprenticeships, the military, or any of the other wide range of training programs that can lead students to make a living doing something that they enjoy and can support them financially. If we think in this way, then it quickly becomes clear that high schools need the flexibility and support to work with students to acquire the skills, knowledge, and proficiencies to pursue the educational pathway that will help them achieve their goals.

In the old education system, which was designed to sort kids into those who would go to work and those who would go to college, programs like career and technical education were seen as a last resort for the "workers", while Advanced Placement and dual enrollment were for the "college bound kids." But, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century system, which is preparing kids for a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, we need to think of all options as viable, important, and fundamentally interconnected. Career and technical education can't be seen as a last resort for a certain population of kids, but as an essential piece of an education geared toward college and career readiness for all students.

At Charlotte High School, we have taken the latter approach to build outstanding programs and partnerships for our students. The most visible of these is our partnership with Eaton RESA and its career and technical education programs through Lansing Community College, Davenport University, and Olivet College. With pathways ranging from welding to computer aided drafting and design, Eaton RESA's programs allow our students to gain valuable college and career skills. In fact, during the 2016-2017 school year, Charlotte High School students earned 465 college credits in addition to their high school credits and in some cases, industry certifications, through Eaton RESA's career and technical education courses.

We also support our own local robust career and technical education programs. We currently offer state approved programs in insurance and risk management, veterinary science, agriculture, business management, and digital media. In addition to an articulation agreement with Davenport University that awards Davenport credits for courses in all but agriculture, we currently have an agreement with Olivet College that awards up to nine college credits through our insurance program. Furthermore, students who complete our agriculture sequence can earn up to six credits toward the Michigan State University

agriculture technology program if they are a part of Future Farmers of America for two years and earn their state degree.

A perfect example of the opportunities that these partnerships and programs provide is a student who was enrolled last year in Eaton RESA's business academy through Davenport. He added additional credits through our local articulation agreements and other college opportunities, and he graduated from high school with nearly 50 credits toward his degree at Davenport, where he enrolled this fall. He is currently classified as a junior after one semester.

In addition to these amazing career and technology opportunities, we currently operate the Charlotte Early Middle College, which is designed to provide multiple pathways for students to leave high school better prepared for their futures. One pathway is through Eaton RESA's Capital Region Technical Early Middle College, which is a career and technology education focused school that allows students to graduate with up to an associate's degree in programs like business through Davenport University. A second pathway allows students to earn up to 60 credits through Ferris State University and Lansing Community College before graduating, while the third pathway leverages our relationship with Eaton RESA and Lansing Community College to allow students to earn college credits and industry certifications before graduation. It is this third pathway that is perhaps most impactful for individual students, because it is designed specifically to help kids who are either off track or in danger of falling off track for high school graduation earn not only their diplomas, but credentials that will allow them to be immediately employable in well-paying careers or to continue with their college education. For example, we currently have two students pursuing nursing credentials, one pursuing general studies, and one in automotive technology at LCC. All four are now college students, but without this program, they may not have made it through high school. In fact, the automotive student found so much success that he finished his high school classes early, earned multiple state certifications, and he is currently actively working in a garage for a good wage while continuing to take classes at Lansing Community College. He will graduate from the Early Middle College this spring with a high school diploma, plus the potential for up to 44 college credits, and up to seven industry certifications.

Our philosophy at Charlotte High School (CHS) is that all students need to have a plan when they graduate, and it is our job to provide them with the supports and skills that they need to carry out that plan. In addition to our career and technical education courses, we offer multiple Ferris State University classes on site during the day, and we offer 11 different Advanced Placement courses, representing all of the core subject areas in addition to the arts and computer programming. We have nearly tripled the number of students taking AP tests since 2011, and last year, CHS students earned 561 college credits through dual and concurrent enrollment; an astonishing 95% of college credits attempted were earned. Combining the college credits earned through LCC and Eaton RESA, successful AP test scores, and dual/concurrent enrollment, CHS students earned a remarkable 1,245 college credits in 2016-2017. And, we continue to grow this year, increasing our numbers in college classes and adding new partnerships. In fact, we even have freshmen earning college credits through Ferris this year in our computer applications classes, which are taught by a CTE teacher.

In addition to all of this work, we are striving to build systems that put the learner at the center of the school. We have focused our attention on ensuring that freshmen start off on the right foot, by building a freshman scheduling model which allows students to learn at a pace more appropriate to their academic needs. Moving slowly toward more competency based learning, this model is founded on the principal that learning should be the constant while time is variable. Unfortunately, schools were set up as a system in which time (bell schedules, semesters, years, etc.) are constant, forcing levels of learning to be variable, and we are working hard to reverse that trend. We utilize standards based grading practices, which create innovative ways to push advanced learners and allow for remediation and credit recovery.

We currently use personal curriculums, but often find ourselves bogged down with the paperwork that goes into them. Thus, the idea of using EDP's as a guide for course expectations is not only intriguing to us, but fits into our philosophy of supporting students' plans for the future. We have grown our AP and dual/concurrent enrollment numbers by allowing some of those courses to count as graduation requirements, thereby giving students options to meet their needs and goals.

As all of these examples clearly illustrate, our systems and successes at Charlotte High School depend upon the flexibility that is currently afforded in the Michigan Merit Curriculum and other rules and policies. We have not watered down our expectations as we have exercised this flexibility, but instead, we have been able to increase rigor, opportunities, and support for all learners. As you consider allowing additional flexibility within the MMC, particularly as it is tied to career and technical education, I would invite you to consider our example, and remember that it is our job as educators to ensure that all students have a post-secondary plan, and that we are able to provide the skills and supports that they need to achieve their goals. As our students move into a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, we need to be prepared to help them carry out a vast array of 21<sup>st</sup> century plans, which means we need to ensure that we maintain a high level of rigor, provide all students with a set of transferrable and basic skills, and most importantly, keep the students at the center of our work.