



Dr. Tracy Pierner | President | Blackhawk Technical College

August 2021 – Blackhawk Technical Strongly Supports the Collegiate Academy at Beloit Memorial High School

Blackhawk Technical College (BTC) strongly supports the School District of Beloit's (SDB) Collegiate Academy at Beloit Memorial High School. The Collegiate Academy's strategic goal of providing career-ready pathways that set a high school graduate up for life-long success is at the heart of this important strategy. This initiative provides a low cost, career-focused opportunity to college-ready high school students that prepares them for further collegiate study while developing skills needed by our region's current and future workforce.

Demand for Highly Skilled Workers

We know the demand for highly skilled workers in our area will only increase. Currently, Rock County lags the state and the nation in bachelor-degree attainment and the technical skills gap is growing in all industry sectors throughout our region. With only 14% of our residents having a four-year degree (compared to 19% nationally and 18% within the State) combined with large skill gaps in areas that do not require a four-year degree, it leaves our companies at a competitive hiring disadvantage and jeopardizes future economic development. The Collegiate Academy will help by accelerating workforce development in our region.

Many high school graduates are entering college unprepared for success. According to the Community College Research Center, 60-70% of new community college students required at least one remedial course in reading, writing, and mathematics, and often need to develop basic college success skills and an understanding of the culture of higher education. At BTC, more than a quarter of our new student are required to take developmental classes before being allowed to take college-level classes. Because of this lengthened pathway to graduation, studies have shown that up to 50 percent of first-year community college students do not return the next fall to continue their studies.

In the School District of Beloit and throughout our region, these issues are compounded by families where higher education may not be familiar to parents and English is frequently not the language spoken in the home. This is where models such as the Collegiate Academy have the greatest positive impact. The partnership between BTC and SDB helps facilitate a more effective transition from secondary to higher education. The Collegiate Academy is an "evidence-based strategy for increasing college readiness and success for a wide range of students, particularly those traditionally underrepresented in higher education" (*Source: Webb and Gerwin, Early College Expansion*).

Support Services and Dual-Credit Courses

The Collegiate Academy program provides students with support services and dual-credit courses to accelerate high school and college education, allowing graduates to complete their high school diploma and an associate's degree in a shortened path.



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Graduates will be prepared to transfer to a university, college, or earn their associate degree from Blackhawk Technical College and will save time and money by completing the program.

Research Supports the Importance of programs like Collegiate Academy

The American Institutes of Research found that students who attend programs like the Collegiate Academy are significantly more likely than their peers to graduate, enroll in college and earn a degree. The study conducted by AIR shows high school students from early colleges (like the Collegiate Academy) outperform their peer high school students as follows:

- 90% receive a high school diploma compared to 78% nationally.*
- 30% earn an associate's degree or certificate with their high school diploma compared to nearly 0% nationally.
- 94% earn transferable college credits in high school, compared to 10% of students nationally.
- 86% enroll in college after high school graduation persist to their second year, compared to 72% of college students nationally.
- 21% earned a college degree within one year of high school graduation, compared to 1% nationally.
- 25% earned a degree within two years of high school graduation, compared to 5% nationally.

(See: Andrea Berger et al., Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study)

Benefits for Students and the Workforce

Strategies such as the Collegiate Academy are needed to improve the preparation of high school students for college and to increase the number of students that can attain a college degree while developing those skills desperately needed in our region. I commend the SDB for its Academy approach and hope you find the advantages of the Collegiate Academy program compelling. With a growing need for a better skilled workforce and more competitive percentage of our community attaining a four-year degree, the Collegiate Academy model is a best practice that demonstrates improved retention, better student success, and enhanced attainment of those critical skills needed by our workforce. I hope you find the support to continue with important initiative.

