

Opportunity and Value

By Patrick Walsh, Principal, Hutchinson High School

President Obama's recent State of the Union speech addressed a pair of initiatives that attracted a great deal of attention. One initiative that he spoke of is the redesign of high schools to offer a more "real-world" education. Secondly, he offered that he was going to push for a free two-year community college education for those that work hard.

President Obama proposes to make community college the new high school. Everyone would get a "free" education through two more years above high school. Some have dubbed this a P-14 initiative, as opposed to our current K-12 system.

The irony of the President's proposal is that these things are already happening, and have been happening for a long time at Hutchinson HS. Our "real-world" options are broad in depth and increasing in value. Our College 1-2-3 program is increasing exponentially, as well.

In terms of the electives we offer students, we have an unsurpassed number of elective choices as compared to other schools. The number of periods taken by HHS students with a non-core teacher during the first trimester of this school year is 39.7%. More importantly, we are working directly with other entities like the Hutchinson Chamber, Ridgewater, Alexandria Tech and local industry to create even greater connections that move kids from the high school and ultimately, into the work force. Our collaborative work developing career academies in areas such as STREAM, Mechatronics, Manufacturing, SciHI and Business is emerging from this collaboration.

Historically, a great number of those elective decisions are delayed until later in your high school career. This does not work to develop in-depth "real-world" engagement. It is a primary goal of our school to get students involved in career pathway electives from the minute you walk into the building. When this occurs, students will be able to delve deeper into the array of electives to create skills and interest that will be able to be capitalized on by both students and the school. In essence, we are placing equal emphasis on Mathematics and Manufacturing.

Two weeks ago, a recent letter writer (Olmsted-Kohls, 1-14-15) editorialized that schools are obscuring some of the college opportunities available to our students. This is simply not accurate. PSEO and Concurrent options are presented on equal footing to other Honors and Advanced Placement options that we provide. While certainly we promote offerings in our building, we also promote the full gamut of choice to each student. All options are always on the table for each student we counsel.

However, there is a right time for students to take on college options. The reality is that 54% of students enrolling in 2-year schools need to take remedial classes that do not lead towards a degree (Office of Higher Education, 2008). We need to ensure that our students are ready for that next level at the appropriate time, be it when they are 16 years old or 20 years old.

Students at Hutchinson HS find college opportunities through PSEO at Ridgewater, Advanced Placement courses, as well as concurrent college classes from Southwest MN State and Ridgewater offered right at Hutchinson HS. HHS students are enrolled for the equivalent of some 2500 college credits per year, 80% of those attained without ever stepping foot out of the building. Depending on the post-secondary institution, this represents anywhere from \$600,000 to \$2 million dollars of potential college credit earned per year, and ultimately saved for students and families in the long run. We are at record-high enrollments in these areas and show no signs of leveling off in the near future.

The reality is that high school is no longer the place where you get ready for college. As we move forward, it is the place where you begin your college career. Our old paradigm of the "Senior Slide" is over, where students opt out of challenges as they near the end of high school. Instead, students need to have a clear goal of using the high school as a great place for remediation and enrichment on their journey into post-secondary education and the work force.

In terms of opportunity and value, Hutchinson High School offers a better deal than even the President is dreaming of...and one you don't need to wait for. From here, you can get a multi-million dollar world-class high school and early college education for FREE!