

Internal/external

ACT Program Aimed at High Risk School Students

A new pilot program to help at-risk students whose needs are not being met in the traditional school setting is up and running at the Chambersburg Area Senior High School (CASHS).

The ACT program is designed to help CASHS students achieve three important goals: to succeed in **Academics**, which means earn a high school diploma; to make a **Career** connection in order to function in society by developing a vocational experience; and to eventually **Transition** to post-secondary life being career, trade school, or college” explained Scott Schoenberger, director of education related services.

“This program focuses on ninth and tenth grade students. We work with some freshman students who did not do well academically in eighth grade and were placed in the Transition Assistance Program while at middle school. We also want to help those students who at the end of their ninth grade year have earned very few, if any, academic credits and have discipline concerns because they simply have not made any personal connections,” explained Mr. Schoenberger.

He said that students who qualify for this program could have poor attendance, frequent suspensions, or learning difficulties which could cause them to underperform academically. Family disruption or conflict also could be a characteristic of a student who may need ACT services.

The program has the capacity to support 20 students; there are 15 students participating currently. We have a collaborative team of district personnel, as well as therapeutic support from Laurel Life Services, which is a private mental/behavioral health provider, described Mr. Schoenberger.

“Many of these students struggle with emotional or behavioral issues because of personal experiences. Our program combines a lot of strategies to help these struggling students,” Mr. Schoenberger said.

There is an academic component connected with the program that is highly personalized for each student. We have a fulltime academic facilitator who is a fully certified teacher, as well as a paraprofessional who assists with academic support. These two individuals support a cyber-curriculum called Virtual Learning Network (VLN) that is used by the ACT students. The students work at their own pace on a schedule that typically includes two blocks for completing academic requirements.

“The educators work hard to make connections and build trust with their students. Because the schedule is personalized, we can accommodate individual needs and interests. The students do attend school all day. In addition to their academics, the students also work with a behavioral support specialist, who provides social and life skills instruction,” Mr. Schoenberger explained.

“We also have a vocational/work-based learning component. Right now that is building construction and maintenance, but our hope is to expand these learning opportunities and establish more

business/community partnerships for students to gain valuable work experience, career advice, and networking opportunities. We really want the students to be able to tour local businesses where they can interact with employees and see work cultures in action,” Mr. Schoenberger stressed.

“We’ve funded this program with existing resources. We really did ‘think outside of the box’ on this initiative. We’re using our existing Alternative Education funding more wisely to meet the needs of this at risk group of students,” Mr. Schoenberger emphasized.

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