

Lake Forest seeks to end CTE gender divides



Lake Forest High School has worked to increase the percentage of female students in its Agriscience Mechanics program over three years from 6.8 percent to more than 10 percent.

Just three years ago many of the career and technical education pathways at **Lake Forest School District's Lake Forest High School** were divided by gender.

Less than 10 percent of students enrolled in the early childhood education pathway were male while even fewer females registered for agricultural power and mechanical systems or design and engineering classes. Female students comprised only 13 percent of the high school's computer aided drafting and design (CADD) enrollment.

Students accessing coursework in accordance with traditional cultural stereotypes was not unique to Lake Forest. Across the country students enter career preparation programs divided by gender.

But Lake Forest wanted to encourage non-traditional students to pursue any of the career options available to them regardless of gender. Non-traditional students are those who are enrolled in programs that lead to professions in which less than 25 percent of the labor force is made up of a gender other than their own. Delaware's target is to have at least 35 percent of non-traditional students participate in career and technical education pathway programs.

"We want all students to consider all the options and opportunities available – not only in our school but in the community as well," said Bernardette Maxwell, supervisor of special programs at Lake Forest School District.

In 2014, with only 30 percent of non-traditional students enrolled in career and technical education, Lake Forest volunteered to participate in the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, or NAPE.

A consortium of state and local agencies, corporations, and national organizations, NAPE provides schools with professional development and technical assistance to identify and target solutions for placing more females in traditionally male courses like welding and automotive technology, while at the same time registering more male students in courses such as nursing and dental hygiene. The NAPE program facilitates school teams to survey students and determine root causes for why male and female students turn away from certain coursework.

Through NAPE, Lake Forest educators first focused on why students failed to enroll in programs with the lowest percentages of non-traditional students: Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Process of Design and Engineering (PDE). School teams surveyed both male and female students and made minor tweaks to their approach. They spotlighted Lake Forest's male elementary teachers to serve as potential mentors for male ECE students. They recruited female students in middle school and held community meet-and-greets to familiarize them with the different pathways options. Based on survey feedback, the district even began offering pink tools and pink

camouflage gloves and coveralls to attract more female students to certain CTE coursework.

Now Lake Forest is a model in Delaware and the nation for increasing non-traditional student access to the programs.

“NAPE helped us to increase our indicator rate of non-traditional participation in Early Childhood Education and Agriscience Mechanics approximately 3 percent in two years,” said Maxwell. “We’ve also increased our awareness of equity and our focus on the potential of all students, which has led to real changes in non-traditional student enrollment.”

Today male students comprise nearly 16 percent of Lake Forest’s ECE roster. The percentage of females in Agricultural Mechanics rose from to 6.8 percent to over 10 percent, while the female enrollment in Processes of Engineering and Design increased from 9.28 percent to 10.34 percent. The percentage of females in CADD now surpasses 17 percent.

“To have a school increase student participation by these numbers – especially in just a few years – is amazing,” said Michael Watson, chief academic officer for the Delaware Department of Education.

NAPE is offered to schools at no cost. To date, participating schools have received \$5,000 mini-grants to sustain the work after the first year. Schools that have started the NAPE program in the 2016-2017 school year include **Dover**, **DelCastle Technical** and **Woodbridge** high schools in the **Capital**, **New Castle County Vo-Tech** and **Woodbridge** school districts, respectively.

“Whatever reasons students have for not accessing certain coursework, whether it’s cultural barriers, tradition, or even logistical, Delaware schools are talking to students, hearing their issues, and finding solutions. This work is leading to improved outcomes

for our students and also means the world for those who pursue the CTE Pathway of their choice,” Watson said.

For more information on NAPE in Delaware, visit

<http://www.napequity.org/states/delaware>.