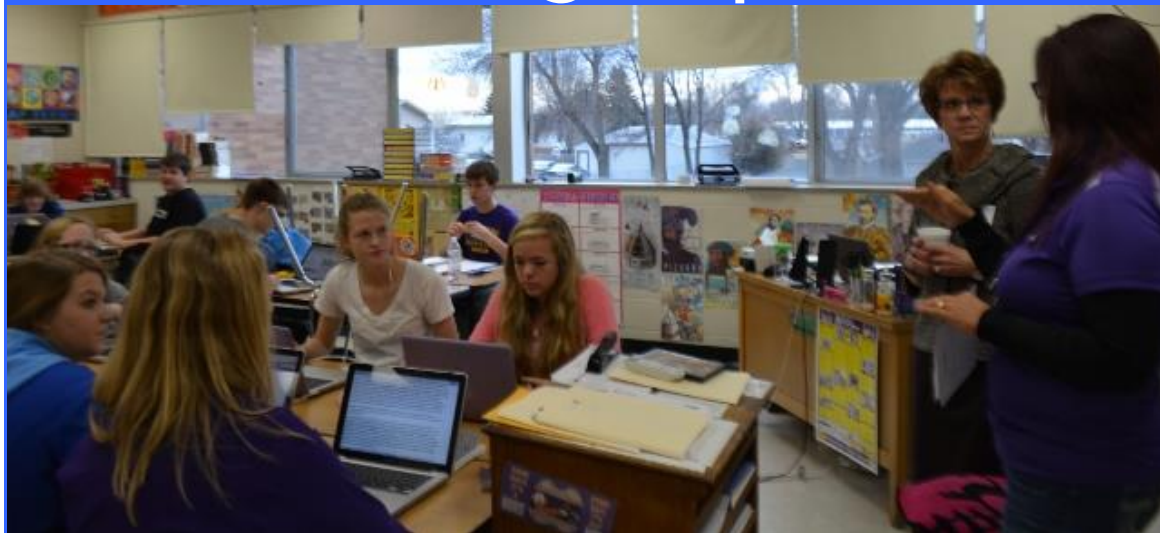


Middle College Update



MCAA VISIT - Watertown Community Foundation Executive Director Jan DeBerg visited with instructors and students of Middle College Arrow Academy earlier this month. The first quarter went well according to parents, teachers and the students. WCF Board members approved a multi-year grant totaling \$75,000 to be paid over three years (2015, 2016 & 2017) to the Arrow Education Foundation to support MCAA.

As Middle College Arrow Academy inches closer to the "middle" of its first year, students aren't the only ones taking notes.

Other school districts, donors, school board members, parents and business professionals are among those interested in how well Middle College is progressing.

The first quarter was, no doubt, a transition for both students and faculty as they dove head first into this new idea. Middle College gives interested students the opportunity to work at their own pace and take courses with dual credits so they can gain their optimum level of college credits as they graduate from high school.

**Rosemary Hirtz with Middle College students
Parker Piorkowski
and Shane Gonnely**

It's a whole new way of teaching so much so that we are almost more like facilitators, said Anita Bach who teaches the English segment. It's no mistake that the classroom is surrounded with motivational quotes that remind students to work hard, be consistent, make good choices and be proud. "Students get to take control" Bach said. "It's not just about a score on a test. It's a process. They master something and move on." It's not a traditional class in any sense of the word.

Now, as the teachers and students alike are rounding out the "learning curve" of Middle College, they are feeling good about the progress and where Middle College is taking them.



"It's not just for straight A students, but for those who want to learn. We're flying this plane as we go," said social studies instructor Rosemary Hirtz. We're not positive how we'll be landing, but as long as the kids are learning, we know it's going well.

And for the most part, the 52 students enrolled are taking on the role of being their own "pilot" wholeheartedly.

Anita Bach with student Hali Erickson

"I have enjoyed being able to work as fast as I want to without having to be stopped," said freshman Jenna Buechler. "I can get help anytime I need it. I also like being able to work with my classmates on lessons which helps me sometimes learn just as much as from the teachers or the textbooks. Middle College is a great way to learn."

Parents are also seeing the journey as positive thus far. "Nick is our oldest," said Joel Vockrodt. It's obvious, he enjoys the challenge and flexibility of Middle College, Vockrodt said. "He's very engaged. He's taken ownership and is doing a lot more homework." The result: Not only is he finishing up a semester class at the end of a quarter, he's getting all A's this year.



"Middle College has given my daughter a great start to her high school years," said Jenna's mom, Kim Buechler. "The teachers have encouraged her to think at a higher level and to make her learning more meaningful."

Students, teachers and parents agreed that one of the Middle College pros is actually about extra-curricular activities. Students can plan their studies and tests around their games and other commitments. The Middle College environment, as well as more one-on-one interaction, enables teachers to see students' interests and passions and help them evolve and blossom.

That's where internships, job shadowing, even panel discussions with people from different professions may enter into the Middle College equation. As we accomplish things and move on, we are looking at other things to do to enhance the whole effort, said Mitzi Moore, assistant principal. The Governor has also been working on some things which will enable us to offer even more dual credits for juniors and seniors. Middle College students will have a seamless entry into these classes.

Principal Michael Butts said they are able to take on about eight more students in January if there is an interest. Next fall, they will plan to enroll about 20 more, most of whom will be freshman.

In the meantime, Middle College hopes to recruit more than students. The community support has already been phenomenal, said school officials and faculty. The next step is building more partnerships with businesses and others to really bring this journey full circle. There is a broad spectrum in which those relationships can begin from area businesses and professionals who want to share their stories, provide tours and internship possibilities to any organization or individual who wants to help financially.

For more information on Middle College Arrow Academy, contact Dan Albertsen at Arrow Education Foundation: 882-6399.

