

## **Essex County Schools of Technology**

### **Gifted and Talented Program: Continuum of Services**

Essex County Schools of Technology consists of three high schools, all serving a diverse student population that includes students with special needs and English Learners. Over 75% of the students receive free or reduced lunch and over 85% of them are in the Black and Hispanic subgroup. With all schools implementing school-wide programs, students are provided with equitable support and services so that they can succeed in their respective programs of study, including the gifted and talented program. The mission of the district is to provide all students with a comprehensive and balanced educational experience that enhances their academic, social, and emotional growth, helps them become college and career ready, and prepares them for participation and success in a highly diverse and ever-changing society. Its vision is a commitment to the educability of all students, through educational and experiential opportunities offered in and out of the classroom. Hence, all students are provided with opportunities to succeed through the customized career and technical and academic programs that address their individual needs.

Students have the opportunity to participate in the Gifted and Talented program in the district, which comprises of programs that are more rigorous and challenging. These include the Honors program, Early College Initiative and Dual College credit programs, select Career and Technical Education programs and Advanced Placement Courses in a sequence of well-designed standards-based programs of study.

The district solicits student applications from school districts throughout the County. After students complete an online application, which also consists of submitting an essay, they take a placement test, the Terra Nova third Edition in Reading, Language and Mathematics. The test is designed to determine the grade level of performance of students. Together with the Terra Nova scores, a student's eight grade academic scores, NJ SLA performance, attendance record, discipline record and essay writing are used to determine admission to one of the district's schools. An admissions committee analyzes the measures and uses a rubric to generate a final score that is used to make an informed selection. The scores, primarily that of the Terra Nova are used to place students in a particular program of study such as the Gifted and Talented.

To further provide students with opportunities to recover and accelerate their learning, incoming freshmen participate in an academic enrichment summer program that enhances their knowledge and skills in Mathematics, English Language Arts and a STEM area. Students attend classes for four hours each day for around four weeks in which they master key curricular standards. They also get the opportunity to demonstrate their aptitude in any academic area. At the end of the program, student performance data is collected and analyzed. Based on their academic performance and teacher recommendations, students can be placed in one of the Gifted and Talented programs.

After students are selected and placed in their respective programs of study, they are provided with resources and support throughout the year so that they can succeed. Their performance is monitored closely using the Student Information System with snapshots taken periodically to identify and address the needs of struggling students. Timely interventions are implemented and supports provided so that students do not lag behind. Support may include online supplemental

programs, modifications of lesson designs, assistive technology, and additional in person instruction in the extended day program. School leaders, counselors and the child study team also engage the parents in providing support to the students.

## **Gifted and Talented Programs**

As a vocational school district, there are various programs that allow students to excel, especially if they are considered gifted and talented or twice exceptional. These include the Honors program, Early or Dual College Credit Initiative, Advance Placement and select Career and Technical Education programs.

With the one-to-one laptop initiative in all schools, students are able to access curricular content and work at their own pace to accelerate learning. This is more pronounced in the Early College Initiative, where students use a flexible schedule to complete more courses within the school day. Other students, especially those in the gifted and talented programs, use the access to technology to complete more assignments by applying themselves beyond the school day.

### **1. Honors Program**

In the Honors program, students are provided with more challenging and rigorous curricular content as described in the local curriculum. Working at an accelerated pace, students complete more courses in a given school year.

The Language Arts curriculum consists of a four-year sequence of courses including Honors Literary Survey, Honors American Literature, Honors British Literature and Honors World Literature. The twice exceptional students also benefit from rigorous curriculum as a result of a scope and sequence that integrates the Language Arts Curriculum into the Special Education Language Arts classroom. This integration exposes the push-in pull-out students to the same content as the general education students. The Language Arts courses incorporate classic, modern, contemporary/modern short stories, novels, poetry and informational text. Students also discuss historical and multicultural perspectives. Supplemental support is also offered with various online platforms such as Albert.io, Vocabulary.com, College Board and READ180.

In Mathematics, the curriculum emphasizes the mastery of Algebraic skills with a strong sequence of Algebra courses. These include Honors Algebra I and II, which students complete at a quicker pace. Students also complete a course in Honors Geometry before their sophomore year. They continue with more demanding courses such as Pre-Calculus and Calculus. The goal is to prepare students to succeed in a rigorous mathematics curriculum and successfully pursue post-secondary education in a related field. All students, including English Learners and twice exceptional students are provided with on-going and timely support throughout the program. Struggling students are identified early using their academic performance and are provided with academic support to master the standards. Students and instructors have access to supplemental online resources such as MathXL and Illustrative mathematics. There is also the use of various digital technologies: Geogebra, Slipgrid, Desmos, Google meet, zoom break out, Class Pad.net, Jam Board, EdPuzzle, Assisments that enhance student learning.

The Science courses are also rigorous and aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. To build a sound foundation for more challenging courses in the upper grade levels, the course sequence consists of Honors Physics, Honors Biology, and Honors Chemistry. Students gain valuable knowledge and skills by participating in well-designed laboratory learning activities

that facilitate deep understanding on curricular content. Throughout the year, students are supported by monitoring their performance and providing timely interventions. Students have access to many online resources such as Albert.io, which offers content that addresses higher level standards.

The sequence of courses in Honors program of the Social Studies curriculum gives students the opportunity to master major historical topics. The courses include: Advanced US History 1, Advanced US History II, and World History. To meet the needs of the twice exceptional students, the curricula are modified with input from the instructors. All the courses are required for High School graduation and are aligned to the NJ Student Learning Standards.

## **2. Career and Technical Education**

There are very demanding and challenging Career and Technical Education programs that require the participation of select students. One such program is the Law and Public Safety program. Students are challenged with rigorous content and complete a series of courses that include preparation for the College Board Advanced Placement test. They also earn college credits from Seton Hall University.

## **3. Early College Initiative and Dual College Credit Program**

With partnerships the district has established with various post-secondary institutions, select students are able to complete dual college credit courses while in high school. In most cases, the courses are taught by our instructors on school campus. Select students also participate in the Early College Initiative in which they take college courses starting in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Following a sequence of courses provided by Essex County College, students earn an associate degree from the college at the time of their high school graduation.

## **4. Advanced Placement Courses**

Students are selected to complete Advanced Placement courses based on set criteria in preparation to take the College Board test. These include the academic performance of students, teacher recommendation and input from parents. Over the years, the district has increased the number of AP courses offerings, giving more opportunities to gifted and talented and twice exceptional students. Student performance has also improved in various content areas.

Throughout the school year, there is strong emphasis on the success of individual students in the various programs. With the continuous use of performance data, the district mobilizes instructional and non-instructional staff to monitor the progress and attendance of students so as to identify and address anyone who falls behind. The district is very proactive and relies heavily on real-time data to inform its decisions. The pulse of the schools is taken periodically and shared with district and school administrators, who address any potential issues that may hinder student learning. The district also engages parents, who can monitor the progress of their children using the Student Information System, in making key decisions on the scheduling of students in an effort is to keep them in their respective programs. With the support and resources provided to students and instructors, the district has experienced significant student growth over the years, especially with post-secondary success.