

# Career and Technical Education for Postsecondary Readiness

## Pathways Spotlight Briefs

pathways  
resource center

Geoffrey Scott Chattin, with Collaborating Educator Natasha Schultz

### Marengo Community High School

Grade Levels: 9-12

Students: 772

Marengo Community High School (MCHS) is located in the rural-urban fringe of eastern Marengo, Illinois, approximately 60 miles northwest of downtown Chicago. MCHS serves the communities of Marengo and Union, as well as the surrounding rural areas. MCHS' racial makeup (80.4% White, 15.7% Hispanic, 1.7% Multi-Racial, 1.3% Asian, 0.6% African American, and 0.3% American Indian) is generally reflective of McHenry County's population. Approximately 13% of MCHS students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. In 2014, U.S. News & World Report ranked MCHS 70th among Illinois high schools and 1,817th nationally, earning MCHS its third consecutive silver medal distinction. For additional information regarding MCHS (e.g., student and educator demographics, student achievement, revenues and expenditures), please visit <http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

### Educator Contact

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### Career and Technical Education for All

This brief describes how Marengo Community High School creates and sustains quality career and technical education (CTE) programming for all students.

### Integration of CTE into High School Curriculum

All Marengo Community High School students are required to exhibit competency in eight essential workplace skills: oral communication, written communication, mathematics, problem solving, responsibility/goal setting, self-management, teamwork, and critical thinking. In large part, MCHS' success in meeting these broad curricular goals is attributable to their close community ties, strong faculty-administration collaboration, and remarkably dedicated guidance department. MCHS counselors arrange question-and-answer sessions for their students with local business leaders (sometimes in conjunction with the Marengo Union Chamber of Commerce), sponsor field trips to community businesses, and organize job shadowing opportunities.

Marengo Community High School is interweaving career and technical education (CTE) coursework and learning experiences into its curriculum through a newly established job shadow program for all juniors. By the end of June 2014 in this initial pilot, 50 MCHS juniors were involved in this process. With the volunteered assistance of Carl Martens, a retired director of the Workforce Investment Board, students are placed into job shadowing experiences that are aligned with their selected programs of study. For several months, Natasha Schultz, MCHS director of guidance, and Martens have been building up an extensive network of employer contacts to create a deep pool of potential sites for students. Students spend 2-4 hours at their site, asking the shadowed employers questions about their professions (e.g., Why did you choose this profession? What is your professional experience? What are your duties and responsibilities?). Students debrief with their school counselors and send formal thank you letters to their sponsors. These experiences also contribute material for the résumés they develop before graduation.

MCHS offers a broad spectrum of collaborative work-readiness activities to facilitate the transition to postsecondary opportunities. For example, the Automotive program of study allows students to obtain dual credit at McHenry County College. Through this program, students have opportunities to work on their vehicles to get hands-on, real-world experience. Students in the Welding Fabrication class recently constructed two regulation-size hockey goals with official NHL netting for the Marengo Park District hockey rink. The production of these nets was a collaborative venture between local businesses (e.g., Deerpass Farms donated the steel tubing and Marengo Auto Body contributed red paint and sandblasted) and various other school groups, including the MCHS Student Council and the Collision Repair/Automotive Refinishing class.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS

**Impact on students.** Marengo Community High School's CTE experiences have been particularly beneficial for their underserved populations. For instance, MCHS has a sizeable and growing Latino/a population, many of whom are potential first generation college students (26% of MCHS students' parents have some postsecondary education). MCHS has a Latino Advisory Council and a Latino Outreach Coordinator to support this student population. Many students who complete certifications while at MCHS (e.g., earning their CNA1 licensure, C++ certification, or CompTIA A+ certification) have been able to find gainful employment within the community. The guidance counselors break down financial and informational barriers that have traditionally impeded potential first generation college students from postsecondary opportunities. MCHS regularly sponsors field trips to colleges to promote college and career readiness to support Latino/a students. Recently, counselors organized visits to Loyola University Chicago, Northern Illinois University, University of Illinois campuses, Columbia College Chicago, and McHenry County College, to name a few. The list of college admissions counselors who visit MCHS is truly impressive, a horizon-broadening experience for many students. As many as 13 universities and colleges visit each month, from Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Missouri. Additionally, MCHS counselors ensure that low income students take the ACT for free, and counselors also correspond with applicants' colleges of interest to facilitate application fee waivers.

*"I believe in challenging the status quo to create positive change which focuses on benefiting students. Never make changes just for the sake of change, but don't be afraid to try something new. If it does not work for your students, refine it."*  
~ Ms. Natasha Schultz, Guidance Director/Counselor, MCHS

**Examples of CTE opportunities at MCHS.** Marengo Community High School provides numerous CTE opportunities for its students. The MCHS faculty believes in helping students understand not only theory but also its associated applications. Although some schools merely salt their curriculum with hands-on experiences, MCHS makes learning by doing the backbone of the educative experience. In a fortuitous move given this approach, Marengo Public Radio is relocating to MCHS. Marengo will be offering a Broadcasting Club and an independent study in broadcasting. As another example, the Foods and Nutrition classes cater in-house events at MCHS. Students prepare buffet-style meals and dress up to formally serve the meals to guests. Recently, the Foods and Nutrition students served at a luncheon for the Marengo Women's Club. As Ms. Schultz observed, "It's very impressive to see kids shining at these events." Foods and Nutrition students also can participate in externships at local foodservice workplaces, including Café 20, Trio Grill, and Kay & Jo's.

**Advice from the field.** At MCHS, Ms. Schultz coordinates a team-oriented guidance department with two other counselors, Maureen Griffin, who focuses on college information and arranging speakers, and Nick Rode, who oversees careers and AP testing. Their department recently aligned their career program to the American School Counselor Association Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) standards. Ms. Schultz recommends keeping abreast of other schools' initiatives; to this end, she meets monthly with other local schools' guidance directors to discuss curricular developments. As a result of these meetings, MCHS is revamping their Assisted Study Hall and implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) programs to improve student achievement. Ms. Schultz suggests that counselors seek information from multiple sources to stay current. For instance, Ms. Schultz regularly examines such magazines as Fast Company and Entrepreneur, and she subscribes to a number of e-newsletters. Ms. Schultz also recommends maintaining a robust guidance department website and using social media so that information can be readily accessed by students and parents. For example, the MCHS Guidance Department has its own Twitter feed, where it announces such matters as upcoming college visits or highlights student successes (e.g., the achievements of past graduates and Dean's List commendations). Also, Ms. Schultz recommends that students be recruited to make in-house videos. MCHS educators intend to add student-made productions— which will share information about classes, programs of study, career clusters, college, job shadowing opportunities, and more— to their YouTube channel of college information by next year.

MCHS website: <http://www.mchs154.org/mchs>

MCHS Guidance webpage: <http://www.mchs154.org/mchs/depts/guidance>

MCHS Career Program – Career Clusters: <http://www.mchs154.org/mchs/depts/guidance/?sect=33>

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## PATHWAYS RESOURCE CENTER

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