

Helping to meet the needs of non-traditional students

School districts can't force students to explore specific pathways or classes, but they can make it easier for them to be aware of the opportunities, careers, pay scale, and benefits. Helping students understand what is out there is the job of the counselor, teachers and even the community. Here are a couple tips to help secondary students know more.

1. Confirm student career interests and goals that can help them reveal what they hope to achieve. Let their answers establish a road map for helping these students effectively meet their career goals. Teachers and counselors can gain a sense of students' overall histories and why a particular class may be better for meeting their needs.
2. Counselors and teachers working with non-traditional students must respect individual differences by taking time to learn each student's story, identify the student's strengths and challenges in this new environment, and respectfully and effectively link these students to the resources that will best suit their individual needs.
3. Ask questions that will help students realize how their existing knowledge, skills, and talents will assist them in achieving both career and academic goals. Provide needed insight on developing their individual plan of study (IPS) to help these students better manage their classes, certifications, organizations and free time to get the most out of their high school time.
4. Many things determine the correct course load; such as students' abilities, stress levels, other activities, and interest. Helping students to understand the academic preparation to complete a pathway, how long it will take, certifications, or specialized skills necessary to achieve their career goals are part of the plan to developing good course load. Using something like the Individual Plan of Study (IPS) helps to identify all of these areas for students.
5. Knowing available support services, both at the district and within the community that can help students meet their academic and career goals. Developing key partners to share resources is key, as well as making sure that all teachers, staff, administration and support organizations are fully aware of the resources to keep consistent guidance.
6. Reconsider the advising structure at the school district, as non-traditional secondary students can take more time due to great variability of their own interests and the options available. Use multiple contact methods, including face-to-face, email, phone, and Web advising. Create materials that cater to a variety of learning styles as well as using existing materials from local businesses, county and the regional workforce board.
7. Keeping up with students can be a challenging task, so find ways to make it more pleasurable for both the counselor/teacher and student. Instead of meeting in the office, why not try chatting about careers and opportunities within the classroom, or set up open times in the commons area.

8. Incorporate parents and siblings into activities to help keep non-traditional students engaged. Activities at school for the whole family and career fairs can make students feel like the counselor is interested in their academic and personal lives.

9. Many secondary students immerse themselves in the latest technology and social media. Texting, chat rooms, social web site have moved the way schools communicate to students to a different level. Think of ways to incorporate frequently used technologies into interactions with non-traditional students.

10. Identify school and local organizations/groups that provide expanded opportunities outside the classroom to explore and gain skills within the pathway or occupation. Local, regional and state activities/competitions are a great way to get non-traditional secondary students involved.