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Talent and Economic
Development Department
of Michigan

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CONTACT: [Erica Quealy](#)
517-582-2961

'Free College' opportunity for motivated West Michigan students

Early College Allegan County program secures educational pathway for high school students, offers jump start to the state's postsecondary attainment goal



James Page works on a CNC machine in his Early College Allegan County class. Page is on his second year in the pre-apprenticeship machining program through Lake Michigan College.

LANSING, Mich.— In her 2020 budget proposal, Gov. Whitmer calls for an increased investment in education to help close the skills gap, the state’s Talent and Economic Development Department of Michigan (Ted) reaffirms that early college is an educational pathway that leads students to filling high-demand, high-wage careers here in Michigan.

The Governor proposed to increase the number of Michigander’s with postsecondary credentials to 60 percent by 2030, offering a debt-free solution to educate and train the state’s talent for 21st-century careers.

“Equipping students with the skillsets they need to fill the 15,000 annual Professional Trades career openings is a priority for our state,” said Ted Acting Director Stephanie Beckhorn. “Participating in early college programs provides students with a no-cost jump start on their college and career path – ensuring they’re ready to take advantage of the state’s most in-demand careers.”

They may lack a local community college, however, students in the Early College Allegan County program have an opportunity to learn in a community college environment thanks to a new wing in their [Technical Education Center](#) modeled after higher education schools. Through a partnership with Lake Michigan College, professors travel to their campus to teach their classes, making the program more accessible to students.

The three-year program allows motivated students to extend high school by one year in order to earn both their diploma and an associate degree or pre-apprenticeship with up to 62 college credits from Lake Michigan College at no cost.

“We serve seven districts and the Early College program utilizes the resource available in these communities to provide college credits to students at no cost,” Evy Houser, Dean of Early College Allegan County said. “This is huge for our underserved populations and first generation college students. They will be prepared to further their education or ready to enter the workforce with strengthened employability skills.”

Early college is an accessible, affordable and relevant postsecondary education that secures students with an education pathway and career goals. Upon completion of the program, students are able to transfer credits to a four-year university, continue in their apprenticeship or are ready to join the workforce.

“I was initially attracted to the Early College program because of the financial benefits and small classroom setting which provides a less intimidating learning environment,” said Morgan Rapa, a senior at Otsego High School in the Associate of Arts program. “I would suggest this program to any high school student looking to get a head start in their college career without the financial risk.”

Before they complete their senior year, students in the Machine Tool Technology program not only gain valuable industry knowledge, they also earn a pre-apprenticeship certificate and work part-time at large manufacturers such as Trans-Matic, Metal Flow, HyTech Spring and Machine and General Die and Engineering to gain first-hand, on-the-job training.

“I took a chance on the program because I enjoy working with my hands,” said Matt Hemingway, senior in the Machine Tool Technology program and part-time employee at Travis Creek Tooling in Plainwell. “I love it and I’m looking forward to my future career. I have the early college program to thank for getting me on this path.”

The state needs to fill 811,000 jobs coming open through 2024, the statewide Going PRO campaign aims to attract talent to Professional Trades careers and educates job seekers of the training opportunities available in Michigan's high-demand, high-wage career fields.

Learn more about the Early College Allegan County program on their website at AlleganAESA.org/ECAC.

Students, parents, educators and other influencers wanting to learn more about the educational pathways leading to high-demand, high-wage careers can use the state's [Pathfinder](#) website. Additional information about Professional Trades careers can be found at [Going-PRO.com](#).

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The Talent and Economic Development Department of Michigan (Ted) allows the state to leverage its ability to build talent with in-demand skills while helping state businesses grow and thrive. Joining job creation and economic development efforts under one umbrella, Ted consists of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Michigan Strategic Fund, Talent Investment Agency and Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority.

Learn more about Ted at www.michigan.gov/Ted.