

# Tri-County Schools initiative proves successful

Nathan Vine, Stevens Point Journal Media

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**Students at Tri-County High School take part in a two-period block course in algebra, which has been added over the past two years. Initiatives like the expanded algebra class have helped the school see a more than 50 percent drop in failing grades among students in grades seven through 12.** (Photo: Nathan Vine/Stevens Point Journal Media)

PLAINFIELD – Looking to change the academic culture in its junior and senior high schools, the Tri-County Area School District embarked on an ambitious plan six years ago.

It started with the implementation of a daily impact period, a 22-minute segment in the middle of the day where students can spend additional time focusing on school work or reading. Additional credits in career and technical education pushed the school's graduation requirement for students from 22.5 to 24.5 credits. Extended algebra and geometry courses were added to help students struggling in math keep up with classmates. Additional courses in science, English and social studies were added, including five AP classes.

Last year, the school took another step forward, instituting quarterly meetings with each grade level to allow students to review grades, set academic goals and discuss any other school issues. Should the students achieve those goals, they receive rewards like a movie night at the school with pizza.

The results of those efforts are making a difference at the school. From the 2012-13 to 2013-14 school year, the junior and senior high classes saw a 51.9 percent reduction in the number of failing grades amongst students.

“This success is about the work of our staff who worked to make these changes possible, and the students who commit themselves to taking advantage of these initiatives,” said Nicholas Marti, principal for grades seven through 12

It's a system that students like senior Lindsay Knutson have embraced. Knutson, 18, of Plainfield, said she started out high school not putting in the effort she should have and regularly found her report card filled with C's and D's.

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That all changed last year when she started thinking about her future plans. Knutson started taking advantage of the impact periods and other support programs like the quarterly class meetings, and her grades began to climb. Today Knutson is the senior class president, carried a 3.228 GPA on her last report card and is hoping to study nursing at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

“I started to realize what I was supposed to be doing if I wanted to get the kind of job I wanted,” Knutson said. “I like that we now get together as a group and talk about what we need to do to improve our grades and reach that higher standard. I think it helps everyone.”

Dakota Lockhart, a junior at Tri-County, said teachers complete grade checks every Friday as part of the impact periods, which also help keep students stay on track with their grades. A student with a 3.8 GPA who hopes to become a certified nursing assistant, Lockhart said the increased emphasis on academics helps students who may otherwise not be as interested in their school work.

“You see some kids that by the time they reach high school it seems like they have already decided on what their path is going to be,” said Lockhart, 16, of Plainfield. “But when you have someone that’s checking your grades, and those grades effect the group, you start working more and maybe that opens up different opportunities.”

Marti said preparing students for a successful future is what continues to drive the school’s efforts, and staff members continue to look for new ways to improve its educational model.

“We want students to see that whatever they want to move on to when they leave here, they have the opportunity to accomplish that,” Marti said.

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