Norwalk Early College Academy

What Is Norwalk Early College Academy?

Norwalk Early College Academy is based on the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) model, an innovative merging of a high school and associate's degree program that is a collaboration of IBM and various public partners. This is the first P-TECH model program in Connecticut.

NECA is a high school plus two years, grades 9 to 14. Within this six-year timeframe, students earn not only a high school diploma, but also an Associate in Applied Science degree, along with the skills and experience they need to step seamlessly into available, well-paying jobs in the Information Technology (IT) industry.

Norwalk Early College Academy (NECA) is a "school within a school" at Norwalk High School, similar to the Center for Global Studies at Brien McMahon. However, unlike Center for Global Studies, which is a regional school, NECA is only available to Norwalk Public School students.

NECA is part of the Norwalk public school system, open to all Norwalk students, at no cost to students and their families. The 2014-15 school year, up to 100 Grade 9 students will start at NECA, with 100 more Grade 9 students to be added each year.

How Much Does NECA Cost?

NECA is a public school, open to all Norwalk students, tuition free. There are no tests or screening required for admission. Admittance is determined via a lottery system.

How Does NECA Work?

Instead of a traditional four-year period, Grade 9 students will begin a six-year program designed to advance through high school and college coursework. In addition to a high school diploma, students who complete the program will earn an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree, awarded by the school's college partner, Norwalk Community College.

Alongside regular core high school courses such as English, Social Sciences, there will be a focus on mastery of STEM skills (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The curriculum will also emphasize the "soft" skills of presentation, self-marketing and communication critical to success in the workplace. Minimum requirements for entry-level

IT jobs, as provided by IBM and other industry partners, will be mapped to the curriculum and serve as academic benchmarks and targets.

As important, students will participate in an ongoing Workplace Learning curriculum to gain the experience needed to work in technology in a corporate setting. All students will be matched in one-on-one relationships with mentors from IBM or other companies. They will participate in project-based learning activities and workplace visits, hear guest speakers, and tackle skills-based, real-world projects through internships and apprenticeships.

Who Are The Partners In NECA?

NECA operates within the Norwalk Public School system, but represents a true public-private partnership between IBM, the Connecticut State Department of Education, Norwalk Community College and Norwalk Public Schools.

IBM, the school's corporate partner, works closely with the education partners to make sure that the curriculum is aligned with skills needed in today's workplace, and is also vital to the Workplace Learning part of the program.

Norwalk Community College provides the courses and certification required for the college-level classes necessary for earning the associate's degree.

Why Do We Need This Kind of School?

Today's jobs require more skills, especially technology-based skills. Many positions require less than a four-year degree, but more than a high school diploma. According to projections by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, nearly two-thirds of the jobs created in the next decade will require some postsecondary education. On average, workers with an associate's degree will earn 73% more than those with only a high school diploma.

NECA provides an opportunity for students to both complete high school and, for those who may not currently see college as an option, to earn a degree. NECA graduates will be prepared for higher paying, successful careers.

Are There Other Schools Of This Kind In The US?

The first P-TECH school opened in 2011, in Brooklyn, New York, as a collaboration between the New York City Department of Education, the City University of New York, New York City College of Technology and IBM. Currently, eight schools in New York and Chicago follow the P-TECH model; 29 more will open in two states over the next two years. Other lead companies that IBM is working with in these schools include Cisco, Motorola Solutions and Verizon Wireless.

What Types Of Classes Will Be Offered?

All NECA students will take core high school courses in English, science, mathematics, and the arts. In addition, students work toward an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree. Students have the option of two degree tracks, focusing in either computer information systems or engineering technology.

Computer Information Systems
Students studying for the AAS in Computer Information Systems (CIS) take courses in computer programming, database systems and administration, web programming, and systems/network administration and support. The curriculum also introduces students to the business world. Students are required to complete a semester of accounting and a semester in business management.

Engineering Technology
The Engineering Technology program is multidisciplinary in that students are taught the fundamentals of electrical and mechanical technology, computer hardware, software, data communications and networking. Students are prepared to diagnose and analyze problems associated with the development, performance and servicing of computers and computer-based equipment, industrial equipment and systems, biomedical instrumentation, and robotics.

What Are The Benefits To Attending?

NECA allows students who may not have thought about college, may be the first in their family to consider it, or who may not be able to afford college, to earn an associate degree and a real opportunity at a good job after graduating. With a high school diploma and associate degree at graduation, they are prepared to join the work force, or continue on to earn a four-year or advanced degree.

The Workplace Learning part of the curriculum will help students understand how classroom learning has real-life application in the workplace. In addition, having real world experience as an intern or apprentice will give them an advantage in hiring.

What Kinds Of Jobs Can Students Get After Graduating?

Students who earn the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) in Computer Information Systems (CIS) are prepared for entry level careers in computer programming, database programming and administration, web programming, and systems/network administration and support. Students also get a foundation in the field of computer systems that will let them transition into a Bachelor of Technology in Computer Systems program, if they desire.

The Engineering Technology program was developed in response to the need to prepare competent technicians who have the skills needed by the computer industry. Graduates qualify for occupations such as field engineer, computer-repair technician, business machines technician, data processing equipment specialist, electromechanical technician, laboratory technician, production assembly technician, biomedical instruments service technician, and robotics service technician. Manufacturers and users of computers and electromechanical equipment are potential employers.

Who Is Eligible To Attend?

Any middle school student in the Norwalk Public School system is eligible to apply. Middle school guidance counselors will also recommend NECA to students who may benefit from the program's extra academic support. Applicants will be chosen through a lottery system.

When Will NECA Open?

Norwalk Early College Academy will open at Norwalk High School in the fall of 2014 with 100 9th graders. One hundred more Grade 9 students will be added each year after that.

How Do Students Apply?

The application is posted online for downloading on the Norwalk Public Schools website, www.norwalkps.org. Guidance counselors at all Norwalk middle schools will have print applications available. The application deadline for the first year class is May 14, 2014.

Why Was Norwalk Chosen For The First P-TECH Program In Connecticut?

Norwalk students come from a variety of backgrounds, with more than 38% of students speaking a second language at home. Norwalk's rich cultural diversity reflects the global society in which our graduates will work and live.

With more than 11,000 students in 19 schools, Norwalk Public Schools is committed to making sure that all students graduate prepared to reach their highest potential for college, career and life-long success in a globally competitive society. A P-TECH model program like the NECA fits perfectly with the district's vision for its schools and students.

Norwalk also has active supportive community, corporate and non-profit partners who are aligned behind common goals for student achievement. With partners like Norwalk Community College and IBM, NECA will be well situated for success.

How Is NECA Funded?

The Norwalk Early College Academy operates under the auspices of the Norwalk Public Schools, which will provide overall administrative support. The state of Connecticut is assisting with startup funds.

IBM provides a full-time liaison, who will coordinate activities, and IBM mentors who will work students. NECA will also be looking to other area companies for additional mentors. As the higher education partner, Norwalk Community College will provide the associate degree requirements and support.

The Norwalk Education Foundation offers strategic support and assistance is securing private funding, along with fiscal management of private donations. Additional partners and funding sources will also be identified.