



A SEAMLESS EDUCATION

Responding to student interest in technology and health science, Ronald Reagan High School began to provide the Career-related Programme in 2013. Fast forward to 2017, and the cohort size is more than eight times the size of the first one.

Ronald Reagan High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the U.S., was established in 2003 as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Small High School Initiative. It quickly chose to become authorized for the Diploma Programme (DP), which happened in 2006, and then the Middle Years Programme (MYP) in 2009. By that point, all courses offered were IB.

Something was still missing, however. “We had students who wanted to do something different than the full DP,” says Misa Sato, the school’s Career-related Programme coordinator. A huge cohort expressed interest in taking computer programming but didn’t have the math background that the DP computer science courses required. And another large group of students wanted to explore a health science pathway. The answer was for Reagan to become authorized for the Career-related Programme (CP), too. It became the first school in Wisconsin to be authorized for the three programmes.

The class of 2015, the first CP cohort, included 7 CP candidates, and last year’s class had 23 candidates. This year there are 59 candidates, while next year the school expects to see 68. For the class of 2019, 106 CP candidates are projected. Reagan is what the Milwaukee school district calls a selective enrollment school, which requires all students to take an exam as part of the application process. The school has about 330 students in each grade level.

“We wouldn’t have had the growth in numbers that we did if the CP was not directly tied to what students wanted,” Sato says.

Reagan’s CP offers the two pathways that students had told counselors and teachers they wanted to focus on: technology and health science. Rather than partnering with a career-related studies program, as many schools do for the CP, the school has its web development and human anatomy teachers act as the providers via an agreement with Milwaukee Area Technical College. (The Milwaukee school district had an agreement in place for its career and technical education programs.) Next year the health science provider will be the National Academy Foundation (see sidebar on challenges).

Ronald Reagan High School (public):
9th through 12th grade

First offered the CP:
2013

Total number of students:
1,250

Career-related Programme coordinator:
Misa Sato

Principal:
Michael B. Roemer

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— MISA SATO, CAREER-RELATED PROGRAMME COORDINATOR, RONALD REAGAN HIGH SCHOOL

"I think the CP has offered the students more opportunity," Sato says. "They are much more purposeful now." Teachers and counselors feel more connected to students, she says, and able to provide information to help them be more successful as they pursue their interest in technology and health science.

The school has backward designed its MYP courses from its CP and DP courses, providing both vertical and horizontal alignment. "We make sure students are exposed to DP and CP topics in the MYP," Sato says. "If they are really interested in biology, for example, they will make decisions [about related courses] that are more informed."

Another supportive strategy the school has employed is to rearrange how counselors are matched to students. Now all CP students are with the same counselor for both years.

While in secondary school, Reagan's CP students can earn certification and college credit. A number of them are doing internships and job shadowing. Students and parents have made it clear how much they appreciate these opportunities, Sato says.

The students also appreciate the ability to explore something they're interested in while they're in a supportive environment in secondary school, Sato adds. Some already know they want to go into a field and are grateful to get more experience while still in secondary school.

When Sato and the DP coordinator talk with 10th-grade students about the programmes, they make it clear that while the CP and DP offer different benefits, one is not less challenging than the other. The coordinators also meet individually with all the 10th-graders to help them "get set for success and select the IB programme that is best for them," Sato says. They also have the option of taking DP courses without being a candidate for the Diploma.

Most of Reagan's CP students go on to university. "They know what they want to do," Sato says. "That saves them time and money because they had the opportunity to explore what they wanted to do."

The 2016-2017 school year brought an unanticipated challenge to the way that Reagan High School provides its Career-related Programme (CP). Currently, teachers function as the career-related study providers and Milwaukee Area Technical College is the authorizing body.

However, all technical colleges in Wisconsin—and throughout the U.S.—are rewriting the agreements they have with school districts and secondary schools to provide college credit for secondary school courses. The new agreements require that the secondary teachers have the same academic credentials as the college professors teaching the equivalent course.

That change was not a problem for the technology pathway at Reagan, as the course teacher has a master's degree in computer science and meets the requirement. The circumstances are different for the health science pathway, so another option had to be found. After doing a lot of research, CP coordinator Misa Sato found that the National Academy Foundation (NAF) would work well.

After a year of fast-tracked planning, the school will use NAF as its career-related studies provider. "It's been a huge challenge and a lot of work," Sato says, "but we think NAF will make our CP health science pathway more robust."

