

Alumnus is 'grateful' for his MCC experience

Ethan Hetherington shares his passion for education at Vestaburg Middle School

Early College at Montcalm Community College alumnus Ethan Hetherington achieved his dream of becoming a teacher and is in his first year as a full-time social studies teacher at Vestaburg Middle School.

By Renae Gould

Ever since he was young, Ethan Hetherington has wanted to be a teacher. He used to play school with his sister, always looked up to his teachers and wanted to give students the same positive experiences he had in school.

Hetherington, 22, of Vestaburg, started his path toward a degree in education in Montcalm Community College's Early College Program. In the program, students earn a high school diploma and up to 60 college credits, tuition free. He attended MCC from 2017 to 2020.

"It sounded like a great program to save money on education and get to have some new opportunities," Hetherington said.

Hetherington graduated from MCC in May 2020 with an Associate of Science & Arts and transferred to Central Michigan University that August. He said his experiences at MCC helped prepare him to be successful at CMU.

"I had a better idea of how to be prepared for college, as well as how to navigate the sometimes stressful environment college can be," Hetherington said. "I also learned more about how to ask for help when I needed it."

He liked the small environment, having more one-on-one time with instructors, and how MCC always felt like a community.

"I am so grateful for my time at MCC," Hetherington said. "If you would like to have a small-town, community-oriented environment with professors who really care about you, I will always highly recommend Montcalm Community College!"

In May 2023, he graduated from CMU with a bachelor's degree in education where he majored in social studies and minored in history. He is now back in the town where he started his education. He began teaching in Vestaburg as a long-term substitute in August 2021. In August 2023, he became a full-time social studies teacher at Vestaburg Middle School.

"MCC gave me so many great examples about how to help be there for students and build relationships in addition to teaching them content," he said. "My professors at MCC were top-notch."

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“Jamie Hansen Hopkins and Andrea Martin were some huge influences solidifying why I wanted to be a teacher,” Hetherington said. “They were both excellent mentors who helped me further develop my passion for teaching and history. I would also like to acknowledge Dean Gage and Shannon Tripp from the Early College Program who rooted for me since day one. They were wonderful people to learn from and were huge influences in my success and decision to teach.”

Hetherington currently lives with his parents and is saving money to buy his own home. He enjoys spending time with friends, attending events, activities, and sports at the school, playing piano, and reading.

Shannon Tripp, associate superintendent of the CTE/Early College program, said the goal of the program is to teach students the professional skills they need to be successful, as well as ensure they graduate with an associate degree, 60 transferable credits, or two certificates. More than 300 students have enrolled in Early College at Montcalm Community College since it was established in 2013.

“Our original goal when starting the early college program was to raise the education level of students who would then hopefully come back and work in Montcalm County,” Tripp said. “As we raise the education level of the students in the county, it improves the lives of everyone in the county.” ■



At Early College, students benefit from a personalized learning environment that fosters the development of critical thinking skills within an innovative curriculum that promotes excellence in the fields of math, English, social studies and science. Students spend their entire school day at Montcalm Community College for grades 11-13.

Early College accepts up to 45 students per year, and students must apply for admission to the program during their sophomore year of high school the spring prior to enrolling. Participants earn a high school diploma and up to 60 college credits, tuition free.

Each participating school is allotted seats based on its total school headcount. Participating schools include Belding, Carson City-Crystal, Central Montcalm, Greenville, Lakeview, Montabella, Saranac, Tri County and Vestaburg.

Shannon Tripp, associate superintendent of the CTE/Early College program, visits all participating high schools each spring and offers multiple informational meetings so students and their families can learn more about the program. Whether your school district participates in the program or not, you may be eligible to become an Early College student.

Applications are available at the parent night informational meetings, at the counseling office at participating high schools, or by stopping by MCC. ■

For more information:

Visit montcalm.edu/early-college

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