

Motlow-LHS Collaboration Produces Growing Number of "Early College" Graduates

LYNCHBURG, TN, UNITED STATES, March 25, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Motlow State Community College will graduate its 100th student from LaVergne High School's Early College at Motlow program this May. Students in this program graduate from Motlow State with an associate degree in General Studies before they graduate high school.

Similar dual enrollment programs in Motlow's 11-county service area exist across high schools; however, LaVergne High School has taken its dual enrollment program to a new level. Students attend all of their classes on Motlow's Smyrna campus. This opportunity has had a tremendous impact on the local community.

"Students from underserved populations have several things working against them; most disheartening is simply expectation. Some people think students of color, or students who come from limited resources aren't capable of achieving greatness. Lack of expectation often translates into lack of opportunity," explained Hope Bakari, assistant principal at LaVergne High School. "No one rises to low expectation. A college collaborating with a high school that is considered to be an implausible dual enrollment partner and wielding a program that produces Ivy League material and more than 100 Early College graduates is very impressive. Underserved students can be top performers when given the right opportunities and inspiration."

Rutherford County Schools is continually assessing, and re-assessing, to determine and meet the



Staff from Motlow State Community College and LaVergne High School. From left to right: Dr. Michael Torrence, Dr. Theowauna Hatchett, Edie Brasher, Tarron Huddleston, Tiffany Johnson, Lisa Fitzcharles, Shelia Bretton, Tammy Sharp, Charle Coffey, Tim Holde



MOTLOW STATE

Motlow Logo

unique needs of the students at each high school. LaVergne High School is the only school in the county offering an Early College program.

"We are pleased with our partnership with Motlow State in developing this program at LaVergne High School," said Rutherford County Director of Schools Bill Spurlock. "It allows our students to attend classes on a Motlow campus, helping acclimate them to college life. We look forward to seeing this partnership continue to grow."

LaVergne High School started offering dual enrollment courses in 2012. The program transitioned to offering associate degrees in 2018. It didn't develop the Early College program until the 2021-22 school year. The impact of the program on students can already be seen throughout the community.

"It is important to note that a ripple effect is taking place within our school. More of our students and parents want to participate in the program. Parents from other counties frequently call to inquire about enrolling their child. We hope that what we have started can be duplicated in other districts to benefit as many students as possible," said Bakari.

The high school is a little unique in Rutherford County in that it is predominantly Hispanic and African American students. Whereas the undergraduate college student population is predominantly non-Hispanic, white students. Those not participating in the program see the students in it and want to participate.

"Seeing other students at school in the program helps non-participants to understand the challenges that come with it. It makes them more confident that they can follow in their footsteps and participate as well," Bakari explained.

"Our students leave high school better prepared and more likely to be successful after graduation," said Dr. Theowauna Hatchett, principal of LaVergne High School. "We are proud of the many possibilities that this partnership affords our students."

Participating in the program opens doors for the Motlow graduates to continue their education differently than they may have previously thought they could. Access to opportunities and positive voices promoting these opportunities is paramount to the success that LaVergne High School sees in its Early College program, as well as in continued growth of the program. Last year, LaVergne High School dual enrollment graduates went on to prestigious universities such as Princeton, New York University, and Yale.

"LaVergne High School students enrolling at universities like Vanderbilt and Yale isn't by chance. They are there because they are qualified," said Bakari. "Having access to early post-secondary opportunities, like Early College at Motlow, allows our students to experience academic success at the collegiate level. One of the biggest obstacles is convincing our students they are capable. This experience gives them the motivation they need."

Affordability is crucial. LaVergne High School is a Title I school, which means it has a high concentration of low-income students, with about 65 percent who qualify for free or reduced meals. In addition to the experience, the Early College at Motlow is an affordable option. Many students continue their education and have more scholarship opportunities made available to them because they participated in the program.

“The reduced amount of tuition and fees is very cost-effective for students in the program,” explained Hatchett. Upon graduation from high school, they have taken two years off of the time they would have spent in college afterward.

“The majority of students graduating from the program this year are first-generation college students. Being able to provide this opportunity, along with guidance and support, is critical to their success,” added Bakari. “It is an amazing feeling helping students earn an education that they may not have otherwise because of the cost.”

Over the years, Hatchett and Bakari both agree that transparent communication has been a significant factor in the program’s success and continued growth.

“It has taken open communication not only between the high school and Motlow but also with students and their families. We want to ensure they understand they might get pulled away from fun activities to get an education that is unlike their peers,” said Hatchett. “They understand the sacrifices they made in order to attain a tremendous achievement at graduation.”

The staff at LaVergne High School and Motlow State are passionate about impacting their students. Hatchett graduated from both LaVergne High School and Motlow. Dual enrollment classes were not offered at the time when she was in high school.

“I became successful because of education. I want to see the same for my students. Early College has opened our eyes to the possibilities,” explained Hatchett. “We appreciate the partnership we have with Motlow and that Rutherford County allows us to be a part of this. We are changing public perceptions and I truly believe the community sees LaVergne High School and Motlow State in a new light.”

“We proactively help high school students explore their potential,” said Sally Pack, director of high school initiatives at Motlow. “We help them navigate the sometimes-complex process of enrolling into college. For those who hadn’t previously considered going to college, the Early College program is a game-changer.”

In the future, the high school would like to expand on the degree programs offered to students, even to establish an open zone choice program.

“We know that postsecondary education changes lives and provides a stepping stone to

prosperity for underserved communities,” said Pack. “Early College and dual enrollment programs showcase the transformative power of education.”

Hatchett concluded, “Ultimately, we want our students to be successful in all aspects of their lives.”

For more information about dual enrollment at Motlow, visit [Motlow.com/DualEnrollment](https://www.motlow.edu/DualEnrollment).

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