

N O R T H W E S T E R N M I C H I G A N C O L L E G E

WHITE PINE PRESS

We hew to the line; let the chips fall where they may.

NMC Dives into Blue Economy with Blue Tech Challenge (Pg.3)



Remembering Jack Segal

Minnie Bardenhagen
Editor-in-Chief

I would like to join the community in remembering the life of Jack Segal, a veteran and diplomat who left a mark on NMC and Traverse City that will not soon be forgotten.

Segal passed away on Feb. 3. In November 2025, I had the pleasure of interviewing him for an article that I wrote about a speech he gave to the NMC community on Veterans' Day. Our conversation expanded well beyond that into his time serving in the Vietnam War, career in Washington, and his international ventures. It is not every day that you get to hear of a life so extraordinary from the person who lived it.

His journey started at age 19, when he was drafted into the army to serve in Vietnam. He told me about watching soldiers and friends die, and the times he nearly died. Segal spoke fondly of a roommate he had during training in Fort Banning, Georgia, named Larry Stefan. Stefan died soon after arriving in Vietnam. Segal showed me printed pictures of Stefan's gravestone and name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"We were really brothers, 'cause he didn't know anything either," Segal said.

After serving two tours in Vietnam, he pursued a career in diplomacy. His accomplishments as a senior US diplomat included being the author of the US-USSR Agreement on Nuclear Risk Reduction and helping to negotiate the START nuclear treaty. The START treaty between the US and Russia expired on Feb. 5, two days after Segal's death. Segal also traveled to places like Israel, Russia, and Botswana.

Segal made his way to retirement in Traverse City after Doug Stanton, a nationally recognized journalist, talked him into it.

"We traveled together for six days in Afghanistan, and it was like a six day infomercial about Traverse City for me," Segal told me, "It worked, he was a very convincing salesman."

Segal and his wife, Karen Puschel-Segal, are the former co-chairs of the International Affairs Forum, an NMC organization which brings international affairs experts to Traverse City. Segal also taught at NMC.

My condolences to Karen. The hospitality and kindness that both Karen and Jack showed me will stick with me for a long time.



Photo courtesy of Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home & Cremation Services

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Making Waves

Great Lakes Blue Tech Challenge Places Traverse City as a Hub for Blue Economy

Eily Knight

Staff Writer

As Traverse City continues to emerge as a leader in freshwater research and innovation, Northwestern Michigan College is accelerating that momentum through the Great Lakes Blue Tech Challenge—an annual competition designed to support start-ups, entrepreneurs, and students developing freshwater technology.

Currently in its second year of the four-year initiative, the challenge is part of a nationally supported effort funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The program is managed by Generator, a Chicago-based start-up accelerator, with NMC serving as the local partner responsible for hosting and running the competition.

"It's important for NMC to host this because we're the lead to execute it," said Denver Peters, NMC's Director of Strategic Portfolio and Development. "NOAA funds it, Generator manages the funds, and NMC is the execution arm for the actual event."

The challenge is open to a wide range of participants who may enter with anything from a simple concept to a fully developed product. Throughout the competition, participants move through a process of coaching, mentoring, and pitch refinement.

"These companies can be at very different levels," Peters said. "Some might just have an idea, others might already have a product in early or mid-stage development. The goal is to meet them where they are and help them grow."

Participants are also placed into groups and receive mentoring that focuses not only on presentation skills, but also on business development, research strategy, and long-term growth, according to Peters. As the competition progresses, participants pitch their idea to a panel of judges through multiple rounds, each narrowing the field until only three finalists remain.

The three finalists get the opportunity to present their project at the Lakebed 2030 Conference, which will take place this year at the Hagerty Center here in Traverse City. The conference centers on the national Lakebed 2030 Initiative, which is a joint effort between the United States and Canada

to map all five Great Lakes using high-resolution imagery by 2030.

"It's a great venue," Peters stated. "They're presenting in front of industry leaders, researchers, and policymakers, while also competing for funding."

Prize money is also awarded to the finalists, with first place set to receive \$30,000, second place \$15,000, and third place \$10,000.

"By the time they reach the final three, they're already winners," Peters said. "They're gaining funding, exposure, and connections that can significantly impact their future."

The competition focuses on blue tech—technology that interacts and impacts our water systems. While participants are not limited to a single area, organizers have implemented several focus topics, including water treatment and purification, aquatic ecosystems and aquaculture, marine mobility and exploration systems, resilience and adaptation, water infrastructure, and data-driven water intelligence.

Many of the projects developed through the challenge address environmental concerns, specifically around water quality and sustainability in the Great Lakes region.

"There's a strong environmental impact component," Peters said. "A lot of these technologies are being developed to help protect waterways and improve how we understand and manage water resources."

Another major component is mentorship, which is led primarily by 20Fathoms, a Traverse City-based start-up accelerator. 20Fathoms provides participants with access to experienced entrepreneurs, investors, and industry professionals at the local, state, and national levels.

"They have strong connections across Michigan and throughout the country," Peters said. "Participants learn a lot, but they're also building a network that can be instrumental to their success long after the competition ends."

While many participants are start-ups from outside NMC, students are strongly encouraged to apply. Peters emphasized that the challenge offers hands-on experience in entrepreneurship, research and development, and professional

networking—skills that are valuable regardless of their future career path. In some cases, participation may even be incorporated into coursework with support from faculty.

"It's a wonderful school project," said Peters. "Students might be able to use it as part of a class or receive credit, depending on their program."

Adyn McHugh, president of NMC's Marine Technology Society, views the challenge as a key player in Traverse City's expanding blue economy.

"Any water-related economy is part of the blue economy," Hugh said. "And in Northern Michigan, that blue economy is about to grow exponentially."

Hugh referred to the construction of the freshwater research and innovation center as a turning point for the city. The building is expected to provide space for blue economy companies to establish operations in Traverse City, attracting start-ups from freshwater research across the country.

"With that building, companies will have a home base here," Hugh said. "You're going to start to see Traverse City become a hub for the blue economy."

Hugh added that the Great Lakes Blue Tech challenge gives start-ups the chance to gain early experience during this growth period. Companies that receive funding through the competition may later choose to establish themselves locally, contributing to both economic growth and innovation.

"It's hugely beneficial for companies that are looking to grow," Hugh stated. "Winning this money now, at the beginning of this expansion, puts them in a strong position."

Last year's competition had 35 entrants, including six from Canada, reflecting the international importance of Great Lakes innovation. Organizers are hoping to see even more applicants this year, with registration currently open. Peters, who encourages students and entrepreneurs who may feel uncertain about their idea to take the leap.

"If you have an idea or a product—no matter what stage it's in—you should apply," he said. "The mentoring, the connections, and the experience are invaluable."

Photo courtesy of Matthew Hirsch

NMC Marine Technology Society President Adyn McHugh



Photo courtesy of Denver Peters



NMC's \$27 Million Unsure of Final Destination

Examining Potential Impacts of Boardman Lake Campus Sale on Campus Masterplan

Minnie Bardenhagen
Editor-in-Chief

On Jan 26, after careful deliberation, the Board of Trustees finalized the sale of the Boardman Lake Campus to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa

Indians for \$27 million. The campus, which was used as the University Center until the summer of 2025, has been property of NMC since 1989.

The proceeds from the sale, per the resolution agreed to by the Board, will be put into a Board-designated fund. This means that any use of the proceeds from the sale must be approved by the board. NMC has stated that the \$27 million will be used for projects aligned with goals in the Campus Master Plan and Strategic Plan, and the board has clarified that they will not use the proceeds for operational purposes.

Troy Kierczynski, Vice President for Finance & Administration at NMC, said in an interview with the *White Pine Press* that his recommendation to the board will likely be to allocate that money towards renovation of the Osterlin Building. The renovation, which is projected to cost between \$7 to \$10 million, is intended to make the space a hub for student services.

"Right now, I feel [it] is the top need of the college, in terms of the master plan and all the dominoes that need to fall in order to improve Front Street Campus," Kierczynski said.

The campus master plan, approved in 2024, is an approximately decade-long endeavor that includes renovations of several main campus buildings, a geothermal power plant, and student housing. The projects outlined in the campus master plan are estimated to cost \$164 million on the low end and \$235 million on the high end. Kierczynski noted that they have already seen projects cost less than originally estimated.

"We actually accomplished Beckett and Scholars [renovations] last summer... and they gave a range of \$1.3 [million] combined for those projects to \$1.9 million," Kierczynski explained. "We, I think, addressed that for less than a half million dollars."

Kierczynski said it is also possible that he will ask the board to allocate some of the Boardman Lake sale proceeds towards the geothermal plant as an alternative to the current method of funding for the project. Geothermal energy, which is the harnessing of thermal energy from the earth, is already used for the Innovation Center. The new geothermal

plant will be used to power Scholars Hall, the Osterlin Building, the Tanis Building, the Biderman Building, and the Health & Science Building.

Housing projects, such as new dorms and apartments, are slated to take place in the late 2020s and into the early 2030s. The most expensive project, the expansion into the Eastern Avenue woods, is expected to be the final project undertaken in the masterplan. Kierczynski said, that while it is not impossible, it is unlikely that the Boardman Lake proceeds will go towards student housing projects. He did mention that NMC is keeping its options open for financing housing projects.

"I think we're going to have to get creative if we want to accomplish everything on this list," Kierczynski said, referring to all of the masterplan projects.

Demand for student housing is high, according to Kierczynski.

"I think it does expedite the need for housing," said Kierczynski. "There's ways we can have an expedited housing project done on main campus... I think right now, we look at it as the next thing after the Osterlin project."

The Board's decision to finalize the sale was unanimous, though one absent trustee, Andrew Robitshek, told the Board virtually that if he were present, he would have voted no.

"I believe in the long term, the college will regret not owning the property which it could utilize for a variety of opportunities," Robitshek told the *White Pine Press*. "I believe the administration has done a great job of putting together the sale, but I would not have voted for it."

According to Kierczynski, NMC considered the possibility that future growth would render the building useful. However, he pointed to NMC's goal to make the main campus more lively.

"Having this remote property is challenging from a culture-building aspect for the college," Kierczynski said. He noted that University Center staff felt isolated, being so separated from the main campus.

The Boardman Lake Campus sale is projected to be complete in the spring.

Photo by Minnie Bardenhagen



The SGA Plans to Increase the Value of Student Involvement on Campus

Jace Dunlap
Staff Writer

Seventy-five years after NMC opened in 1951, the Student Government Association (SGA) hopes to encourage students to continue getting involved on campus to maintain its culture and vibrancy.

The SGA met on Feb. 2 to discuss the future of student involvement on campus. They covered upcoming events such as Winter Fest, which happened on Feb. 3. They also spoke about SGA's meeting with the board of trustees on March 23, and the association reflected on accomplishments from last semester.

The meeting opened with a review of the minutes from the previous meeting. The SGA's president, Ava Moomey, wanted to review their plans for Winter Fest.

Winter Fest is held once a year as a tabling event to allow student groups to promote their group and get people interested in them. During this year's Winter Fest, the SGA had its own table and planned a more student-involvement-focused approach.

During the event, Moomey hoped that the SGA could begin to have a more prominent presence on campus. Lisa Thomas, one of the faculty advisors for the group, said in the meeting that it may be helpful for students to know what the SGA can do for them.

The SGA offers a variety of resources. It is the group that is mostly responsible for managing student group funding, and often is involved in organizing campus events. The association is hopeful that its heightened presence at Winter Fest will encourage students to reach out to their available resources.

An additional goal Moomey had for Winter Fest was to get to know the other student group leaders better, so that they can begin to communicate about the SGA's second luncheon this year. The goal of this event is for student group leaders to have a designated time to network with other group leaders and to collaborate. "It was a nice way, through some of those luncheons, [to have] student groups start working together on pooling their resources," said Thomas.

Last year, the number of student leaders who attended the luncheon dropped significantly, and the SGA hopes to get numbers up this year. Their plan to increase attendance consists of more aggressive advertisements and communication with group leaders. It also wants to stress that it is a free event, and that going would be beneficial in letting other groups know what each other does.

In addition to networking, it is also a good time to communicate that the window for student groups to request funding is open from Jan. 31 to March and the SGA expects to see group leaders joining the SGA's meetings to request funding for their group.

As the association continues to plan for the board of trustees meeting on March 23, it has begun reflecting on this past academic year's events and its impacts on student quality of life on campus. One impact it is highlighting in the meeting is a new Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) route that has been connected to NMC's Front Street Campus.

The SGA has recently been working with representatives from BATA to make public transportation more accessible for students. After multiple meetings with the representatives for BATA, the SGA was able to get student discounts added to routes 5 and 14.

Both routes 5 and 14 have already been connected to NMC and have a pickup location at the Dennos museum, but through collaboration with the SGA, BATA will now offer a 50% discount to students taking their lines.

The SGA hopes to continue the partnership with BATA and has goals for extending the two routes further into campus to make it more accessible for students. However, the SGA encourages students to use these resources because, without participation from students,

resources like these may not continue to develop.

Its next step with this project is advocating for a stop near the Innovation Center. "Where we're at with that now is we're trying to collect data on it and figure out how many college students are using [lines 5 and 14] to hopefully get [the pickup station] moved to the Innovation Center," said Moomey.

In addition to the BATA route, Moomey has other goals for NMC in the near future. A current theme that the SGA has been working towards is "vibrancy" on campus. Many students who attend NMC commute from off-campus to come to class, and because of this, Moomey believes that the campus may not feel as inviting as the SGA would like it to be.

The end goal of its mission towards vibrancy is making NMC feel more like home. The SGA wants students to feel like they don't have to only come to the campus to go to class. It wants to build a space where students can feel like a part of the campus and its community.

As the meeting concluded, Moomey took a moment to reflect with the association on its past decisions and how it can do better for NMC's students. Going forward, the association has goals to make more informed decisions, and are hopeful that more student engagement will allow it to more accurately understand what students want to see on campus.

Moomey believes that the first step towards this goal is collecting data. Her hopes are that with having more concrete proof of student concerns and feedback, the SGA will be able to more accurately affect campus in the ways students want.



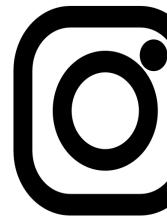
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The Librarians Documentary Urged Citizens To Be Proactive

The Documentary Showing of *The Librarians* Puts the Recent Trend of Book-Banning into a Comprehensive Whole

Dominic Montoya-Arlt

Staff Writer

The documentary, *The Librarians*, opened at the beginning of the book-banning trend, when, in 2021,

Texas State Representative Matt Krause first put forward an 850-book-long list to investigate for what “might make students feel discomfort...because of their race or sex.” The documentary, which was released in 2025, then followed the effects of that list, how US librarians reacted, and how community members spoke out to committees and fought to maintain the unbanned status of certain books. Following the showing of *The Librarian* in the Dennos Museum on Feb. 4, local librarians spoke in the Milliken Auditorium on their experiences with book censorship challenges in recent years.

The books targeted by these bans are books such as *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, which is a book about Johnson's experience as a queer, black individual, and *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry, which is a kids' book about a black father and daughter bonding over caring for the daughter's hair.

Those who call for these books to be banned say that they are either pornographic or made to make white children feel ashamed about being born white, otherwise known as “white guilt.” Some claim that books discussing or involving LGBTQ+ themes are pornographic for depicting queer relationships in vivid light, or that those books are trying to brainwash children into being transgender or gay.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines pornography as “printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings.” Many children's books banned for pornography in this way don't fit this categorization.

The documentary illuminated how librarians were taken aback by the conflict they faced, as parents they knew decried them. It shifts between testimonies from affected librarians, spoken protests at public committees, clips of historical book burnings, the views of a diverse set of library patrons, and ultimately, why and how the conflict over book banning persists.

Two major organizations responsible for the uptick in book banning are Moms for Liberty and Patriot Mobile Action, according to *The Librarians*. The Moms for Liberty Grand Traverse County chapter webpage lists a series of reasons that they believe their chapter is needed, such as “TCAPS 2024-25 calendar neglects traditional holidays” and “TCAPS implements Social Emotional Learning (SEL).” The civil rights watchdog organization Southern Poverty Law Center labeled Moms for Liberty as an extremist group in 2023.

The Grand Traverse County chapter chair, Amy Collins, did not respond to a request

for an interview on these topics.

Patriot Mobile Action, a political action committee funded by mobile virtual network operator company Patriot Mobile, is revealed in the documentary to have bankrolled their favored local Texan committee members' election campaigns.

After the documentary showing, Northwestern Michigan librarians spoke about their experiences with book banning. One spoke in regards to a question about parental concerns for what kids might read, “Kids will seek out what they need before they articulate what they need,” and went on to say that these “books save kids.”

Throughout the documentary and the after-show discussion, librarians iterated and reiterated that it was important for children to be able to find people alike and different in books. Another librarian quoted Rudine Sims Bishop from her essay, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.”

“Books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated...may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism.”

Bishop is a professor emerita at Ohio State University, which called her “the mother of multiculturalism.”

Librarian attendees of the Dennos generally viewed the documentary favorably. A page for Traverse Area District Library, Rayna Archibald, said, “It was balanced and reasonable.” She explained their relationship with libraries, and called them “the perfect nexus of information and community connection.”

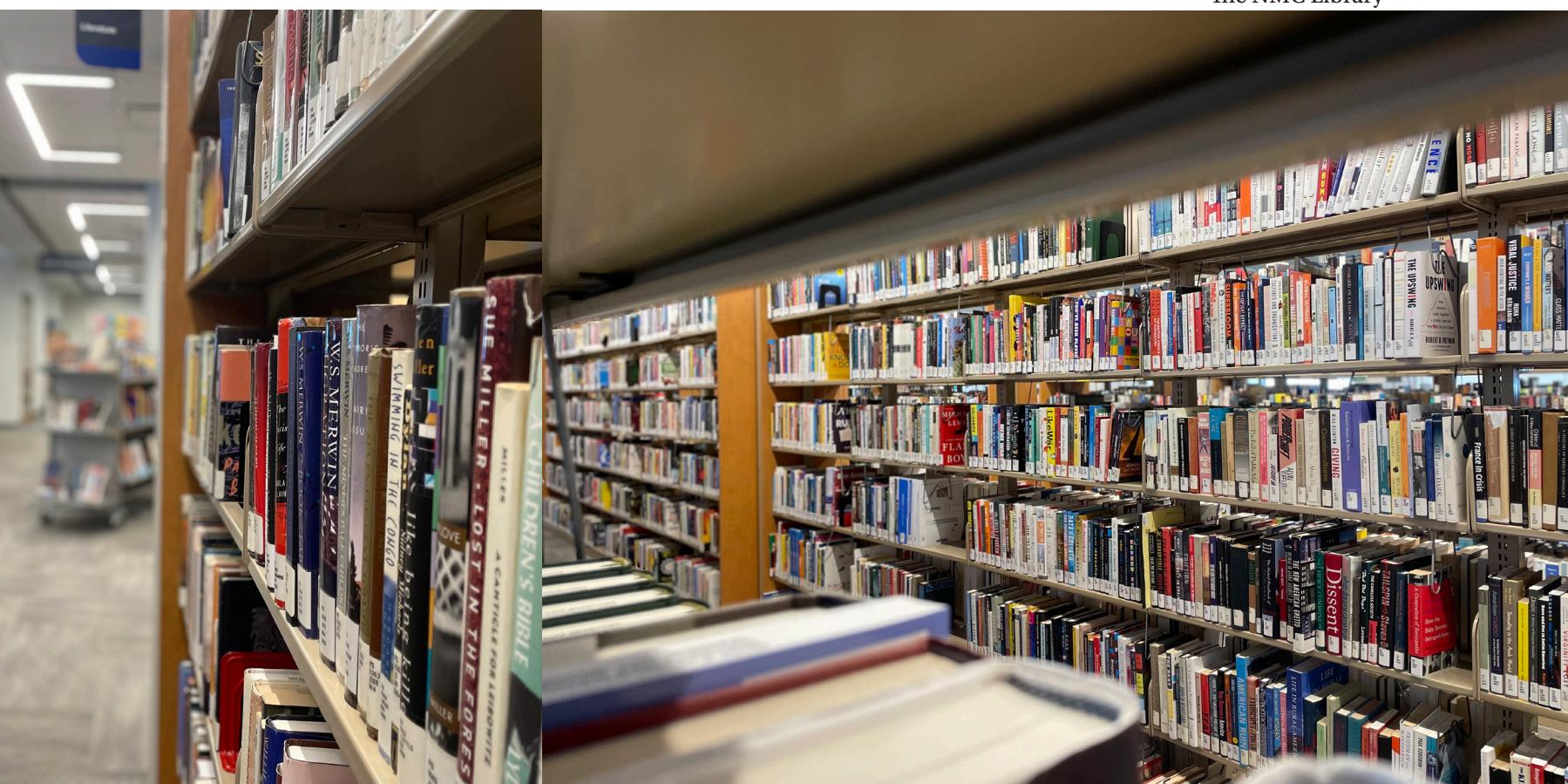
NMC librarian Nicco Pandolfi was one of the attendees of the showing and was interviewed by the *White Pine Press* afterward about his experience at NMC and his experience with book challenges.

Pandolfi has worked at the NMC library since 2019, and says he has not experienced any book challenges during that time. When asked why he thought that was, he said, “The main reason is that people expect there to be a wide range of material and perspective taught in a college curriculum.”

He added, “While there are well-organized and well-funded groups trying to change what is available... the majority is against that kind of censorship...Censorship is basically like a narrowing of the world.”

When asked about what he thought of the documentary, Pandolfi said, “I'm glad the film gave a national perspective.”

*Photos by Minnie Bardenhagen
The NMC Library*



Between High School and College

What Early College Looks Like in Practice

Isabelle Plamondon
Staff Writer

For many students, high school and college are separated by a clear milestone—graduation. For students in NMC's Early College program, however, that line becomes less defined.

They begin earning college credits while still enrolled in high school, often completing an associate degree by the end of a fifth year, often called a "13th year." The opportunity can mean thousands of dollars saved and a significant academic head start. But it can also mean navigating a space that feels neither fully high school nor fully college.

The concept behind Early College is rooted in access and acceleration.

"Early College was designed to give students—especially those who may not see themselves as college-going—an opportunity to get involved while they're still in high school, and have it paid for by the school system," said Lisa vonReichbauer, Director of Admissions at NMC. "The goal is to get students to and through college with little to no debt, ideally early, so they can enter the workforce or move toward a bachelor's degree without waiting another year and incurring additional costs."

Participation in the program has grown steadily in recent years. In the fall of 2025, 544 local high school students were enrolled in dual enrollment or Early College programs—a 13% increase from the previous year—and accounted for nearly 16% of the college's total enrollment.

According to the winter 2025 institutional data, 341 of those students were enrolled specifically in the Early College pathway, highlighting how many students are pursuing the full 13th-year experience.

VonReichbauer said, "As tuition prices rise nationally, the appeal of completing two years of college with minimal financial burden has become increasingly compelling."

For students pursuing career and technical education pathways, the program serves a slightly different but equally strategic purpose.

Ashley Darga, Early College Coordinator at Northwest Ed Career Tech, explained that Early College allows students to layer academic credentials onto technical training. "Early College gives them the opportunity to pair that with a college credential so they can be highly employable and command a higher wage when they finish," Darga said.

Students in the Early College program cite both financial and academic motivations for enrolling.

"I initially was drawn into the program because it gave me a chance to get ahead in my education earlier than my peers, but mainly the no-cost tuition as long as I continued with my good grades," said Emily Kozlowski, an Early College student.

Isabelle Porter said she joined because she "wanted to get a head start on college and challenge myself academically."

While the promise of acceleration is clear, the transition is not always seamless. Darga noted that "one of the biggest shifts is that students are much more individually responsible and accountable for keeping track of their workload." She then added that "College expectations are different. Students have to pay close attention to the syllabus and manage their time independently."

Students echoed that sentiment.

"One of the most challenging parts has been learning how to manage my time and balance responsibilities," Porter said. "I underestimated how much independence college classes require."

Beyond academics, administrative complexity can also create friction.

Because Early College students are simultaneously connected to their high schools and NMC, enrollment approvals and billing often involve multiple institutions. "With every enrollment approval form, we're working with schools to approve individual courses and determine what will be paid for," vonReichbauer explained. "There are multiple layers of approval."

Differences in district funding policies can further shape student experiences. "If costs limit how many credits students can take in a semester, that can extend their time after graduation," vonReichbauer said.

NMC is currently transitioning to a new enrollment approval process, "with the intent of making it easier and less confusing for schools and improving the billing process on our end." Even so, she acknowledged, "it is a complicated process for everybody involved."

That complexity can extend beyond paperwork and into identity. VonReichbauer described Early College students as occupying a transitional space.

Students expressed that feeling in different ways. "When I first started, I felt somewhere in between because I was still connected to my high school while trying to adjust to the expectations of college-level courses," Porter said.

Age differences sometimes made connections difficult.

"When I was 16 there were a few classes I took where the next youngest person was 18–20," said Jace Dunlap, another Early College student. "In situations like those it can be hard to make connections."

Course modality plays a role as well. "Course modality is a perennial challenge, especially since COVID," vonReichbauer said. "For many students outside Traverse City, online coursework is often the most practical option. That may be one drawback, particularly for students who don't have easy access to the campus for face-to-face classes."

"You really can't replace the in-person experience," she said. "In 12th grade and especially in the 13th year, I strongly encourage students to try one or two face-to-face classes."

Still, experiences vary. Some students report feeling more

connected at NMC than they ever did in high school. "I feel like I identify more with being an NMC student," Dunlap said. "The connections and friends I have made at NMC are more long-lasting and more relevant to my future."

Administrators are careful to emphasize that Early College is not limited to one type of student.

"There's a misconception that Early College is only for academically advanced students," Darga said. "There are benefits for students across the spectrum." The individualized structure allows students to move at different paces, whether that means completing an entire associate degree or taking only a class or two.

VonReichbauer underscored the financial significance. "An associate degree is a degree," she said. "This is a great way to avoid the pitfalls of significant student debt." At the same time, she cautioned against oversimplifying it as simply "free college." "We don't want to just say 'free college.' There's more that goes with it."

Ultimately, Early College offers both opportunity and responsibility. As Darga tells families considering it, "At that age, your job is to open as many doors as you can. You don't have to close any yet." For students willing to navigate its structure—and its ambiguity—the program can serve as a powerful bridge between high school and higher education.

"It is a great opportunity to get grounded in college coursework, college success, and completion while you have resources from both your high school and the college," vonReichbauer said.



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