

BANGOR SCHOOLS

An offer they can't refuse

Bangor high schoolers in line for tuition-free classes at LMC

By **BECKY KARK**

For The Herald-Palladium

BANGOR — Bangor Public Schools officials have a program they think many parents won't be able to resist — two years of free college tuition for high school students.

The school district is creating a partnership with Lake Michigan College this fall to offer a pilot program called "Early Middle College." An open house is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Thursday, July 25, at LMC's South Haven campus. Parents and students can learn how the program works. To register, parents should call 427-6800, Ext. 1200.

"The Early Middle College program provides students the opportunity to receive a high school diploma and an associate degree, and the tuition is free," said Lynn Johnson, the school district's Career Academy director.

The school district will fund the program through per-pupil state aid revenue. The district can offer the program for students for five years — and still get per-pupil state aid for fifth-year students — which means the district will not lose money on college tuition and fees, Johnson said.

In Michigan, high school students can take

up to 10 credit hours of tuition-free college courses, but the Early Middle College program allows them to take 60 credit hours, free of charge. Students can begin taking the college courses as sophomores, once they pass LMC's entrance exams.

"We're the only school district in Van Buren County I'm aware of that is offering this," Johnson said. "We'll become only the 18th school district in the state that has it."

Early Middle College allows students to attend high school for up to five years, which disperses the rigor of simultaneously attending college and high school. Students will take the college courses at LMC, and they can complete high school courses in school or through online courses at the Bangor Career Academy.

"This does expand the traditional view of high school," Johnson said.

Perhaps, but statistics compiled by the Kids Count Data Center shows that a greater number of students in Michigan and Van Buren County are not graduating within four years. The latest statistics indicate that as of 2011, 29.1 percent of Van Buren County high school students did not graduate on time.

With college costs going up and students choosing alternative ways to graduate from high school, Bangor school officials say the

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Early Middle College program will fit right in with the changing times.

“I think this is a good idea,” high school Principal Jeff Melvin said. He cautioned, however, that parents will have to help their teens stay on track when taking both high school and college courses.

“The college doesn’t want ‘helicopter parents’

hovering over them, but don’t always tell their parents when you’re dealing with the school every-
15- and 16-year-olds, they thing,” Melvin said.