
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

John Hancock College Prep Audio Transcript

Vanessa Puentes, Principal: My name's Vanessa Puentes. I'm the proud principal of Hancock College Prep High School. We have two specialty programs, a pre-law program, and a pre-engineering program.

Developing the pre-law and pre-engineering programs at Hancock has taken some time. We did have to, network and reach out to some partners so that city colleges can work with us and offer dual-credit courses to our students. So that wasn't something that was a part of the program that we really thought, "How do we make sure that students are getting college credit by being a part of this?" And so that was important for us to communicate with outside businesses, and really think about exposure for students with careers in both of those tracks.

For schools that are thinking about adding professional programs, hiring is extremely essential in this process. We've been very lucky that the four teachers who are in our programs were both lawyers and engineers prior to coming into education. So, they were really able to support students not only with content, but also with how to learn about that content in such a crucial time in their lives.

Sarah Jane Simons, Pre-Law Teacher: My name is Sarah Jane Simons, and I am a pre-law instructor. I am also a licensed attorney.

There were a number of things that Hancock did to help support me as a new educator. One of those things that they did initially was connect me with somebody in the social science department immediately to serve as a mentor. The other thing that the school does that I have found immensely helpful and continue to really treasure and value as a practitioner is, I have an instructional coach that comes in and observes me as I'm teaching, where she will give me feedback about what she observed and tweaks we may want to make, or what, what were some things that we could build on and do differently next time.

We love teaching the units around the mock trial at Hancock. The students really love it. They really are excited about it. They have the opportunity to analyze like a real sort of case, and then put skills, put litigation skills into practice in a real courtroom, in front of real judges.

You don't have to be interested in a legal profession post high school to get value out of our program as a pre-law student. What it is really giving students is the opportunity to get more practice with real-world problem solving skills, with critical thinking skills, with reasoning, with analysis, with writing, with continued exposure to complex texts.

In terms of advice to give to a school considering a CTE program in the pre-law field, I would just advise them to consider the ways that it really supports student learning across content areas.

Erika: Hi, my name is Erika Eli and I'm in grade 12.

So, the pre-law program, it gives you the positives and the negatives of going into the legal field. And it does that by putting you in the shoes of the lawyer and then putting you in the shoes of a person that you might have to defend in the future. Because you get to actually go downtown and you get to, you get to see how it feels to be a lawyer. It really pushes you as a person because sometimes you have to get out of your comfort zone.

Jay Sipek, Engineering Teacher: My name is Jay Sipek, I'm an engineering teacher.

What we strive for in pre-engineering, is we want to develop student's problem solving skills and abilities. There's a little bit of each different field of engineering, so the students get an idea of what, you know, a mechanical engineering might work on, what an electrical engineering and a civil engineer. And then from there, we have our digital electronics program, and that really focuses on transistors and little bit of programming and making circuits and things like that.

I know that several of my students after they left John Hancock last year, they emailed me and said, that the class inspired them to actually pursue a field in engineering. I received a couple of those emails, just like, you know, "Thank you for the class and I'm going to University of Illinois, Chicago, and I'm going to pursue mechanical engineering."

Carlos: My name is Carlos. I am a junior at John Hancock College Prep High School.

Engineering is such a big field, such a big field, so there's a lot for us to explore. And, and basically my school is, is offering us all these available options to see what we can do. And so I think that its exposing us to different kinds of classrooms. We have AP, we also have dual credit, we have CTE. And so, all of these different classes, they're allowing us to explore what are the available options out there.

Erika: Hancock really does push toward our future. They always want us to have something in mind after high school. But I feel like if you go there, you're going to be comfortable. And you're going to feel like they really want you to do better as a person, as a student and as a whole.