

## **Senior Seminar Origins** **(or My Crazy Life as a Perkins Funded Employee)**

### Reading Specialist

I've been an instructor at Central Montco Technical High School (CMTHS) for 15 years and was originally hired through Perkins Grant funding as a Reading Specialist. CMTHS already had a Perkins Math Program taught by Matt Tornetta, where students learned and practiced the current math content involved in their respective shops. This program was going well and CMTHS wanted to start a similar type of program, but with reading.

I acquired a Reading Level Indicator Test and administered it to the whole school population. The Assistant Director at the time, Seth Schram, and I looked over the results and narrowed our focus to students with low reading levels who did not have IEPs. We felt these were some of the students slipping through the cracks and not getting the support they needed to help them to improve their literacy. I used high-interest, low reading level materials, (many that I created myself), with these reluctant readers. Another strategy I employed was to request comfortable couches for my classroom – my logic was that anyone that I know who reads for pleasure sits in a comfortable chair – not upright at a desk. I wanted to make my classroom a place where these reluctant readers would want to come to learn and I gave them articles on what they wanted to read about so they could appreciate the importance and joy of reading.

### PSSA/Keystone Support

This Reading Program ran two years and we felt it was pretty successful. But, this is education and things change. We returned one fall to learn that our sending schools (CMTHS is a shared time CTC), were becoming reluctant to send students who did not pass their PSSA/Keystone tests – one school going so far as to stop sending 10<sup>th</sup> graders so they could improve their AYP. We knew we had to do something to not only keep our enrollment up, but to advocate for our students to be allowed to attend CMTHS and learn a trade that will allow them to earn a living. Administration came to Matt and me to see if we could offer a solution to help keep these students in the building and PSSA/Keystone Remedial Groups were born.

Our Administration reached out to our sending schools and told them of our effort to help them with the PSSA/Keystone score improvement and that they wouldn't have to pull students out of CMTHS to get more math and reading support. In coordination with our sending schools, the math instructor and I were given the names of students who did not pass their PSSA/Keystone tests and would benefit from some remediation. We began a remediation program where we pulled the students out of their programs for two thirty-minute sessions a week – which was much better than having those students pulled out of their programs completely. We tracked the students and saw growth and improvement.

### Perkins Reauthorization

We did these PSSA/Keystone Remediation groups for two years and then things changed again - Perkins was reauthorized. Our director, Walt Slauch, called Matt and me into his office in June and explained what that meant to us. Basically, for the next school year, we were no longer allowed to do any type of

“Remediation” with students. The key phrase was now “Current Content”. We could no longer run our PSSA/Keystone Support Program.

For Matt, his solution was to go back to his original Perkins Math Program, as he was already teaching current content. For me, it was back to square one – if I couldn’t teach reading remediation, what could I teach? My first idea was to go back to the reading program I originally started, but after reflection, it was decided it was repetitive of the help and support students were getting at their sending schools and was too close to remediation.

I am very lucky that I have an administration that believes in a bottom-up approach and also has a lot of faith in me. Walt tasked me with figuring out what I could do at CMTHS that would teach “current content”, reach as many students as possible, and be compliant with Perkins regulations. I didn’t want to lose my job; I really love working at CMTHS so I went home for the summer with “current content” as the buzzword and I set to work to save my job.

### Senior Seminar

I tried to think of what type of current content would be the same in each program. I didn’t know anything about Automotive Technology or Allied Health, how could I possibly learn and cover all of that? But I kept at it, trying to figure this out. One day over that summer, it finally hit me: the clouds parted and the angels sang and I realized I could teach career literacy – that was the same in every program – workplace skills. I returned to CMTHS in the fall of 2007 with a proposal of a new program that I called “Senior Seminar” (as an English teacher, I like alliteration). My proposal included using the Career Education and Work Standards – current content – to teach career literacy to the seniors in the building. The program would include writing a resume, creating a portfolio, learning important workplace skills, and some money topics such as creating a budget.

Administration approved my proposal and I set to work building the Senior Seminar program. That was 9 years ago. It has given me a lot of pride to watch Senior Seminar grow and change to meet the needs of our students and remain compliant with Perkins. I am very lucky in that the minute I start talking about money and life after high school, in the “big wide world”, I usually have the students’ undivided attention. They are leaving CMTHS with the skills necessary to have a career and I enjoy being able to add to that with Senior Seminar that will help them to keep that career. I love running into students around town after they graduate and I hear, “Ms. Slattery! That resume and portfolio really helped me get a job! Thanks so much.” That always makes me smile – how could it not?

Senior Seminar is constantly evolving and changing; again, it took 9 years to get where I am today. The Senior Seminar website is only a year and a half old, but it has become a large part of the program providing in-depth resource information to our students that will help them to make the most out of the careers they are training for. It is my absolute pleasure to share this program with you and hope you will appreciate the value it provides to our students and that you will take and use all that you find helpful.

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