

# Early opportunity: Center Grove graduates earn associate degrees in high school

**BY ADRIANNA PITRELLI | For the Daily Journal**

After graduating from Center Grove High School this year, Gracie DeHaven will start at Ball State University with the same amount of credits as a college junior.

For DeHaven, that means a jumpstart on her college education, allowing her to save money and get a preview into how she would need to study for college courses.

DeHaven and 28 other Center Grove High School graduates received an associate degree along with their high school diplomas this year as part of the high school's Early College program.

The program allows students to take general studies courses through Vincennes University as part of their high school coursework. If students complete the classes, they can earn an associate degree with their high school diploma. More than 70 students graduated from the program since its first graduating class in 2015.

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Center Grove graduate Julia Dahl works on her blog on Monday in Greenwood. Dahl graduated high school with her associate degree and will attend Indiana Wesleyan University. Scott Roberson / Daily Journal

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Center Grove is one of 13 high schools in Indiana to have an Early College program. According to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 81 percent of Early College graduates will enroll in college upon graduation, compared to 65 percent of total high school graduates.

“Taking college classes as a high school student meant that I had to step up my game and act like a college student,” DeHaven said.

The program can also save students money. Classes offered at Vincennes University can cost more than \$200, but through Center Grove’s program, students can take most classes for \$75. Many Early College students will graduate college in three years, and since the average cost of one year of college in Indiana is more than \$7,700, students and their families can save thousands.

“Early College is the most underrated high school program at Center Grove,” DeHaven said. “It is one of the most beneficial things I could

have ever involved myself in, and if I had to do it all over again, I'd do it all the same."

Because of the Early College program, Haley Hash already is done with her first two years of college.

That means she can start taking more English and education classes in her goal to become a teacher and teach in South Korea, rather than focusing on prerequisites. Instead of taking entry-level English and math classes, Hash will be able to learn about classroom management and be immersed in a more difficult English class.

Because she will be able to graduate from college sooner, Hash also will be able to start her career earlier and will not have to pay as much for college, she said.

She also credits her decision to teach overseas to one of her Early College teachers, Ms. Hensley.

"Without her wisdom and knowledge, I would not have ever chose to teach overseas," Hash said.

The teachers are also the reason Julia Dahl chose to study education at Indiana Wesleyan University, she said. She will double major in elementary and special education, and she will be able to graduate in three years, saving at least one year of college costs, she said.

"The program challenged me in my academics, and the teachers involved in the program grew me as a person," Dahl said.

Madison Hoffman credits getting her internship with a racehorse veterinarian to already having two years of college under her belt. Unlike most recent high school graduates, Hoffman had more real world skill,

such as professionalism and time management, which helped her receive the internship, she said. This fall, she will attend Indiana University to get her bachelor's degree in pre-veterinary science.

The Early College courses were challenging at times because of a larger workload and the overall stress of taking college courses as a high school student, but the extra work was worthwhile, she said.

"The teachers treat you like an adult instead of a kid, and the courses open your mind to ideas that you would have never had on your own," Hoffman said.

While the coursework was overwhelming at times because of the rigorous workload, Dahl said the program gave her many skills she can use in college, including learning how to form her own opinion from facts.

Early College classes are different than traditional high school classes because they are college-level and taught by college professors, Hash said. For example, students can choose to take higher-level foreign language classes which are taught at a harder, faster pace, but also allow them receive college credit, Hash said.

"As hard as it can get sometimes, you have a support network of students that understand what you are going through because they are going through it with you and teachers that know the workload won't actually kill you," Hash said.

"Early College is a family that will always be there for you."