Ascend: Dropout Prevention Program with CTE as Focus

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Funding Sources:
The Career and Technology Center (CTE) located at the Moore Norman Technology Center (MTNC) supports the program's funding entirely.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:
One FTE, plus $15,000 is the allocated budget for all supplies, professional development, tutoring, travel, and professional organization memberships.

Project Description:
Ascend is a Career Exploration/Credit Recovery program that is housed and operated out of Moore Norman Technology Center in order to provide targeted intervention for a Tier three group of at-risk students that are unserved by partner districts. The program is unique in that it serves our nation's most at-risk students who are repeat freshman or off-cohort sophomores. The program provides these students with the opportunity to earn lacking English and math credits in order to be back on track to graduate in their third attendance year of high school. The program uses a flipped and blended model of instruction while recruiting students who have an innate interest in CTE programs. If not for this program, these students would never qualify for CTE credit requirements in Oklahoma, which is 11 credits/junior standing, before the time to apply for MNTC. So, this program is by nature highly specialized, timely, and provides targeted intervention to support all students and provide each with an equitable and engaging purpose and goal toward graduation and gainful employment.

Staffing Pattern:
1 full-time, highly qualified English instructor; 1 part-time Math instructor; 1 adjunct tutor

Population Served:
This Tier three group is universally under-served and fundamentally the definition of a student who falls through the cracks because their identifying at-risk behavior is not overt and, as I call it, "loud and observable". I provide all five high schools with at-risk data that aligns with the University of Chicago's High School Success framework regarding at-risk indicators for dropout (NCS Freshman On-Track Toolkit). With this I am able to provide our five partner high schools with key indicators for their own systems' targeted intervention model, and together we are able to locate the specific students who are not provided supports through their own structures whom are my targeted audience and the ones I call "invisible, forgotten students." These students meet the following criterion:

- Completed one-year of high school enrollment, entering sophomore cohort year
- Has interest in CTE program that is specified and intentional
- 90% attendance rate or higher
- Less than 2 suspensions
- Has no more than 3 lost credits in their freshmen year

Students that lie outside these criterion gates frequently have wrap-around counseling services, mental health services, or alternative education services that will aide them within each district. As I have worked with these districts for four years, they have come to realize that these truly are

students that neither the principals, counselors, nor teachers know much about, and I have found that this quality of hiding in plain sight is their own self-preservation tactic. Because I am the only FTE, I have only served a maximum of 16 students per half-day session.

Project Origination:
This project was originated through the guidance and vision of Dropout Recovery programs that are housed within 8 other CTE's throughout the state of Oklahoma; however, those programs host students for a full-day, half of the day in which the students are in credit recovery and the other half of the day the students are enrolled in CTE career programs. It was the partnership of key partner school administrators and the deputy superintendent to envision a program that served a very at-risk group of students who lacked targeted and available interventions within the common education setting.

Issues Addressed:
Credit recovery, engagement, motivation, goal-planning, authentic learning, relevance of learning

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:
- Students will be able to recover and obtain credits in order to be classified as juniors (11 credits) by the end of the school year.
- Students will be able to shadow, apply, and attend, if desired, a CTE program of their desire their junior and senior year to continue engagement and motivation toward graduation.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:
- English and math instruction were delivered in a blended and flipped model, not solely online. Teachers pre-teach units of study for each subject to students, along with key learning habits, and promote success on unit pre-test through state-standard skill attainment. Students then pre-test to determine their skill acquisition. If students still lack key skills within the teaching timeframe, instead of moving on with the curriculum as is typical in the common education setting, the students receive remediation using the online system as we are more concerned with the acquisition of skills rather than a timeline in which students must complete the unit. Students are provided optional tutoring three times per week to elect self-advocacy skills in preparing for pre-test skills or working on remediation skills within the online lessons. However, all students must keep a learning notebook with specific note-taking skills evidenced before they are able to re-test.
- Learning how to learn best strategies are coached and modeled to all students in all subjects. Structures for learning are evident in our practices.
- All students take a Career Exploration course, earning two units of Career Pathways learning and researching, two two-week career shadowing opportunities within our own CTE programs, a soft skills 9 weeks curriculum that ranges from attitude training to how

to rock a job fair training and experience, and finally a culminating research project presenting their capstone skills for a career program they apply for at MNTC.

- Why Try curriculum uses as Tier 1 emotional intelligence curriculum
- The University of Wisconsin SEI (Student Engagement Instrument) used to track and measure yearly growth in engagement levels, specific to cognitive engagement factors (a student's sense of control, intrinsic motivation, and future aspirations) and affective engagement factors (student's relationships with peers, teachers, and family support).
- PBIS Intervention models are used in both system supports and behavioral intervention models. I work with my administration and the partner school administration to identify strategies and interventions for working with our most difficult obstacle-avoidance. We create Tier 2 and, if needed, Tier 3 interventions to support students.
- Families are contacted by phone at least once every two weeks by me, the math instructor, or the math tutor to ensure family communication is consistent, of high quality, and intentional. We speak first on strength-based evidences within in the classroom and then look for future needs and growth opportunities.
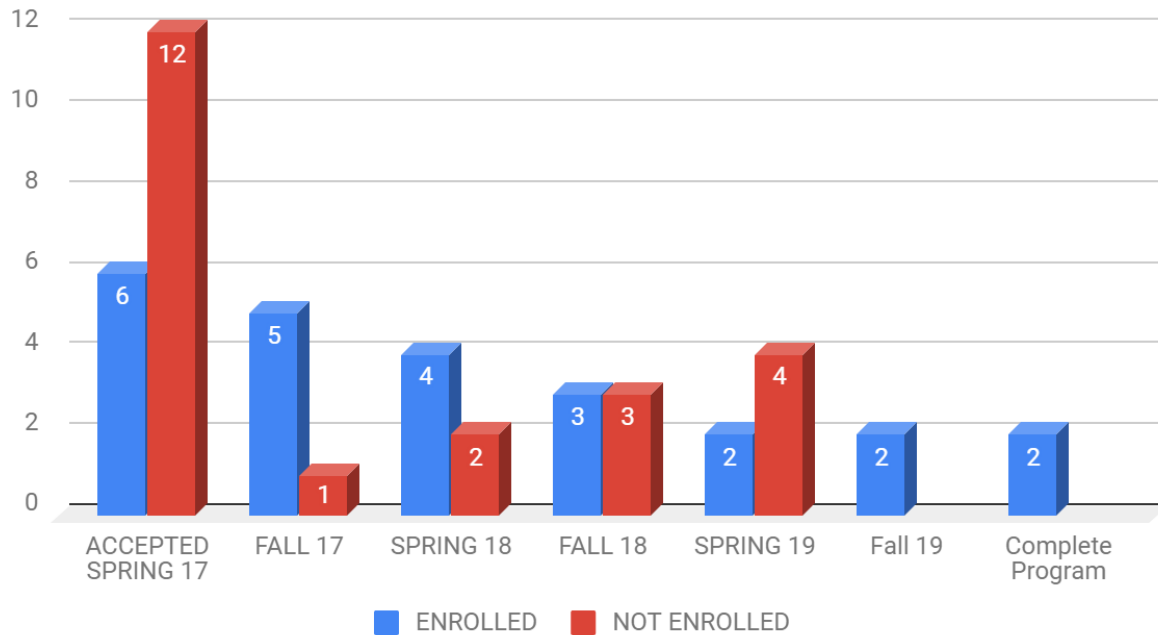
Results (Outcomes and Achievements):
Cohort SY16-17
- 1st Year of Program
- SY18-19 was Graduation Year

Cohort SY 16-17 Graduation Rate (Graduation Year 2019)

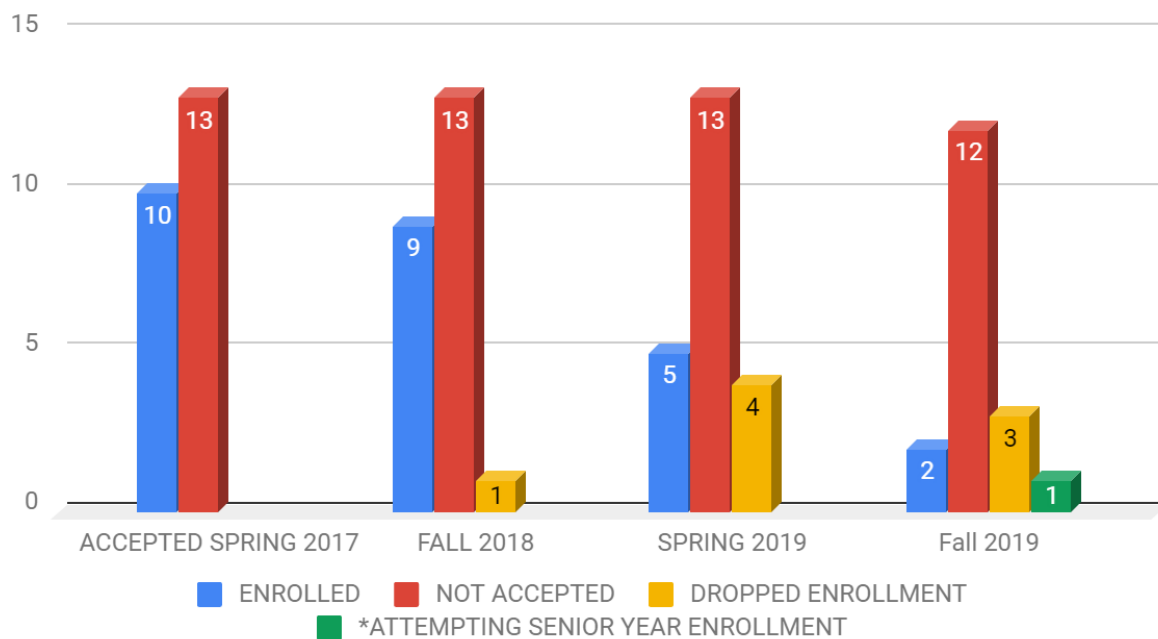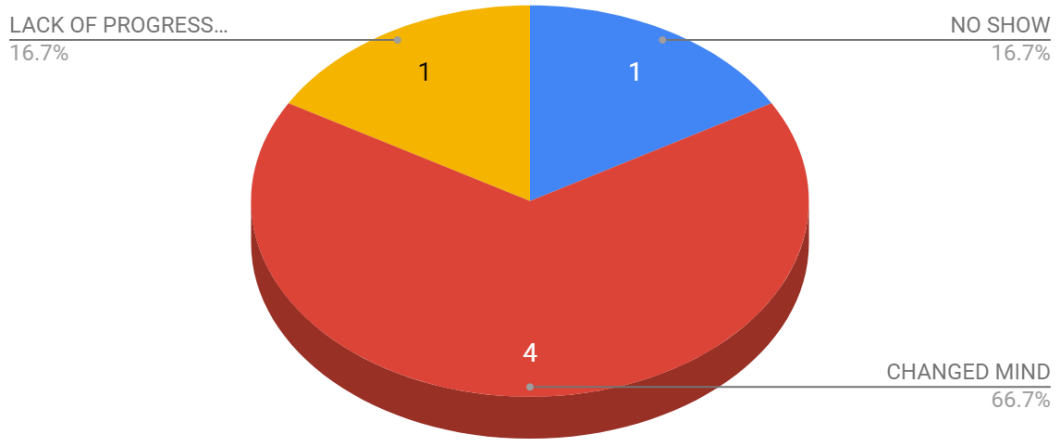| Category	Value
Total Graduated On-Time	9
Total Moved	3
Total Drop out	5
Total EPIC	1
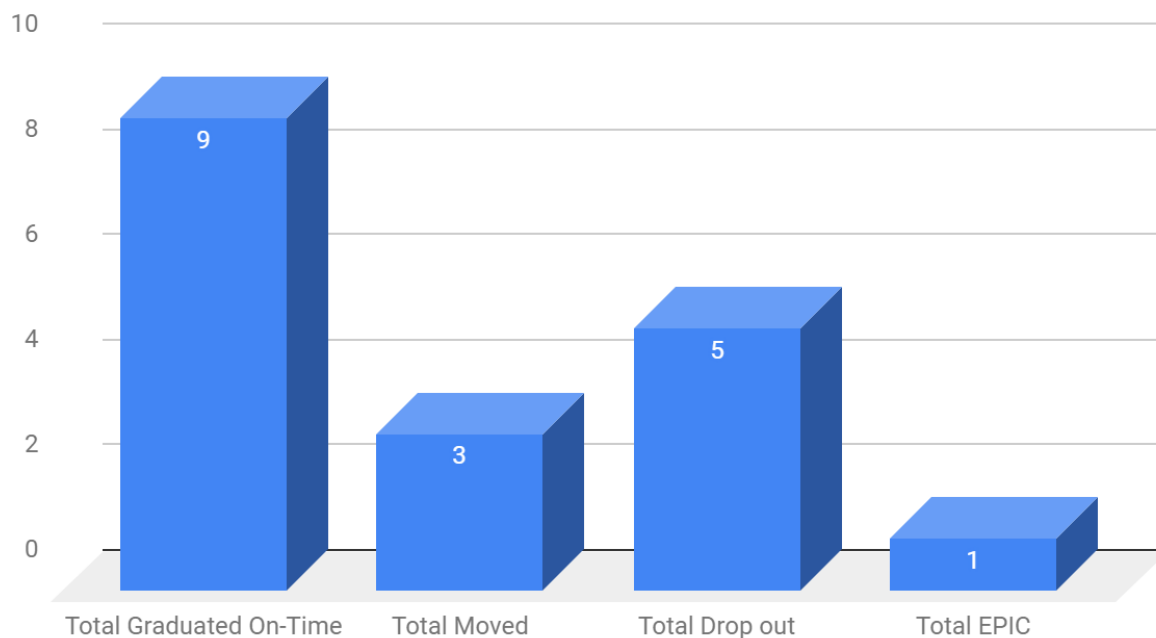
Cohort SY16-17 MNTC Enrollment Status & Completion

Cohort SY17-18
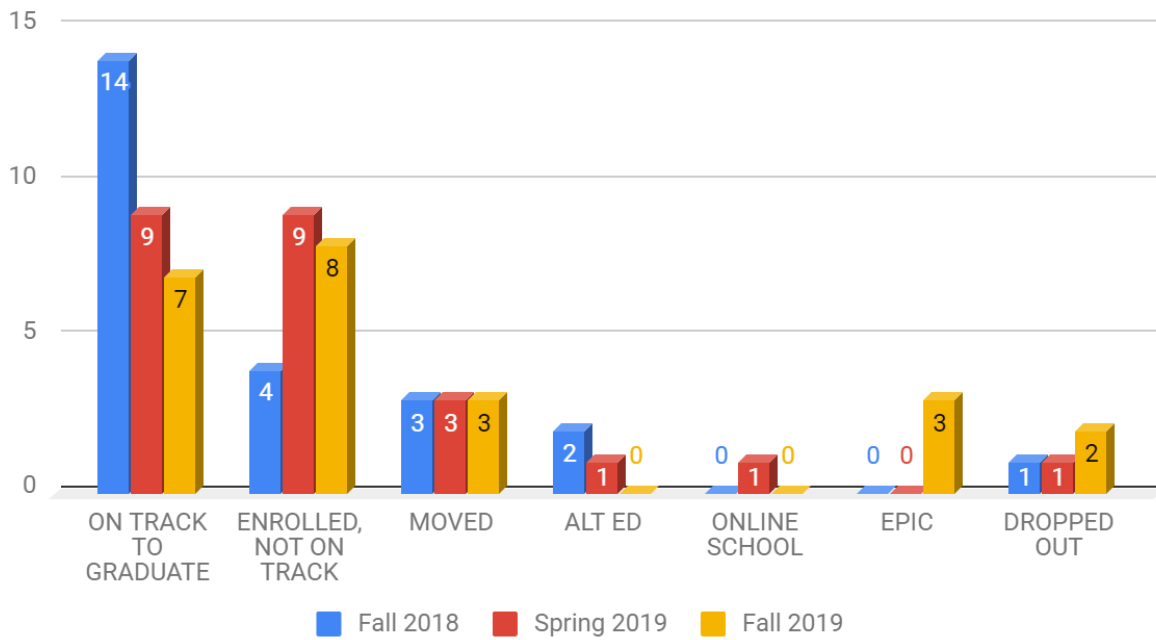- 2nd Year of the Program
- SY19-20 is Cohort's Graduation Year

COHORT SY17-18 MNTC ENROLLMENT

Cohort SY 17-18 Reason for Drop

LACK OF PROGRESS...
16.7%

NO SHOW
16.7%

1

1

4

CHANGED MIND
66.7%

Cohort SY17-18 Graduation and Enrollment Tracking

	ON TRACK TO GRADUATE	ENROLLED, NOT ON TRACK	MOVED	ALT ED	ONLINE SCHOOL	EPIC	DROPPED OUT
Fall 2018	14	4	3	2	0	0	1
Spring 2019	9	9	3	1	1	0	1
Fall 2019	7	8	3	0	0	3	2

■ Fall 2018   ■ Spring 2019   ■ Fall 2019
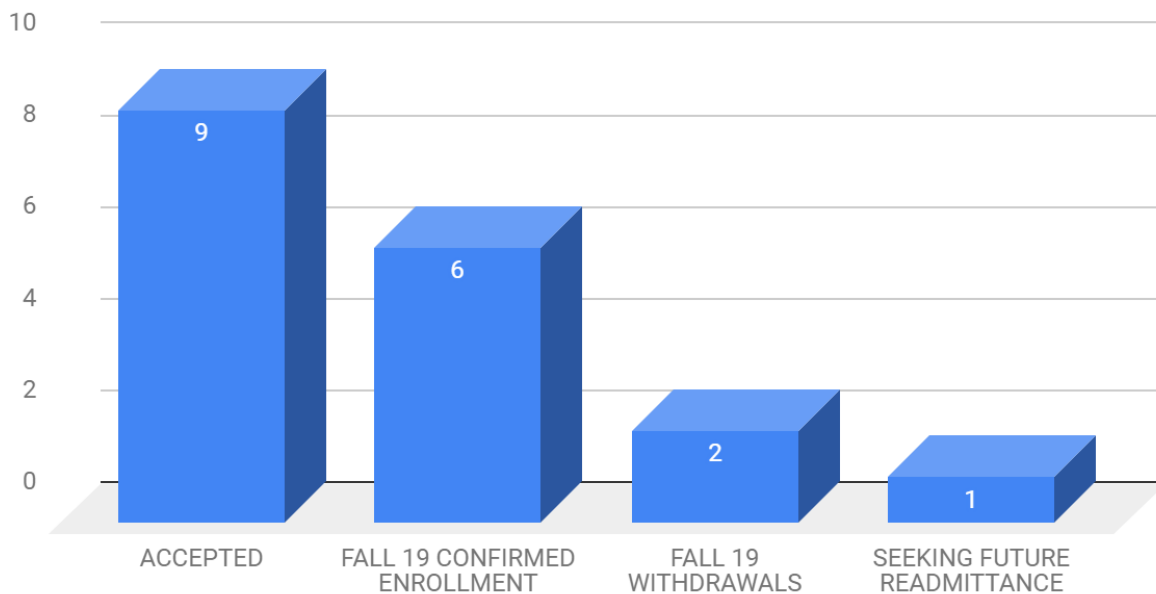
Cohort SY18-19
- 3rd Year of the Program
- SY20-21 is Cohort's Graduation Year

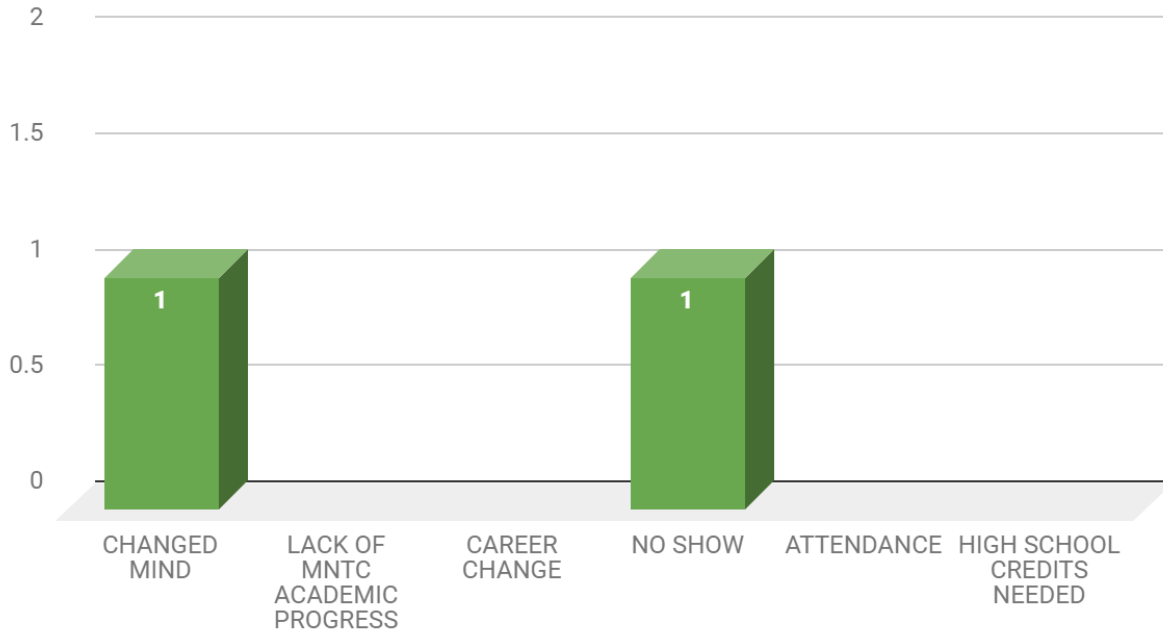## COHORT SY 18-19 MNTC APPLICATION, ACCEPTANCE, AND ENROLLMENT

Count of MNTC ACCEPTED
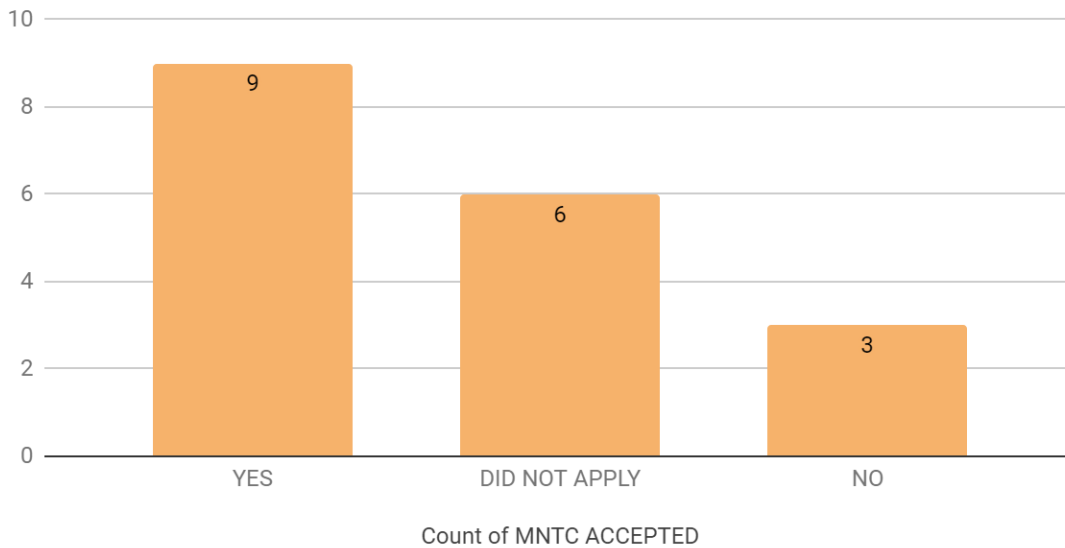
Reasons for Non-Acceptance: Lack of necessary credit recovery (all 3)

COHORT SY1819 MNTC ACCEPTANCE COMPARISON TO FALL ENROLLMENT STATUS

COHORT SY1819 WITHDRAWAL MNTC REASONS

1			1		

CHANGED MIND — LACK OF MNTC ACADEMIC PROGRESS — CAREER CHANGE — NO SHOW — ATTENDANCE — HIGH SCHOOL CREDITS NEEDED

Comparative Cohort Graduation Tracking (FALL 2019)

2016-2017

	Graduated On Time	On Track to Graduate	Enrolled, Not On Track	Dropped Out	Moved Out of District	EPIC
Cohort SY16-17	9			5	3	1
Cohort SY17-18		7	8	2	3	3
Cohort SY18-19		10	4	0	0	3

■ Cohort SY16-17 ■ Cohort SY17-18 ■ Cohort SY18-19
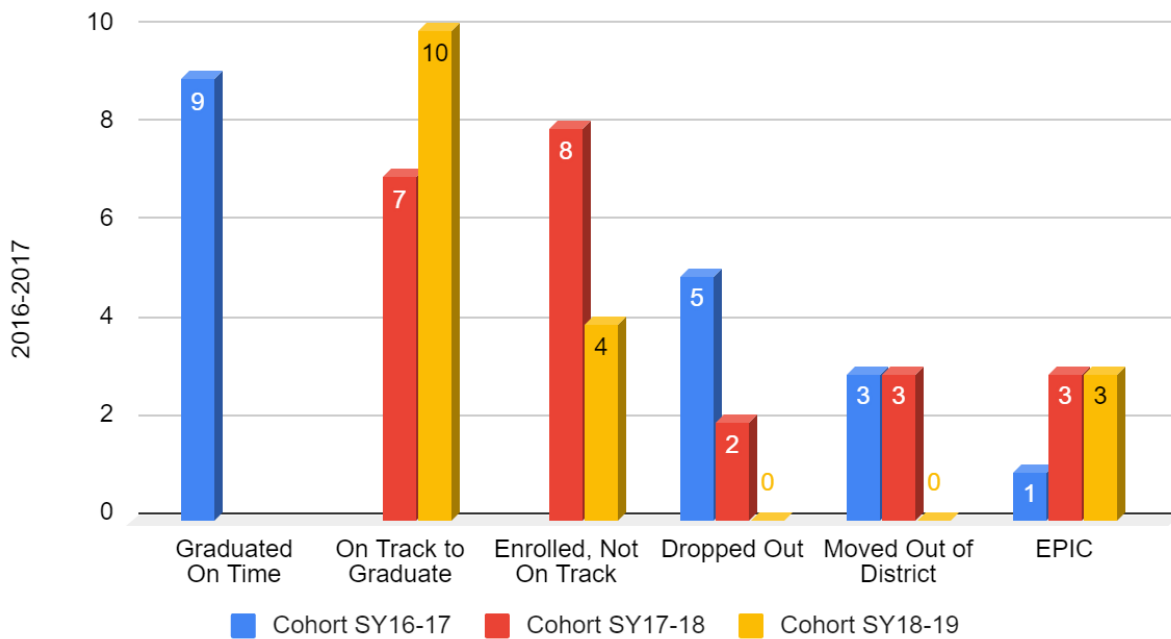
Comparative Cohort MNTC Enrollment and Completion

Chart data:

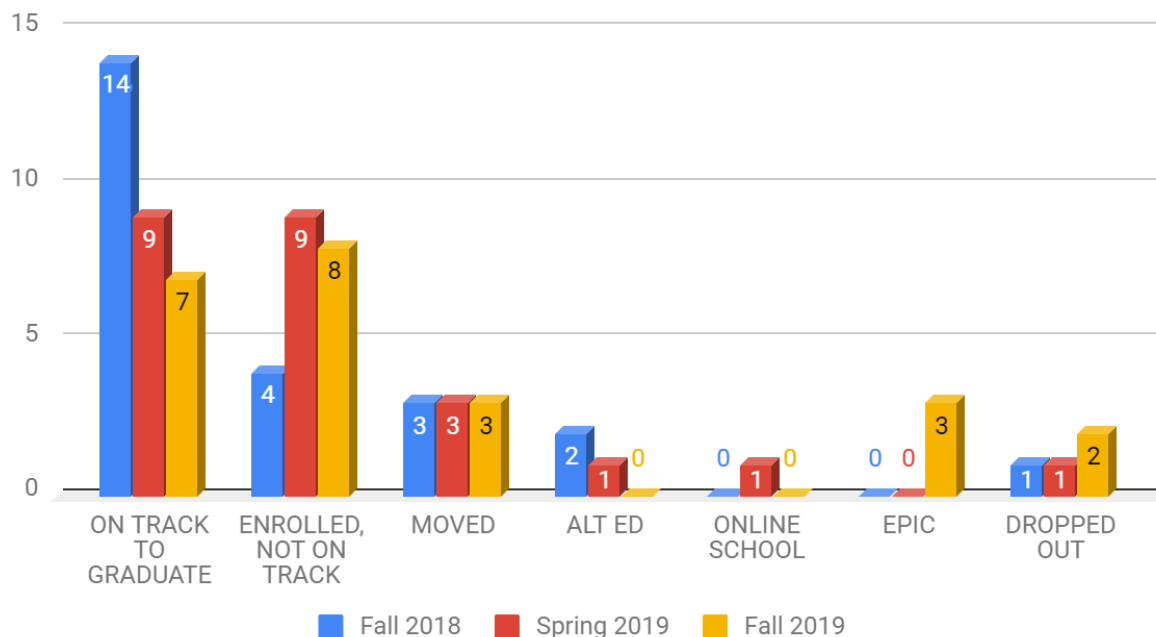| Category	Cohort SY16-17	Cohort SY17-18	Cohort SY18-19
Accepted	7	10	8
First Year Enrollment		9	6
Second Year Enrollment		2	
Withdrawn	5	8	2
Completed Course	2		
Re-Enrolled as Adult	2		
Completing Second Program	1		
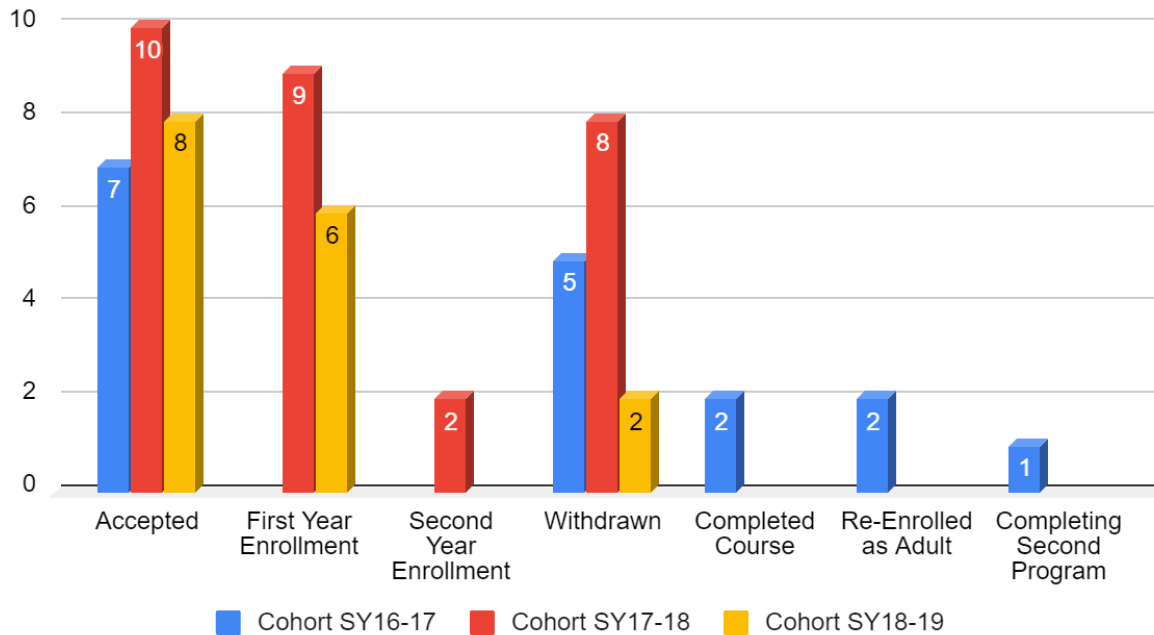
Project Timeline:

This is the program's fourth year, and it's second year to have graduates. However, the program did not have secured placement in a CTE program until SY17-18, so years prior to that students completing CTE programs was based upon a student competitively being placed against other non-at-risk students. I hope the program moves toward a potential second year of academic offerings in the form of a pull-out math or English offering, or even more ideally, full day enrollment at MNTC with half-day academics and half-day CTE. The goal would to be to transition students back to their partner high school their senior year in either a full capacity or in a partial capacity (half day) to transfer and transition learned successful habits to multiple venues as a gradual release of responsibility.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:

With the current model of saved seat in CTE program their junior year with completion of Ascend Credit Recovery plan credits (SY17-18 onward), our graduation rate is yet to be determined. However, the table below illustrates a much smaller number of dropouts or move-outs, as they have a stronger identity and engagement connection to completion of their partner school graduation requirements because of their enrollment in MNTC.

Cohort SY17-18 Graduation and Enrollment Tracking

Bar chart showing graduation and enrollment tracking across categories for Fall 2018 (blue), Spring 2019 (red), and Fall 2019 (yellow):
- ON TRACK TO GRADUATE: 14, 9, 7
- ENROLLED, NOT ON TRACK: 4, 9, 8
- MOVED: 3, 3, 3
- ALT ED: 2, 1, 0
- ONLINE SCHOOL: 0, 1, 0
- EPIC: 0, 0, 3
- DROPPED OUT: 1, 1, 2

Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:
- Continued growth of skills in social/emotional skills for Math and tutor teachers
- PBIS and Trauma-Informed skills for administrative staff when intervening in student incidents and investigations; CTE rarely uses these models as they are acceptance-based enrollment and rarely deal with behavioral issues
- Continued CTE instructor growth in areas of working with at-risk students, trauma-informed practices, and relationship-building

Current Status of Project: Ongoing

Role in Project as a NDPS Certification Program Participant:
I am the project developer and the only FTE in the program.

Lessons Learned:
- There are a silent group of chameleon students who comply, attend, and blend in as a means of self-preservation and self-fulfilling prophecy. Many of these students either fear trying or fear even caring enough to try because they did once (or frequently) and met a hostile/unappreciative teacher response or experienced failure. These adverse experiences prevent them from wanting to care or try, so they would rather place the own-ness on externalized loci of control.
- These students have very strong and overwhelming histories of both familial and personal "failures" in schools, and they have embraced this as their future without sense of being able to control even what happens to them tomorrow.

- As a sophomore teacher at Norman High School, I always seemed so frustrated at the CTE application process because the students who could really change their lives and trajectory for generations to come in their families by being given the opportunity to attend and gain a highly-skilled certification and career skill were often turned away at the first step because of a lack of credits. Yet again, confirming to students with their perceived "defined futures" as out of their control. I was granted the opportunity to bridge this gap not just for those students, those families, and MNTC programs, but for a community that would have to pay the costly (literally) effects of paying for another high school dropout due to a lack of engagement and relevancy.
- When given a relevant and within-reach "reward", even your most reluctant students will work tirelessly through difficult concepts in order to gain control of their stories.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:
Tirelessly fight for those in your system who are invisibly slipping through the cracks, because they lose their voices along the way and will sing so beautifully when trust and validation remind them of their value.