

BCIST by Design, NVOT at Heart

Design and Sports Medicine students lead double lives as part of Bergen County Institutes for Science and Technology

By Sam Cruz and
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For the past three years, junior Sam Cruz has been waking up at 4 a.m. to finish his morning routine in time to catch the 6:15 a.m. bus and prepare for the hour-long commute ahead. Within that hour, Cruz completes his entire skincare and makeup regimen, finishes an essay, and plays whole games of UNO.

Cruz is from North Arlington and is a student in the Bergen County Institutes for Science and Technology (BCIST), a satellite high school program offered by Bergen County Technical Schools (BCTS) in partnership with the NVRHS District. Students, like Cruz, come to NVOT from all over Bergen County to be a part of this pioneering program.

To be admitted into the BCIST program, applicants have to submit a personal essay, teacher recommendations, transcripts, and complete an interview. All eighth graders residing in Bergen County are eligible to apply, but half of the seats remain reserved for in-district students. Enrolled students are officially BCTS students and receive a BCTS diploma, but attend NVOT full time.

The partnership began in 2018 when NVRHS approached BCTS in hopes of developing a new Career Technical Education (CTE) program. "Our district values the school-to-work connection. Having students be able to connect what they are learning in high school to their future is really important," said Matthew Spatz, District Director of Guidance.

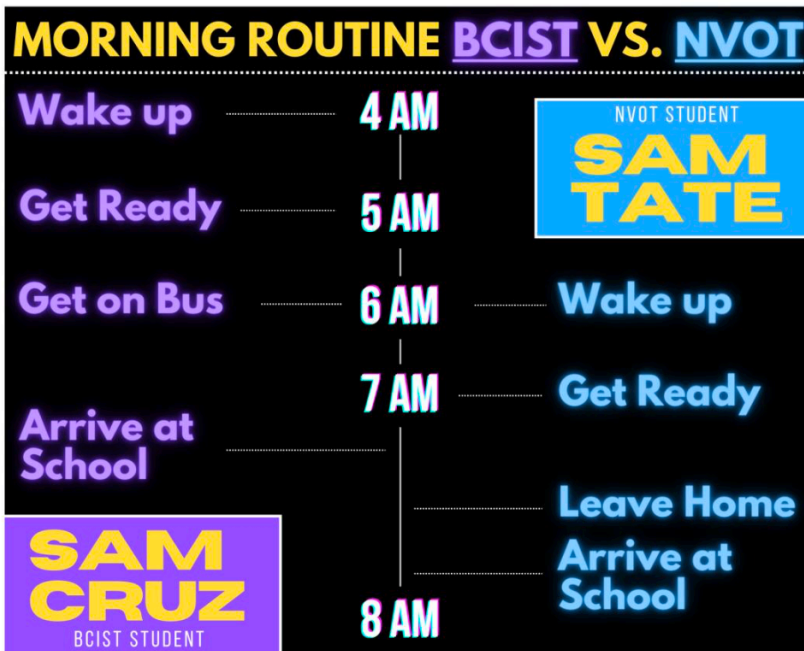
However, the partnership was about more than creating a new CTE program. According to Andrea Sheridan, the BCTS

Assistant Superintendent and principal of the institutes, a primary focus was "bringing students not just from the Valley, but from all of Bergen County up to [the NVRHS] schools."

Ultimately, the result was the creation of the Institute for Interactive Design Technology (IIDT), which welcomed its first class in the 2020-2021 school year, and later the Institute for Sports Medicine and Exercise Science, which launched this September.

IIDT introduces students to the field of user experience and user interface design, while the Institute for Sports Medicine and Exercise Science teaches students the scientific principles behind sports performance. Each institute follows a four-year framework in which students take one CTE course yearly that relates to their institute. This course takes up one elective spot in their Northern Valley schedule.

With the exception of that required CTE course, students have the freedom to take any other NVOT classes. "The way



The program began with a small class of 19 students during hybrid learning, but there are now more than 70 students across the two institutes. However, it took some time for

As more students join the institutes, Mangano finds that more people are aware of the program than ever before. "Now that there's three years of it at the school and now there's

Like Dennis, other students found themselves feeling more integrated into the community after overcoming the adjustment period. "At first it was kind of weird because all my friends were in a different town and I was all the way here," Aliya Gajra, an IIDT freshman said. "But it's been a month or two and I actually got well adjusted to it and made friends outside of the program."

Since half of the spots in the program are reserved for in-district students, joining the institutes was entering more familiar terrain for some. Mangano, who is from Harrington Park, had already planned to attend NVOT, but joining the IIDT offered her a new opportunity: "I always loved design and art and I wanted to pursue it so [the program] sounded perfect: here's the program within the school you're already going to go into that focuses on what you love."

Despite being BCTS students on paper—and in commute—students in the institutes still feel like NVOT students at heart. "I completely feel like an NVOT student," said IIDT junior Svapnil Tripathi. "The IIDT experience helps bring me together with the IIDT students, but the rest of my classes I share with NVRHS students, which makes me feel like I'm fully part of the community."

For Dennis, splitting between two schools has become second nature: "I'm grateful to have Bergen Tech on my diploma, but I definitely rep Golden Knights."

"I DEFINITELY REP GOLDEN KNIGHTS"

I was looking at the career and technical programs, it's almost like taking an elective, but an elective that you're really passionate about. And you may go into that field one day," Sheridan said.

the program to seem like part of the NVOT community. "There are a lot of people who don't know what it is. They'll ask me why I have a different laptop or what I mean when I say I have this class," said IIDT junior Lillana Mangano.

the sports medicine program, it's becoming more known," she added.

For the students coming from outside Northern Valley, going to a school in an entirely new district took some adjusting: "It's a unique experience but it is sometimes draining when you come from out of district," said IIDT sophomore Gabriella Vega. "But it allows you to step out of your comfort zone and make some new friends."

According to IIDT junior Abigail Dennis, starting the program her freshman year during hybrid learning "was a bit of a difficult transition coming from another town." However, she noticed that the situation improved once the school opened up to in-person learning: "Once we got to go to the classroom, once I got to get to know everyone in the school, I really enjoyed my experience and it's been great ever since."

CTE Course Sequence

Institute for Sports Medicine & Exercise

1. SPORTS MEDICINE & ATHLETIC TRAINING
2. ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY
3. MOVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE
4. ENERGY SYSTEMS & SENIOR INTERNSHIPS

Institute for Interactive Design Technology

1. ESSENTIALS OF INTERACTIVE DESIGN
2. COMMUNICATION IN DESIGN
3. THE USER INTERFACE: DESIGN STRATEGY & INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE
4. INTERACTIVE DESIGN STUDIO & SENIOR INTERNSHIPS