

Hancock, MI – Copper Country Intermediate School District (CCISD) Career and Technical Education (CTE) is a program designed to promote the building of real-world skills through hands-on learning. CTE delivered on a recent project by installing a CORE Board on the playground at Barkell Elementary School in Hancock. CORE Boards are tools used throughout the school, not just in the classroom, to promote communication by having visual and written “core” words like yes, no, all done, and many more. Students use boards and point to words to express themselves which makes up many of the words everyone uses consistently throughout their day. Janel Summers, an Autism Consultant with the CCISD, saw a need for an additional CORE Board. She then approached CCISD Superintendent George Stockero to request a large scale board to be utilized on the playground to promote student and adult communication in addition to student to student. That led Stockero to connect this project with the CCISD housed CTE program to assist.

To deliver on the request, CTE Construction Technology students worked with instructors to design and build the structure of the CORE Board. CTE Instructor, Jordan Schulze, designed the board’s graphics and worked with Industrial Graphics in Houghton to get the board printed. Then the CTE Construction Technology class went to work building a hands-on, learning activity on the backside of the CORE Board and a sturdy frame to withstand the harsh UP climate.

This collaborative project between the CCISD Special Education Department, Mild Cognitive Impaired Classrooms and CTE is a great example of what happens every day in the construction industry. The teachers and students will benefit from having access to a high-quality education tool that is readily available to help students communicate. Simultaneously, the CTE Construction Technology students and staff benefit by taking a request from a customer, then building a product that is multifunctional, beautiful, and most importantly meet the customer’s needs. Mike Randell, CTE Construction Technology Instructor explained, “Students were able to see all aspects of what professionals in the construction industry do every day by meeting the need of a customer with a high-quality product that exceeds their expectations. These are excellent experiences students will be able to take with them to any industry, job, or even with furthering their education.” The skills acquired in this project are a microcosm of what they can expect to see in the real world. Andrew Kinnunen, a junior from Jeffers High School worked on the project and said, “This project was a lot of fun to make and very creative. It is a good feeling to know this will be helpful for students.”

For students and teachers having access to an oversized four foot by eight foot CORE Board on the playground is a game-changer. Summers said, “We are so excited to have the CORE Board outside at recess and want to thank the CTE students, Construction Instructors, and Mr. Stockero for making this project happen and then taking it to the next level by having an area where students can interact with the activities on the back and communicate easily with their friends.” Lisa Sporbert, a Teacher for the Program for students with severe disabilities at Barkell Elementary School said, “All of our students are non-verbal and we use the CORE communication board in every part of our school day so students can understand what is being said to them. They in turn can point to the CORE pictures to express their wants and needs as well. Our parents are using (CORE Boards) at home also and we have seen success in student engagement as well as an increase in expressive communication from our student population. It's the first research based system that actually works and is functional and easy to use! Barkell Elementary has allowed us to post CORE boards throughout the school and the General Education students are using it with our kids as well to communicate! We appreciate having one at recess also. Thanks to the CTE class that made it!”



Andrew Kinnunen, Jeffers 11th grader and CTE Construction Technology student, paints the frame of the CORE Board to be available on the Barkell Elementary playground to assist students communicate.



CORE Board created by Copper Country ISD Career & Technical Education students available to students on the Barkell Elementary playground for students to use to promote and assist communication.



Copper Country ISD Career & Technical Education students remove supports after setting the posts for the new CORE Board created by CTE students and available on the Barkell Elementary playground that will be used by students to assist and promote communication.