

Center for Talent Development  
Madden Family Interview

At 16 years old, Alexis Madden is already making a name for herself in STEM environments, and she has plans for even greater accomplishments. This fall, Alexis began her first year at the University of Iowa through the Belin-Blank Early College Entry Program. She is studying biology and pre-med with the hope of pursuing medical school and a career in pediatric robotics.

While her academic performance has been nothing short of stellar in recent years, her early elementary school teachers might not have predicted this success.

**Audra**            **Lisa, some parents might be nervous about a child starting college at such a young age. Why do you think Alexis is ready for this challenge?**

Lisa                Alexis has never been your average kid. From the moment we began giving her the right tools, she has been unstoppable. She is hard working, determined, and performs well under pressure. Plus, she has always connected well with children in gifted and talented camps and programs, so I believe the Belin-Blank Honors Program will suit her well.

**Audra**            **We will certainly look forward to following her achievements there. Let's talk for a minute, though, about why her success might surprise her younger grade school teachers. Tell me about Alexis's early elementary school days.**

Lisa                Those were extremely scary times. Alexis was underperforming, disruptive, and emotionally hard to manage for her teachers. It got to the point where I expected calls from the school on a weekly basis. She was miserable, and, as a parent, I felt helpless.

**Audra**            **That had to have been so difficult. Alexis, what do you remember about that time?**

Alexis             I was bored and very frustrated. I remember never fitting in and not knowing how to apply myself.

**Audra**            **Lisa, how did Alexis go from being an underperforming, disruptive student to a high-performing, early college entrant?**

Lisa                Alexis was identified as a gifted and talented student via the Northwestern University's Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS). With her test scores and information provided by CTD, I was able to have good conversations with Alexis's teachers about her academic needs. Then, when we enriched her education with theater and camps for gifted children, Lexi started to find success in her relationships with teachers and other children. For the first time, her confidence soared. We continued having her take the ACT through NUMATS, and her

Center for Talent Development  
Madden Family Interview

scores are what identified her as having early entrance potential to the University of Iowa. Her excellent grades were just a bonus; the test scores were the real key to her admission.

**Audra** **So NUMATS helped lead you to the Belin-Blank Early College Entry program. What other opportunities have you enjoyed as a result of your NUMATS testing, Lexi?**

Alexis So many! My test scores qualified me for entrance to a University of Wisconsin-Madison Veterinary Camp, a Northwestern University Greek & Latin Camp, and the Lake Superior State University Women in Technology Camp. The tests and the camps, combined, helped me identify what I love and also what I don't. When I was younger, for example, I had always wanted to be a vet. After vet camp, however, I realized I loved medicine, but I didn't want to work with animals. Most people don't get experiences like NUMATS gave me until they are in college or even in their first jobs. Because of NUMATS and CTD, I'm much more confident about my career choice. I now know I want to use my passion for medicine with people.

**Audra** **How did you first become interested in pediatric robotics, specifically?**

Alexis Last year, Center for Talent Development sent me an e-mail invitation to apply for a [Women in Technology Camp](#) at Lake Superior State University. I was one of 30 women accepted and given a scholarship. At camp, I learned coding and enjoyed building robots and a radio. Afterward, I decided that both medicine and robotics were in my future.

**Audra** **It sounds like NUMATS has guided you to some terrific enrichment programs. Lisa, how did testing enhance Lexi's day-to-day experience in school?**

Lisa Alexis's test scores helped me advocate for her in the school system. They provided evidence to show her teachers what she was capable of achieving. Lexi really didn't have any weak areas academically. She was grade levels ahead of her peers in some areas. Because of my conversations with them, teachers started having Alexis mentor and tutor her peers. She was also given additional work to keep her busy. Most of all, teachers **viewed** her differently. Instead of feeling like a burden or an issue, she felt valued, and that changed her behavior.

**Audra** **Lexi, you've not only proven yourself academically, but as a performer, as well. How did you get involved in music, and what role has that played in your academic life?**

Alexis CTD staff members recommended to my mother that I balance my highly analytical interests with the arts, so I began theater. I've now been in

Center for Talent Development  
Madden Family Interview

over 15 productions, and I've found a real love for music and theater. That's where I relax. I love to act, sing, and dance. Doing so has also strengthened my presentation skills. After years in theater, I am not afraid to present in front of anyone.

**Audra**            **That fearlessness will serve you well in college, I'm sure! Lisa, as you reflect back on parenting Alexis, what advice would you like to share with parents of other academically talented children?**

Lisa                BE PROACTIVE. SEEK ANSWERS. CALL CTD. GET TESTING. DO SUMMER CAMPS. Be prepared with test scores when you meet with teachers. Be ready to ask for differentiation for your child. If you don't ask, you won't get it. Don't forget to help your children find balance and fun. For my children, that has been theater. Be prepared to pay for what your children need. The cost of a miserable child and the impact that inability to fit in has on their lives is far more than the cost of the extra education and camps that teach them they are VALUABLE and not alone. I have also learned that having confidence in your child teaches them to have confidence in themselves. Lastly, when they are ready, let them fly.

**Audra**            **Excellent advice. Thanks for sharing, and thanks to you both for your time today. Lexi, best of luck with your first year of college. Keep in touch and let us know how it goes!**

Lexi                Thank you so much. I will!