

CC to End its TEEN Program in June

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After over 20 years as the area's only alternative high school for pregnant and parenting teens, Centralia College announced Tuesday it plans to end its Teens Entering Education Now program effective in June.

The program serves teens who are pregnant and parenting, or seeking an alternative educational environment.

Although it was a one-of-a-kind program, officials at the college said most high schools now have their own alternative education programs that students can utilize.

"Basically when the TEEN program first started over 20 years ago the high school systems were not prepared for the population," Steve Ward, vice president of finance and administration at the college, told The Chronicle. "The schools have made tremendous advancements over the last couple of decades."

Ward said the program serves as a "stop gap" for alternative high school education. Now, the college plans to help the students in a more mainstream role, he said.

John Martens, vice president of instruction, said the college is looking at ways to transition the students into existing programs in the K-12 system. He also said some students in the program may complete their education with the college even after it is closed.

"Perhaps there will be students we finish off here depending on their age, and where they are," he said. "...We are trying to ensure that for some students it may be best to continue with us."

Cristi Heitschmidt, dean of child and family studies, told The Chronicle the program has about 40 students currently enrolled. Typically, the number of students ranges between 36 and 50, she said.

The program provides its target population with the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma instead of a GED, she said.

All of the participants are required to take parenting classes, something Heitschmidt said adds a unique piece to the college's program.

The program, according to Heitschmidt, is important because of the opportunities it provides the students.

"We're stopping intergenerational poverty," she said. "Many of the students that come are from homes of at risk situations, trauma and adversity."

Serious talks about ending the program began this winter, Martens said.

"I think it would be fair to say all of our programs are under more or less continuous review, not just the TEEN program," he said. "Everything that we do we try to keep tabs on how we are doing and what our successes are."

In a press release, Martens said the college saw a need to refocus its efforts and channel the students into programs that could better meet their needs and remove some of the duplication.

"Centralia College has established GED and high school completion programs in place, and many of the high schools are offering their own alternatives," he said.

The program is funded directly through participating high schools, Martens told The Chronicle.

Heitschmidt said the students currently in the program remain a priority for the college.

"It's really important for our students and their families to know they're going to be taken care of through this process," she said in a press release. "They're not going to be abandoned. We're working through a lot of the details now, but these students will be taken care of."