

Teen Program Helps Local Teenagers Succeed

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By Robin Montgomery Centralia College

Centralia College's TEEN (Teens Entering Education Now) Program is a high school credit retrieval program specifically designed for students who need an alternative to the traditional high school setting.

Initially created to meet the needs of pregnant or parenting teens, the program today also serves students with anxiety, mental health issues or chronic illnesses. Out of the 50-60 enrolled students, about half are young parents. Many of the 15- to 21-year-old students come from low-income families or homes where there is little to no parental support.

"Our program provides a nurturing environment where the staff is truly invested in the youth, often becoming mentors in their lives," said Kristi Jewell, program manager, adding, "We help them to navigate their educational pathways and make positive life choices."

Serving 14 school districts, the TEEN program provides both group and individualized educational programs to meet the unique needs of their students. The program's goal is to help students reach the 20-credit requirement for their state diploma and to encourage them to go to college.

Classes are offered during a four-hour block each weekday and include history, English, science, math, health/art/PE and parenting. For those who don't have rides, limited transportation is also provided.

Focusing on the unique challenges of teen parenting, the year-long parenting class is tailored to help students through each stage of their child's growth and development. Recognizing the importance of the father's role, the TEEN program also offers a special class on fathering.

Collaboration is key to the TEEN program's success. Not only does the program partner successfully with local outreaches like Lend a Hand and Blue Earth Farms, it also works closely with community social service agencies like maternity case management, the health department/WIC, TANIF, juvenile justice and the local school districts.

In addition, the on-campus partnership with Centralia College's Lab School enables students to utilize on-campus childcare while they attend classes.

Although many of the teen parents and other students have extremely challenging circumstances, they also have an overwhelming number of advocates. The dedicated TEEN program staff and numerous community mentors continue to invest in the lives of these youth — giving them a safe place to learn and grow and succeed.

For more information about the TEEN program, call (360) 736-9391, ext. 341.