

D211 POST: ALTERNATIVE NIGHT SCHOOL REACHES 25 YEARS OF SERVICE



At 6 p.m. on a Thursday evening, most students are either home doing homework or attending some form of extracurricular activity. For some, however, their school day is just beginning.

Since 1992, Township High School District 211's Alternative Night School has offered individuals who left high school a chance to return to earn their high school diploma. The program gives individuals who left high school prior to graduation a chance to return and complete the high school curriculum.

To enroll, students must have completed a minimum of eight hours of high school credit prior to registering.

Jerry Trevino, Director of Summer School and Community Outreach for District 211 said the program offers students a greater sense of structure than G.E.D programs. He said with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, the district has been able to open the program to individuals who may not currently reside within the district.

Rhonda Barbeau, WIOA coordinator for District 211, said the policy has expanded what the program does.

"We are now not just getting them to their diploma," she said. "They have to have a path to their future, and we have to help them get on that path."

Barbeau said that help ranges from helping the students fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Assistance (FAFSA), to taking them to meet with representatives from Harper College or representatives from various companies.

"We're trying to get students, that, even if they don't want to go to college, get into some sort of certification path or get a job where they can be self-sustaining," she said.

According to Barbeau there is no standard amount of time a student will be enrolled in the program. She said each new student's prior high school

transcripts are reviewed to determine which classes they will need to complete District 211 graduation requirements.



“Some students are here for as long as two years, others are only here for a semester,” she said.

Students who enroll in the program left school for a variety of reasons. One student who chose to return to school is Cristal Arreola. The twenty-year-old said she left school for personal reasons during her senior year.

“The second semester of my senior year, stuff happened at home so I moved out,” Arreola said. “Either I had to go to school or pay my bills, so I decided to work full time.”

She said after seeing friends post graduation pictures on social media, she felt regret for not finishing.

Arreola said going back to has been complicated but she will be worth it once she completes the course.

“Sometimes it can be difficult. I have two jobs,” she said. “I have to go to my jobs, then come here. It can be complicated, but as long as you put your heart into, you’re going to get things done.”

Arreola is currently on track to receive her diploma in May 2018. She said she had a strong reason to return.

“I want to make my dad proud,” she said.

While family pride was a driving force behind many students’ decision to return, they also have very practical reasons as well.

Jose “Pepe” Ortiz said he found it difficult to advance in his current job.

“I put in to be a director in my department,” Ortiz said. “They told me they since I hadn’t finished high school, I could move up.”

Ortiz said his employer would accept either a G.E.D. or diploma for him to apply for the position.

"I'd rather have the diploma," he said.

For Isaac Garcia, the deciding factor for him to return to school was very simple.

"I'm not just going to be another statistic," he said.

Kimberly Grauer, a Social Studies and American Government teacher said there is a word she does not allow in her class.

"The word 'dropout' is not allowed in my classroom," she said. "Each of these students made a decision to return. To me that's very courageous."



District 211 will be holding an early registration for the spring 2018 semester from Nov. 6 – 16 from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m. each night in room 49 at Hoffman Estates High School. Anyone wishing to enroll needs to bring their high school transcripts as well as payment for any classes. Classes cost \$12 each, and students can take no more than four per semester.