

D211 POST: CNA COURSE GIVES STUDENTS A LOOK AT MEDICAL CAREERS



Paige Kawiecki practices taking blood pressure of Ada Sieminski during a Certified Nursing Assitant's course at Palatine High School.

John Reyes always wanted to be a teacher, even when he worked as a nurse at William Fremd High School. His desire to teach led him to teach a Certified Nursing Assistant course at Harper College. When Township High School District 211 began to look at starting their own program, the administration decided to observe a class at Harper, which happened to be taught by Reyes.

“Nancy Robb, the superintendent at the time, saw me that night,” Reyes said. “She called me the next day at my office at Fremd, and asked me if I knew anything about the CNA program. She said, ‘We’d like to start one.’”

Reyes said he would help start a pilot program for the district, but he wanted to be the one to teach it. The first year of the program, Reyes had 24 students.

Six years later, the District 211 CNA program has more than 200 students and is available at both James B. Conant High School and Palatine High School. The dual credit course allows students to earn six college credit hours and prepares them to test for their state certification.

Reyes said many students who take the course go on to pursue medical careers after college.

"I keep in touch with a lot of the alumni, and we are seeing many of the students actually go on to college and study something medical," said Reyes.

Vickie DeGuia, who teaches the CNA course at Palatine High School, said having the course available gives students the clinical experience they need before applying to medical schools.



A group of students practice taking each others blood pressure during their CNA class at Palatine High School

"The clinical practice they get is priceless, because they can use that experience when they apply to colleges if they feel like they are going major in health careers," DeGuia said. "It's a hands-on experience you can't get anywhere."

One student, Chris Swinkunas, enrolled in the course at Conant to fulfil a requirement of his college pathway.

"I'm interested in nursing, and I noticed that this course is required," said Swinkunas. "Since it's free at my school, I decided to take it here."

One requirement for students to earn their certification is completing a minimum 40 hours of clinical work. Palatine High School senior Abbie Amato said balancing the work with other school requirements is not difficult.

"I don't find it to be that difficult because it is something I enjoy," Amato said. "It's not too big of work load. I find what you put into it is what you get out of it."

While the class can help students with plans of medical school get a leg-up on their peers, Reyes and DeGuia both agree that it also helps students decide if

a medical career is right for them.

“I believe this is a good way to decide if this is a career they want to do now versus after two years of college,” DeGuia said.

District 211’s CNA program has had a high percentage of students taking the course qualify for their certification with a nearly 100% qualification over the past two years. Reyes attributes that to the motivation of the students.

“This is an elective that students really want to be in,” said Reyes. “It’s very intrinsic.”