

GLENDALE NEWS-PRESS

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Education

Academy puts students on right path

Program, which aims to help those who have dropped out of high school, celebrates first year.

By Angela Hokanson

Halfway through her senior year at Glendale High School, Serenela Suarez, 18, was behind in credits and considering dropping out. She frequently didn't show up at school because her homework wasn't done, and she felt her teachers weren't responsive when she needed help.

But her luck turned, Suarez said, when she found out about the AdvancePath Academy, a Glendale Unified School District program for students who are in danger of dropping out of high school. Suarez enrolled in the academy about a week after it opened in January 2007, and she's still there a year later, working on her high school classes one at a time.

"I love it," Suarez said. "They don't pressure us to do six classes at the same time."

Suarez is among about 120 students enrolled in the program, which marked its one-year anniversary on Thursday.

In that time, 11 students have graduated from the program, said Narek Kassabian, the lead teacher for the academy.

About 10 more may graduate by the end of the school year, she said, although it's hard to be sure because students work through the classes at their own pace.

Helping that batch of students obtain high school diplomas has been one of the program's key accomplishments over the last year, Kassabian said.

The student attendance rate of about 85% is also remarkable given the student population, she said, and seeing students who have struggled in more traditional

high school settings hit their stride at AdvancePath has been rewarding.

The school district partnered with AdvancePath Academics, a Virginia-based educational services company, to launch the AdvancePath Academy. In Glendale, students come to the academy, which is based at the Pacific Avenue Education Center, for one four-hour session five times a week.

They spend much of their time using specialized software programs aligned with California state standards to learn the content for the classes they need to graduate.

Students can pick the order they do their classes in, and how quickly they move through the content, Kassabian said.

The academy teachers also lead small group sessions and stroll around the academy's facility — a giant computer lab — checking to see if students need help.

“Not every student is going to ask for help,” Kassabian said. “We are always up and about.”

The academy's staff includes three teachers, two educational assistants and one registrar.

Each student is assigned to one of the teachers, who acts a guidance counselor and works with the student until they finish the program, Kassabian said.

“The way we develop relationships with these kids is what makes it different,” Kassabian said.

The small size of the program can also be an advantage, said Tony Rivera, 18, who was enrolled at both Hoover High School and Daily High School before he arrived at AdvancePath last year.

“You know everyone, so there's no worry about drama or anything like that,” Rivera said.

Nouneh Minasyan, who taught at Hoover High School last year and who teaches math and science at AdvancePath now, said she sees students who were having trouble at Hoover succeeding at AdvancePath.

The students get more individual attention at AdvancePath, and if a student is causing disciplinary problems, Minasyan can talk to them at that moment, because other teachers are available to work with the students.

“I know that these kids are going to get help,” Minasyan said.
