

KIDS THESE DAYS

Some are so academically advanced, they flourish in programs like Running Start

Parents, do you find yourselves increasingly unable to keep pace — intellectually — in discussions with your teenagers or daughters? Is their understanding of math, science (and especially anything connected to a computer) rapidly surpassing your own?

Well, don't despair. Trust us, it's actually a good thing, kids these days reaching their full academic stride much sooner than their parents had expected. Instead of trying to catch up to them and match their blistering pace of learning, the best strategy is to simply let them go, to encourage your academically precocious teenagers to race on further ahead of you.

One great way for local high school students to do this is through Clark College's Running Start. This program allows "dual-credit" students to simultaneously earn college credit and meet high school graduation requirements. When these kids accept their high school diplomas, they've already completed several college courses; each one already has a college transcript.

Running Start students not only must be smart, they must be highly motivated and emotionally mature, dedicated to proper study skills, gifted with time-management abilities and ready to sprint ahead of their peers.

If you and your teenager are ready for that challenge, you've got two opportunities in the next few weeks to find out more about Running Start. Identical informational sessions are scheduled for high school sophomores and juniors and their parents from 7 to 8 p.m. Jan. 12 and Jan. 19 in the O'Connell Sports Center gymnasium, on the southwest corner of Clark's main campus at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way. Attendance is expected to be heavy; for parking maps, visit <http://www.clark.edu/maps>.

At these sessions, you'll learn about a wide variety of Running Start courses that will be available

in the fall of 2011. Current Running Start students will speak about the special challenges they face, and information will be provided about eligibility, testing procedures, deadlines and other issues. Running Start students pay for books, transportation and some fees; other fees are paid through the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Another good way to learn about Running Start is to visit <http://www.clark.edu/runningstart>. This website features a thorough FAQ section, and in mid-January a "Fall 2011 Test Information" web link will be activated.

Running Start benefits more than just the students and their parents. Taxpayers in general benefit from a more efficient public education system as students with high academic skills are allowed to move more rapidly through the pipeline. Dual-credit courses allow public funds for teachers and classrooms to be spent more efficiently. The transition from the K-12 system to higher education is smooth and quick; many teenagers who "just can't wait to get out of high school" are able to accelerate that process. Another advantage has to do with maturity: After qualifying for the courses through the testing process, Running Start students become exposed to the college environment a year or two earlier than is typical for teenagers.

Those advantages to so many different stakeholders became so obvious in 1992 that the Legislature created the Running Start program to allow concurrent pursuit of high school and college credits by taking courses on the college campus.

High-achieving students also have other opportunities to take Advanced Placement classes or enroll in International Baccalaureate programs or honors classes. It's good to see this one other tool at their disposal, the chance to move onto a college campus ahead of schedule as a part-time student.