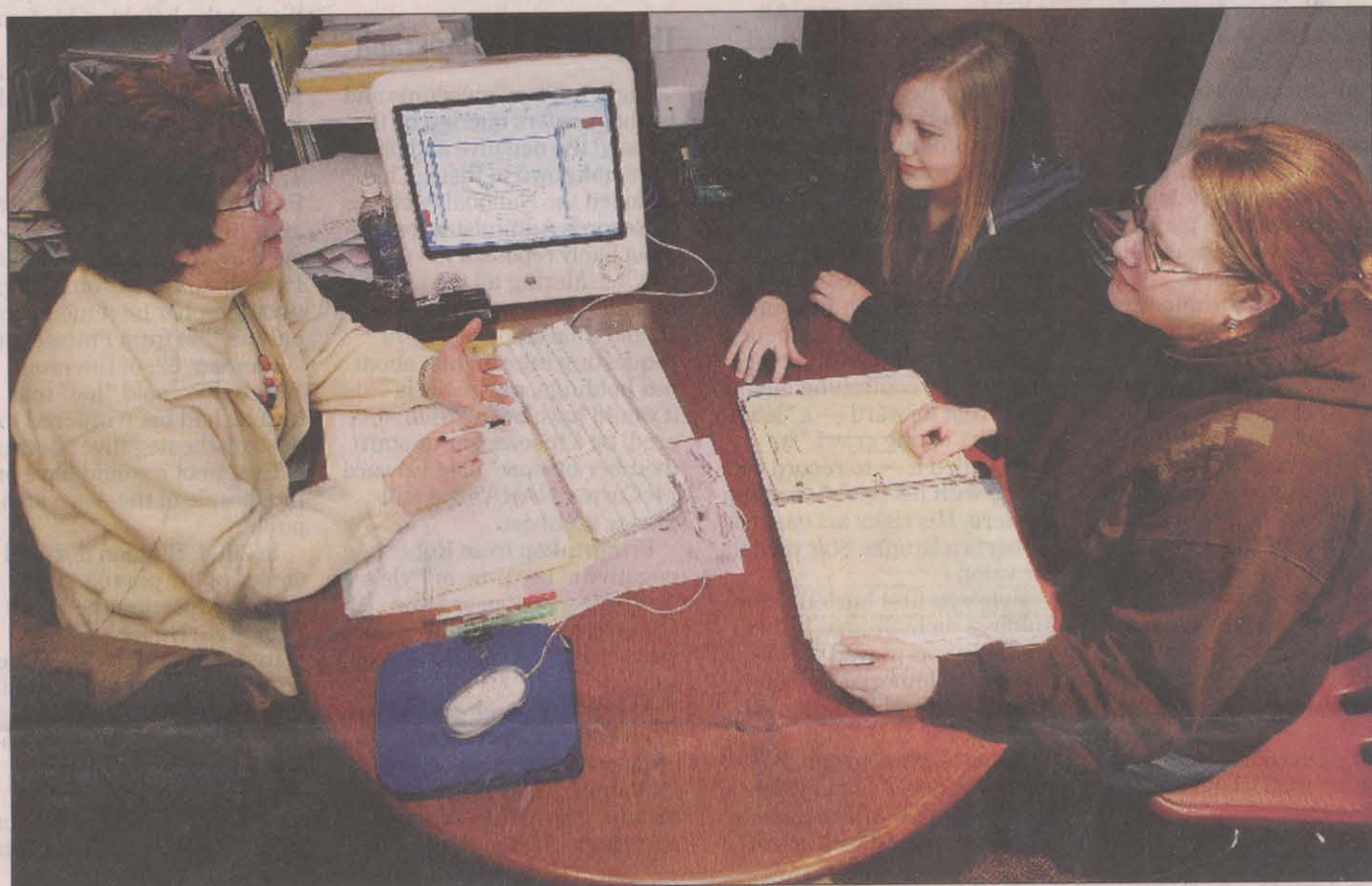


GETTING EDUCATED



VIVIAN JOHNSON for The Columbian

Danita Shipps, right, and her daughter, Kirané, 14, meet with HomeLink teacher Jean Markuson. HomeLink is among the increasing number of education options for Clark County students.

Students take best of many worlds

Smorgasbord of opportunities caters to teens' varying needs

By ISOLDE RAFTERY
Columbian staff writer

During her freshman year at Summit View High, Alesya Volchanskaya found out about the Clark County Skills Center.

It appealed to her, so she went.

There, she found out about the Running Start program for high school students at Clark College.

So she went there, too.

At 17, Volchanskaya is a certified nurse's aide and working toward an associate's degree.

Her path — a mix-and-match approach to education — is becoming more common among Washington students as districts provide more options for them.

"I've heard of people that got out of high school and don't know what they want to do with their lives yet," Volchanskaya said. "They're 18, and they're taking general education classes. Whereas in my place, I've al-

ready known for a while."

Though most students don't attend three schools at once, more than ever are deviating from the traditional six-period day.

In Vancouver Public Schools, for example, students are encouraged to try magnet programs at other high schools. The district provides a midday shuttle.

Martin Mueller, who oversees alternative education at the state schools office in Olympia, said more students are pursuing alternative ways to score their high school diploma than last year.

And in the last three years, he said, more students have gravitated toward Web classes.

"A lot of high schools around the state are saying, 'Wow, here are some really advanced, high-quality courses I can make available in an online way. I don't have to hire that teacher or develop the curriculum,'" Mueller said.

Riley Crabtree, a Mountain View High School sophomore, takes Latin online through Northwestern University in Chicago because

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Did you know?

■ More students are accessing alternative education to supplement high school, according to preliminary data from the states schools office in Olympia. That's in addition to "traditional" alternative high schools.

■ In Clark County, theoretically, a student could attend four different schools in a given day: High school, Skills Center, Running Start and an online course.

■ Vancouver Public Schools provides a shuttle bus between high schools for students attending magnet programs.

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his schedule is packed.

Crabtree is a solid student and a musician who studies music for hours after school. During the summer he took an online health class to get the requirement out of the way. One summer, he and his mother rented a small apartment so that he could attend a course at the University of Washington.

"It's important to take all the classes you want and not to be limited by school or state requirements," Riley Crabtree said. "It's not a happy life if you follow the stream and don't go your own way."

Mueller links the increased options to new technology, but also to No Child Left Behind, the 2002 federal education law that requires that all students meet state standards by 2014.

Schools work harder to accommodate students, he said.

Clark County debuted its first alternative high school in 1974 with Pan Terra, a high school for young delinquents. In 1983, the Skills Center opened its doors.

In the late 1980s, CAM opened in Battle Ground. The school is unique in the country, a public school that offers small classes and requires parent involvement. About 80 percent of CAM students participate in after-school activities.

"It's almost overwhelming and it can be complex," HomeLink and CAM Principal Colleen O'Neal said. "You try to deal with the kids' time, and you try to reel in families that are trying to do a smorgasbord of activities."

At CAM, O'Neal said, many students can't be boxed in by five-day-a-week school because of allergies or illnesses. Many come from religious families.

Danita Shipp, a CAM parent, said that home schooling is too isolating, so she chose the HomeLink program for

her four children. Her students take some classes at the school and meet with teachers to discuss work done at home.

"I feel like I'm more in control of my daughter's education," Shipp said. "But it's better here, instead of at home, where we're totally alone."

Her daughter, Kirane, 14, attends some classes at HomeLink in Battle Ground, does a group algebra course with some friends, and also attends a Toastmasters class after school every week.

And, true to these times, she's debating how to chart her high school career.

"I'm thinking about doing Running Start," Kirané, 14, said. "But it's not the same high school experience. I don't know if I want to go into the college atmosphere or the high school setting."

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