

Dropouts Drop Back In At Southern's Evening School

By Pamela Banks
To a casual observer, an evening class in Southern High School's alternative education program resembles a typical high school "study hall", except for one important difference.

The students are older. But though the subject matter is your basic high school curriculum, there the similarity between a typical high school class and the evening program ends. There are no teachers lecturing to the class, and students are not asked to recite answers in front of their classmates.

For many of the students, the class's structure is a major plus. "I'm really glad that we don't have to answer questions in class," said Ms. Sue Gibson, one of the students in the program. "If we did, I don't think I would have enrolled."

Ms. Gibson, a working mother whose eight-year-old son thinks her going to school "is a big deal", returned to the classroom after dropping out nine years ago.

Ms. Gibson is also one of about 23 students enrolled in the alternative education program at Southern High School. The program is sponsored by the Community Education Division of Durham County Schools. The Southern program is geared for students from 16 to 21 years of age who have dropped out of school, as well as for adults 21 years and older.

The program is sponsored also by the Durham Technical Institute, through which diplomas are awarded. But most of the program's staff is with the county school system.

Durham County's Community Education Program, at seven years old, was one of the first such programs in the state, and is geared to help tie the public schools closer to the community.

According to county schools superintendent, Dr. Frank Yeager, the program yields another welcomed benefit.

"It helps us to provide services to other agencies in the community, such as Durham Tech," he said, "and they don't have to go out and build a new building. They can use our buildings, and this type of thing draws us closer to the people who actually own the schools — the taxpayers."

According to Ed Tice, one of the program's two administrators, the Community Education Division, with a staff of about 65 fulltime and parttime employees, and a budget of about \$125,000 has about 2500 people enrolled in its various programs. The program operates with both state and local tax money.

Other programs include after school care for elementary students whose parents are working, pre-school child care, parenting, summer camps in the summer, tutoring and special interest adult education, such as aerobics, typing and shorthand.

The night high school program is one of the division's showcases.

According to Ms. Deborah Andrews, who teaches in the Southern night program, many students choose to work at home on their own in the self-paced program rather than attend the Monday and Wednesday night classes.

On a Wednesday night a couple of weeks ago, there were nine students in class. They sat at their desks, studying from workbooks that cover any one of nine units required for an adult high school diploma. The teachers are there to answer questions.

The evening school's scheduling flexibility and the self-paced approach to class work make these classes especially attractive to working people who want to get the high school diploma they missed during their teen years.

"I've had a diverse student body," said Ms. Andrews. "I have married women who got married in high school and said they quit and a lot of singles."

Although she has some students in their 50's, most are in their late twenties.

One student, Ms. Marie McCorkle, a mother of four children and an IBM employee dropped out of school 20 years ago to get married. In September, she enrolled in the program to begin working on all nine units for the diploma.

She said she enjoys the program and is glad she enrolled.

Likewise, the program for students under 21 at Southern offers the student who couldn't continue the traditional daytime high school program an alternative.

There are 38 students enrolled in the alternative class for ages 16-21 taught by Ms. Deborah Evans.

Ms. Evans said the average age in the class is 17 or 18, with four or five over 21 years of age.

For Penny and Paul Williams, a recently married couple who attend the class, Southern offered the best opportunity for pursuing their diplomas.

Penny, who is 15, recently left school to work and get married. She said she definitely likes the alternative classes better because the program fits her new life style. She hopes to become a cosmetologist after getting her diploma.

Likewise, her husband Paul, 17, a self-

employed handy man, likes the class because it fits his needs better.

Dollie Cornell, 17, who is working on six units for her diploma, got as far as the 10th grade in regular school.

"I like it (alternative classes) better because I don't have to go as much to get a diploma," said Ms. Cornell. "The whole course is a lot quicker."

She hopes to take a computer course at DTI after getting a diploma and then get a job at IBM.

Bobby Moore, a 19 year old cafeteria worker at the Durham Exchange Institution, left high school in the 9th grade.

He likes the program better than traditional high school and wants to be a truck driver after getting his diploma.

Ms. Evans, who is a biology teacher at Southern during the day, sees a difference in the alternative student.

"They have a much more positive attitude at night," she said. "I don't have any disciplinary problems. I think it has a lot to do with them making a decision — no one makes them come."

The program for both groups is just about the same except for a few differences. Students from both groups must submit a transcript from the last school attended to determine how many units are needed to obtain the diploma.

Students in both groups are required to have a total of four English, one mathematics, two science and two social studies units in order to get a diploma.

In addition, students in both groups must pass the N.C. Competency test as well as final exams for each unit they complete in the program.

Most of the students

under 21 register for the program through the Durham County School system. Exceptions are made in some cases where enrolling directly with DTI is more beneficial for the student, according to Tice.

However, any student registering for the program directly through DTI must take a reading placement exam. Those scoring below the 8th grade level are recommended to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) class to upgrade their reading before pursuing a diploma.

The county does not have this requirement, because a reading specialist is available to students who have reading difficulties, according to Ms. Evans, Southern teacher for the 16-21 age group.

The passing score for all courses is 70.

Besides being a flexible and independent study program, the alternative classes are also free. Students may purchase their books if they like, but they can choose to use them in class only. However, students enrolled through the county may check out workbooks.

The alternative high school diploma offers many pluses to the students, but for the under 21 age group there may be some minuses. The social and extra-curricular activities are not available through the program.

There are no science labs or physical education classes. Likewise, there are no varsity sports.

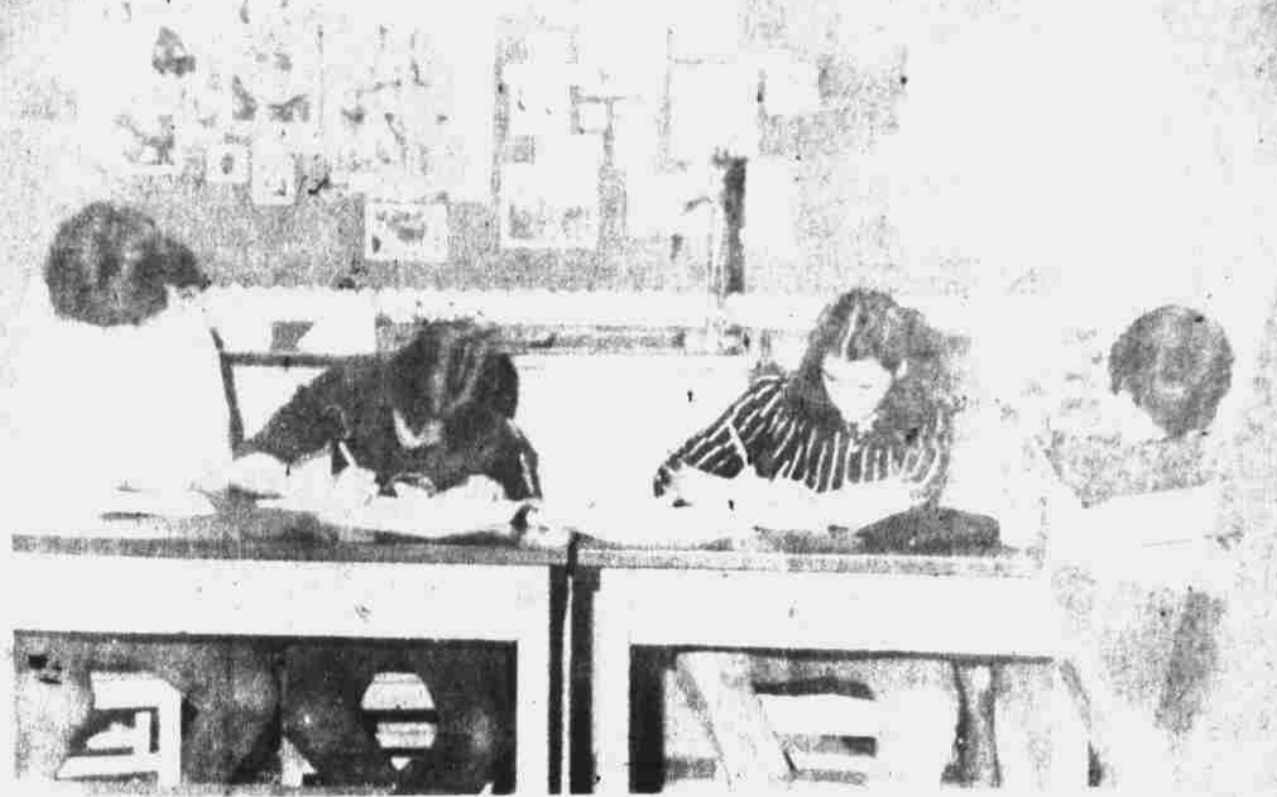
"I feel the traditional program is a better, broader curriculum," said Tice. "From every way you look at it, it has more to offer. But I realize that for some students, the day program is not working

out." However, Tice said he believes the alternative

program is not inferior to the traditional, but offers only basics for a

high school diploma. For students under 21, many may miss the

broad spectrum of the traditional high school program.



They Dropped Back In—These four school dropouts who have dropped back into school through the county schools alternative education program at Southern Senior High School. The pro-

gram offers night classes, and a self-paced learning approach that fits the needs of these students. The attentive students are: (l-r) Kevin Carter, Mary Carter, Penny Williams and Paul Williams. Photo by Mayfield

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