

New Educational Alternatives at the Cook County Sheriff's Office

Focusing on Reentry has reshaped thinking about education in the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO). The Department of Women's Justice Services (DWJS), the Day Reporting Center (DRC) and the Reentry Office have coordinated to offer the High School Diploma Program, now located within the DFC, DWJS and at the Neighborhood Technology Resource Center in the Holman Square Community Center. This program provides an opportunity for qualified 17 to 21 year olds to earn high school credits toward a diploma. The High School Diploma Program gets a young offender into school very quickly. The program offers all courses required to graduate from high school in the City of Chicago. If they receive all the credits to graduate, they will obtain a high school diploma from the last Chicago Public School they have attended. All of the courses are also approved by the State of Illinois and may be applied towards any other high school's requirements.

The High School Diploma Program operates as approved additional sites for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Alternative Learning Opportunities Program (ALOP) at Healy High School. CPS staff oversees the program, analyze student transcripts, assign courses, monitor compliance with graduation requirements, and assign final grades based on performance.

Aventa Learning, approved by the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago, is a highly respected and leading provider of online courses for high schools. Online courses provide another way for students who have not been successful in a regular school to get an education. Students who have begun an online learning program can continue to work towards graduation at other sites when they are released from the Sheriff's custody.

Through Aventa, students access their courses online, get a personal online teacher (all of whom are certified in the specific subject area and licensed) instruction through email, live chat, and phone, and get support from their onsite mentor.

Students are taking their high school courses with guidance from the onsite mentors. Mentor plays a special role in the program. They help motivate the students, enforce school policy, serve as a liaison between CPS and the online teacher, etc. They also receive weekly email reports related to each student's progress, activity, and or inactivity.

Students also participate in drug treatment/cognitive behavioral restructuring and life skills classes. They also listen to motivational speakers from the community. They are required to attend A.A. and N.A. meetings in the evenings and on weekends and to present evidence of their attendance.

Students who have been identified as having special needs will receive support from the appropriate CPS personnel while enrolled in the High School Diploma Program.

This style of learning opens an array of opportunities to learn and practice job readiness skills, such as using email, time management, and navigating online programs that include completing specific tasks.

Students are enrolled and able to start their assigned courses within 24-48 hours of entering the program. Their schedule is customized based on their unique start dates. Students are completing credits more quickly than anticipated. No student has failed a class.

Classes offered include Core requirements, Electives (Health, Driver's Education, Career Planning, etc.) and credit recovery courses (designed for students that have taken the course already but did not pass. They allow the students to complete their coursework and receive full credit for a class.) Students are engaged in service learning projects.

Examples of online courses that students are currently taking: Geometry, Algebra 1, Algebra 2/ Trig, English III and IV, Literature, American/World History, and American Government.