

College in high school

Local grad halfway through associate degree

When Gabe Campagna graduated high school in May, he was halfway finished with an associate degree from Southern State Community College.

While Campagna, 18, Washington Court House, was attending high school, he was also taking college classes through College Credit Plus, a program that allows local high school students to begin getting a college degree before they've graduated — at no cost.

While many students graduate high school and attend a four-year university to get a bachelor's degree, Campagna said he was happy to break the mold.

"It feels great," he said. "Now that I've graduated high school, I just have a couple more steps to go and I'll be done with my associate degree... and it's free."

Campagna is not alone. At Southern State's commencement exercises in May, 59 of the 300 participating graduates were enrolled in CCP and graduating high school. Those students and their families collectively saved more than \$10 million in future tuition and book expenses by attending Southern State.

With College Credit Plus, students can take college classes at their local high school and even complete an entire associate degree before graduating. The program is completely free.

Campagna said he was at first intimidated at the idea of taking college classes so early in life. But taking college classes at his own high school helped relieve the pressure.

"It felt like it took a lot of stress off of me," he said. "I'm taking a college-level class, but it's at my high school. It's not that it was easier, it just felt more comfortable."

Campagna said when he began taking CCP classes during his junior year, he took a psychology class with SSCC Coordinator of Career & Counseling Services Tom Payton and "fell in love" with the field.

"I didn't really know what psychology was at that point, but he brought this energy and passion to it, and that's when I fell in love with psychology," Campagna said. "It was a great experience."

Campagna said when he finishes his associate degree at SSCC, he plans to continue his education with a bachelor's and master's degree in the psychology field.

"It's exciting," he said. "I like school, but it's no one's favorite thing to do. CCP took off years of education for me. It gets you to be able to do the things you love sooner."