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Troy's success begins but doesn't end at nationally acclaimed tech program

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FULLERTON - When many high schools hold college recruitment days, they attract about a dozen representatives from local universities and community colleges.

When Troy High School held its recruitment day this year, guidance counselors capped participation at 80 universities.

That's Troy's reputation for success.

"Students here know they are going to college," said Maria Williams, Troy's guidance technician. "Our biggest task is letting students know that there is life outside the Ivy League."

The school is a technology magnet that attracts students from across Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Some have even tried to make the commute from San Diego.

Troy has won national acclaim, most notably for its Science Olympiad team, which for seven of the last 14 years has captured the national title in an event that tests written and practical knowledge of chemistry, engineering and other sciences.

But Troy also has won acclaim for its dance team - national champions, too. And for its NJROTC military studies program, and for numerous athletic titles.

"We take pride in the Four A's at Troy - academics, athletics, arts and activities," said Priscilla Cheney, student adviser at Troy. "It's all important to our students."

The origins of Troy's reputation can be traced back more than two decades, when a study commissioned by President Ronald Reagan presented a gloomy picture of a nation failing to properly train its students for the future.

Troy, located in the heart of a city that calls itself "The Education Community," responded by applying for a grant and starting The Troy Tech program. The magnet curriculum set out to train students in math, science, engineering and high technology.

Only a handful of kids enrolled when the program began in 1986, and it grew slowly during the first decade. When the school started winning national recognition in the late 90s, interest in the program "spread like a wildfire," Cheney said.

Today, nearly half of Troy's 2,550 students come from outside of its attendance boundaries. Students must test to get into the Troy Tech program.

"It's not cut-throat here," said senior Saumya Gurbani, 17. "But with some of the smartest kids around you, there's going to be friendly competition."

The technology magnet program has attracted young, enthusiastic teachers who want to be part of an exciting new concept in education, Cheney said.

Engineering instructor Kent Goodman came to Troy to teach after 12 years as a professional engineer. He said he's constantly tweaking his curriculum to ensure students are challenged.

Some parents say it's worth traveling the extra miles to have their students study alongside some of the brightest tech-minded students.

"When my son got into Troy, it was like being accepted on the path to a great college and hopefully a great career," said Genni Cho, whose son travels from Diamond Bar. "His world opened up to new challenges. He's motivated."

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