

Administrators examine new approaches for future

Faced with challenges and poor success rates in the ninth grade, administrators look to other innovative programs to ease the transition to high school for at-risk students.

By Vanessa Gray
Staff Writer

Teachers, parents, administrators, and the school's curriculum facilitator have recently begun considering a new approach to learning for freshmen by establishing a school-within-a-school learning environment. While the actual academic curriculum is not yet defined, Curriculum Coordinator Bud Harrelson has been promoting an approach known as Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs).

Presently, the projected plan consists of several teams of teachers who will instruct no more than approximately 100 students in a day. Such a program would serve as a support system for both students and faculty. Each team of educators will share the same students, enabling them to collaborate with one another regarding the development and progress of each individual student. Once the SLC committee finishes designing plans, the group



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Curriculum Coordinator Bud Harrelson discusses SLCs with teachers and administrators at a Leadership Team meeting in January. He proposes changing the ninth grade structure to create a more personalized, community-based environment to ease the transition to high school.

will propose the idea of SLCs to Principal Rob Gasparello.

SLCs are designed to make the learning experience more personal for students. Researchers and reviewers have investigated the effects of school and unit size on many students' performances, attitudes, and behavior measures. Statistically, students tend to do better in a smaller, more personalized school setting.

Northeast and High Point Central High Schools already implement SLCs. Grimsley, Ragsdale, and Page High Schools are considering such an establishment for the 2005-2006 school term through

a grant from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Separating freshmen from the rest of the student body allows for a curriculum that should not overwhelm incoming students academically or socially. Harrelson, who is spearheading SLCs at Grimsley, claims that these communities will allow freshmen to "learn and express themselves."

Last year, a reported 105 of 467 freshmen students were not promoted to the tenth grade. With summer school as the next resort, 81 of these 105 students still did not pass ninth grade, even

after attending the remedial program.

Parents and faculty are seeking answers to such startling statistics. Because of the notable decrease in passing freshmen, the SLC committee members are collaborating to establish SLCs; consequently, they hope to create a more personalized environment, which should result in success among more students.

The same courses will still be offered to freshmen, and students can still choose to take electives and a zero period if they so wish. This curriculum design is not meant to penalize students

from higher-level classes, but instead for teachers to consider their students' strengths and weaknesses and to provide them with the proper one-on-one attention needed for achievement in the classroom and on their end-of-year competency exams.

Harrelson explained that the transition from middle school to high school is particularly difficult because there is "a lack of understanding as to what expectations there are." While middle school assignments are often graded on a completion basis, high school students are expected to think more analytically and demonstrate this ability through written and oral work.

Parents have already expressed concern about the possibility of a new arrangement. To address their concerns, Harrelson is arranging a bag lunch for parents the last Wednesday of each remaining month of this school year at which parents will have the chance to ask administrators questions about SLCs and acquire knowledge about any other issue they believe should be addressed.

On Tuesday, Jan. 25, a Small Learning Communities Workshop will take place at 7:00 p.m. in the Media Center.

Virgin prepares as civilian space industry blasts off

Earth no longer serves as a boundary for wealthy consumers' travel ventures as Virgin and CSA prepare civilians for holidays in the stratosphere.

By Shimère Etheridge
Staff Writer

When the Civilian Space Administration (CSA) was founded in October of 2002, people were skeptical, to say the least. The group is a non-profit organization that claims to bring people together from all over the world to work on technology projects. Intending

to act as a hub where diverse people can compound ideas and research, the CSA lets everyone join in on the work as if it were a hobby. When this group first proposed the idea of space tourism, civilians around the world were doubtful.

Over the past few years, however, space tourism has received a resurgence of interest from many well known groups. "Rebel Billionaire" Richard Branson, known for his record-breaking attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a hot air balloon and his founding of the widely-

known Virgin industry, takes great pride in his new space tourism program. Virgin Galactic was established by Branson's Virgin Group to undertake the challenge of developing space tourism for everyone. Using privately owned and operated spaceships, Virgin will allow affordable sub-orbital (up-and-down) space tourism for the first time in history.

Many hurdles arose in finding an aircraft that overcame the trouble of re-entering the earth's atmosphere more than one time. Burt

Rutan, hired by Branson, developed the technology that will make this possible and intends to have the plans finalized for the Virgin SpaceShip by early this year. The key to Rutan's design is a craft that transforms from a sleek space plane into a "shuttlecock" on its return to earth. In this form, the spacecraft can drift back to Earth without overheating. Finally, it will metamorphose into a conventional aircraft shape for landing.

"Virgin's experience in aviation, adventure, luxury travel, and cutting-edge

design will be vital in contributing to the design of the spaceship, the smooth operation of the spaceline, and creating an unforgettable experience unlike any other available in mankind," said Branson.

As word travels about Branson's latest exploit, celebrities are signing up for the experience. Most notably, teen idol Lance Bass, a member of the boy-band *NSYNC, had forged a deal that would allow him to visit the International Space Station. However, Bass

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As acceptance letters roll in, seniors take on apathetic attitudes. Teachers struggle to discourage these tendencies.

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Students fail to recognize the repercussions of their risky actions, endangering themselves and fellow motorists.

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Whirlies Break it Down

The dance team bowls crowds over in Orlando, Florida, during the Capitol One Bowl halftime show.

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