

LOCAL

KMHS opens Freshmen Academy

Schools note new additions for classes starting Monday

EMILY WEAVER

eweaver@kingsmountainherald.com

The bells! The bells! School begins for students on Monday, August 25, 2008, and there are a lot of new additions this year to local institutions.

Kings Mountain High School is opening the doors to its first ever Freshmen Academy. Ninth graders will attend academic core classes in their own building, away from the hustle and bustle of 10th-12th graders.

The academy is stationed in the building, which once housed math and history classes. It has been named "The Expedition."

Principal Ronny Funderburke said that the goal of the academy is to reduce the school's drop-out rates and increase graduation rates by helping ease students into a more controlled transition.

According to figures from the NC Department of Public Instruction, KMHS had a graduation rate of 55% in 2006, among students attending four years.

"Our school is great, but that is one area, like a lot of schools, that we definitely need to improve in," said Liza Dellinger, who is in charge of the new academy.

Funderburke said that studies have shown ninth grade to be a pivotal year for students so the school is taking a new approach. Shelby High School started a freshmen academy last year. This will be the first year for the academies at Kings Mountain, Crest and Burns.

Dellinger said that a group of teachers toured six other schools last year that had freshmen academies. In at least five out of the six schools they visited, she said that their dropout rates had declined and the academy had proved to be a

positive step.

The ninth graders will stay in The Expedition for their core academic classes and for Health. For P.E., in the gym, and for all other elective classes students will travel to the same buildings or areas used by other students at KMHS. There are also no lockers in The Expedition building so students will have to travel inside the main buildings to retrieve books and materials. They will also eat in the same cafeteria as other students. The freshmen academy is not designed to isolate the students from the upperclassmen, in this regard.

Some criticism has been received from parents and students about the freshmen being limited in the courses they are able to take. But both Funderburke and Dellinger said that, that isn't the case. The ninth grader's options of electives are still open.

"They are still able to take everything they've been able to take (before). We didn't want to limit anybody's options," she said.

Another concern is that the freshmen academy takes more of a middle school approach to education, still holding the student's hand when he/she needs to start becoming more independent. But Dellinger said that they feel like that is what the ninth grade is for - finding a common ground between "holding your hand" and releasing the students into the sometimes chaotic atmosphere of high school.

"As a parent myself, I think I would be more excited because I think it's a more nurturing environment," she said. "We still have very high expectations for them."

"My focus is to make sure that the freshmen have a successful first year and that they

feel excited about their experience and that they find some way to get involved in the school, whether it be academic, athletics or clubs and organizations," Dellinger said. "We want them to know that we care, we want them to be here and we want them to be successful."

To open the door for students to get involved, she said that they offered an activities fair at the academy's orientation Tuesday night. The fair, stationed in the courtyard outside of the cafeteria, allowed students and parents to peruse the different club and organization options available to them in their new school.

To help the Class of 2012 bond, Dellinger said that they will be offering special activities just for the freshmen this year. A freshmen tailgate party is scheduled before the football game on Sept. 12 for ninth graders and their families at the baseball field. Plans are in the works to have another event for the ninth graders in October.

To help even more with the students' transition, KMHS is offering an advisor-advisee program to the freshmen. Some of the targeted students will be paired with an upperclassman, who is either an Ambassador member, a Renaissance Leadership class member or a Teacher Cadet. "I've got about 30 upperclassmen and they'll have about three students each that they will work with," Dellinger said.

She added that the teachers in The Expedition will also focus on building strong relationships with their students to help them in their academic careers. The closer interactions will help them target other students that may need more attention. "We're going to try to improve our communication," she said.

Dellinger added that the

freshmen in the academy will not be in classes with repeat ninth graders, which may also help.

"From what I understand this is going to be a great class and it should be real easy for them to form those great relationships and bonds," she said, which should, in turn, improve their success rates. Although these helps are in place, the challenge to succeed or fail is up to the Class of 2012.

Other notes for Back to School

Bethware Elementary

115 Bethware Drive
704-734-5623

Principal Valerie Boyd
Principal's email: vboyd@clevelandcountyschools.org
School day: 8:10 a.m.-2:50 p.m.
Estimated enrollment for 2008-09: 480

New additions this year: The school plans to implement a new Positive Behavior Support Program, known as PBS. Sharon Thornhill is joining the staff as the new art teacher and Angela McKee will be the school's new technology facilitator.

East Elementary

600 N. Cleveland Avenue
704-734-5633

Principal Jennifer Wampler
Principal's email: jswampler@clevelandcountyschools.org
School day: 8-2:50 p.m.
Est. enrollment for 2008-09: 230 (K-4) and 270 (Pre-K)

New additions this year: East has added four new teachers to their roster this year. Lauren Sochacki has joined the staff as a first grade teacher and Robert Stickney has joined the staff as a third grade teacher. Jan Welborn will be the new art teacher and Jami Bumgarner will teach music. Jennifer Wampler, a former Chemistry

teacher and native of Kings Mountain, joins the staff as the new principal.

"East was named one of the Top 12 National Distinguished Title I schools and will be honored in October in Greensboro," Wampler said in an email. "East is also in the running for National Blue Ribbon School (status) and will find out in September if we were selected."

Grover Elementary

206 Carolina Avenue
704-476-8351

Principal Janet Anthony
Principal's email: janthony@clevelandcountyschools.org
School day: 8:10-2:50 p.m.
Est. enrollment for 2008-09: 400 (including Pre-K)

New additions this year: Grover's new school theme this year is "We're Wild About Learning." Animals and jungle scenes decorate the halls to enforce the theme. Carole Barnhardt transferred from Marion Elementary to join the staff. Other countywide transfers are bringing the following staff members to Grover: Jenny Hollifield - Art, Monica Martin - Music, Elizabeth Vinesett - Technology Facilitator, Anna Whitaker - Curriculum Coordinator, and Summer Bachman - School Psychologist.

"Our school has had several renovations," Anthony said. "Our first and second grade building has new lighting and new doors; our Pre-K building has been renovated. We will also be participating in a new approach to meeting individual student learning needs this year. It's called Responsiveness to Instruction. We're excited that we will be able to provide needed interventions for children in targeted areas."

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Office: 824-1 East King Street • Kings Mountain, NC 28086

E-mail: heraldnews@kingsmountainherald.com

Bill Parsons - Publisher

(bparsons@kingsmountainherald.com)

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(eweaver@kingsmountainherald.com)

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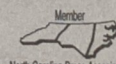
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