

9th-Grade 'Academy' Shows Success

Melissa Walker, Associated Press | Friday, February 27, 2009

DES MOINES - Fewer F's, less time in the principal's office and better attendance have prompted Des Moines school officials to launch a third specialized program that separates ninth-graders from upperclassmen. North High School's freshmen next fall will be grouped as an academy in a separate section of the building, 501 Holcomb Ave., in an effort to better monitor their progress toward graduation. "It will be a lot more nurturing environment for the ninth-graders," North Principal Vince Lewis said. "They will be a house, a family."



Educators across the country say more focus is needed on freshmen, many of whom face challenges with the social and academic transition to high school. Students who struggle in ninth and 10th grades are more likely to drop out than those who get off to a good start in high school, studies show.

The freshman "academy" concept grew out of a national study in the early 1990s that showed students struggled markedly after middle school. People who don't complete high school are more likely to be unemployed and need public assistance, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The 244 ninth-graders at Des Moines' North failed 325 classes in the first semester in the 2008-09 school year. Ninth-graders were moved out of Lincoln High School in 2006-07 to make way for a building renovation. What started as an experiment became permanent when officials noticed better grades and behavior. Freshmen were given their own building, the former Kurtz Junior High School, about two miles away on the south side. District officials at the time estimated it would cost about \$275,000 a year to operate the separate building.

The new academy was called Lincoln South High School. Dawn Pilon, vice principal at Lincoln South, said students in the inaugural "hope class" are now juniors. About eight out of 10 left the academy in good academic standing, and about 73 percent are on track to graduate. That compares with an estimated 65 percent of this year's senior class - the last to start ninth grade at the high school. This school year, about 77 percent of Lincoln's 550 ninth-graders were academically on track after the first semester, which is considered the toughest, Pilon said.

At East High School's freshman academy, which opened last fall, attendance increased among the 570 students by about 5.5 percentage points, students failed 33 percent fewer courses and trips to the principal's office were down during the first semester. About \$150,000 was spent to renovate the building about a half-block from the high school. In Des Moines, Kierra Osborn, 14, an East academy freshman, said she favors the academy concept because the size of the building is "kind of like middle school, as in there's no one else to mess with." "We don't have any worries about being bullied, and it's easy to get to class," she said.

1. In appropriate paragraph form, compare and contrast the pros and cons regarding an educational facility consisting primarily of ninth grade students. Neatly organize your thoughts into a Venn diagram. **(GPS - Grades 6 - 8: MRC a, d)**
2. Kierra Osborn attends two of her academic classes which interestingly enough are creatively constructed in the form of a right prism whereas another resembles a pyramid. Illustrate, label, and identify the number of faces, line segments, edges, and vertices found in each of the two figures. What similarities and differences do they possess? Explain. **(GPS - Grade 6: M6G2a)**
3. Create or borrow specific examples from the passage above to effectively demonstrate understanding of the following three vocabulary terms: translations, dilations, and reflection (i.e. "Ninth-graders were moved out of Lincoln High School in 2006-07 to make way for a building renovation" is an example of transformation because it contains the word "moves" like mathematically moving all of the points on a figure across a coordinate plane. **(GPS Grade 7: M7G2a; M7P3d)**
4. Given the following problem context, write an appropriate system of linear equations or inequalities: 244 ninth-graders at Des Moines' North moved into a facility which would cost \$275,000 a year to operate. East High School's freshman academy will contain 570 students at \$150,000. What would the actual annual operating costs at East High need to be to equate to Des Moines North to make the facility a better deal? Explain. **(GPS Grade 8: M8A5a, b; M8P1a - d)**
5. Upon completion of this assignment, how far have we progressed through the 2008-09 series of *The Daughtry Times*®? Express your answer interchangeably as a fraction, decimal, percentage, and circle graph. **(GPS - Grade 6: M6N1 f, g; M6D1c; Grade 7: M7D1 f)**
6. Using contextual clues only, define the following italicized words: *renovation*, *inaugural*, *markedly*, *transition*, *nurturing*, and *specialized* obtained from the passage above. Additionally, use each word in a complete sentence to demonstrate further comprehension. **(GPS - Grades 6 -8: MRC a, c, d)**

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) adapted from georgiastandards.org. Standards specifically addressed in this edition are strategically aligned with the curriculum map and annotated adjacent to the respective grade level inquiry.

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