



Issue 17

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## NEW! Southeast High School's Freshman Learning Center Welcomes Class of 2009

When the new class of freshmen arrived at Southeast High School (SEHS) on the first day of school, one side of the school's front marquee greeted them with the words, "Welcome Class of 09."

What an incredible, unbelievable understatement—yet the freshmen have no idea. High school is new to them, so as far as they can tell, this is what high school has always been like. They may never know of the vast amount of time, energy, dollars, and even... dare we say it here...love...that has gone into those four little words on the marquee. That's because the Class of 2009 is the first class to enjoy the brand new SEHS Freshman Learning Center (FLC).

Thousands of man-hours have gone into it—hours spent planning, brainstorming, creating, writing, traveling to workshops and training conferences, and even physically moving classrooms around. Thousands of dollars have gone into staff development, purchasing resources, and hiring a new assistant principal solely dedicated to the FLC. Untold quantities of energy have been spent on creating the best possible environment to not only educate, but motivate, stimulate, excite, inspire, and prepare these freshmen to become lifelong learners and productive members of society. It's a tall order. And it has taken a remarkably committed team



*Continued on Page 2*



### Upcoming Events

#### National Tech Prep Network Conference (NTPN)

Marriott Convention Center  
Orlando, Florida  
Sept. 28–Oct. 1, 2005

#### High School Reinvention Symposium

ICLE - Bill Daggett  
Omni Shoreham Hotel  
Washington, D.C.  
October 1–3, 2005

#### NCAC 9th Annual Conference

Fountainbleu Hotel  
Miami, Florida  
November 17–22, 2005

#### Small Schools Planning Institute

Sheraton Sand Key Resort  
Clearwater Beach, Florida  
January 17 – 19, 2006

*"The small learning communities program is a perfect fit with our new strategic plan initiative, 'EdVantage—Inspiring our students to learn, dream and achieve.' The mission of the Manatee County School District is to inspire our students with a passion for learning, empowered to pursue their dreams confidently and creatively while contributing to our community, nation and world."*

Herb Tschappat  
Executive Director; District Planning, Policy, & Program Evaluation



**Smaller  
Learning  
Communities**

**Spotlight on Success**

**School District of Manatee County**

**Adult, Career, & Technical  
Education**

215 Manatee Avenue West  
Bradenton, FL 34205  
(941) 708-8770 x2227  
FAX 708-8686

**www.manatee.k12.fl.us**

**Principles of  
Character  
Education**

*From www.goodcharacter.com*

- ✓ Your character is defined by what you do, not what you say or believe.
- ✓ Every choice you make helps define the kind of person you are choosing to be.
- ✓ Good character requires doing the right thing, even when it is costly or risky.
- ✓ You don't have to take the worst behavior of others as a standard for yourself. You can choose to be better than that.
- ✓ What you do matters, and one person can make a big difference.

working over a year to open up the new FLC.

Before you meet the team's players, however, take a look at the playing field. Located in eastern Manatee County, Southeast High School is the most culturally diverse school in the county, with approximately 1500 students. 39% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, and 42% are minorities. In 2002–2003, the percentage of students who graduated within four years of initial entry into SEHS was 55.1%, compared to a district-wide rate of 68%<sup>1</sup>. Given these statistics, the FLC team understood the importance of somehow engaging freshmen, and giving them more reasons and encouragement to stick around for the long haul to graduation.

Scott Cooper is the new administrator in charge of implementing and overseeing the FLC. "The transition from middle school to high school is extreme," he said recently. "And typical high school teachers don't have a middle-school focus, helping kids along the way." A year ago, he developed a core team to start changing the focus. His first job was to recruit staff and motivate "buy-in"—that hard-to-find place where teachers jump aboard wholeheartedly, ready to help create change instead of change being mandated from above. "We had to overcome the mindset that teaching freshmen is a punishment," he said. "But it didn't take long to get a core group,"—a team so enthusiastic that as they progressed with ideas for the new FLC, other teachers began to take notice.

"No one was assigned (to the FLC)," said Linda Bogue, the math departmental chairperson. "Everyone volunteered, except for the new-hires. We have three department chairs who volunteered for the freshmen center—and that's unusual. We have a good mix of veterans and new hires. We will be successful—it shows how committed we are—the whole school is committed to the ninth graders and seeing these freshman go from A – to B – to C – to graduation. It's a caring school."

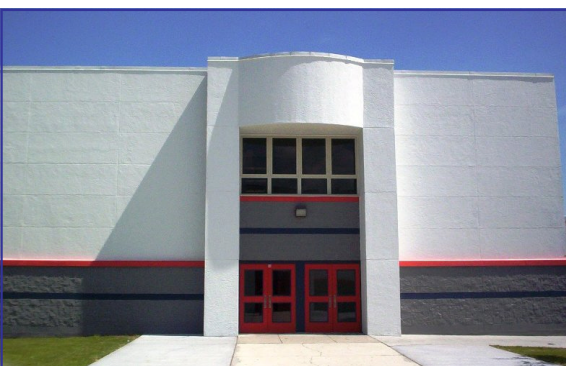
"We were highly influential," added Meghan Fetzter, a math teacher and FLC team member. "The whole school is adopting some of our ideas. We want to

refocus students. We want them to know, 'it's a good thing to come to school.'"

Ruth Slay, another math teacher and the student government advisor said it in a different way. "We want to love them," she said with a huge smile.

**A New Focus: "NFL"**

After spending time observing district and nationwide schools, hearing from experts, and seeing what has worked elsewhere,



*One of the wings that will hold the new SEHS Freshmen Learning Center.*

the team created a mission statement, set goals, and created a student handbook. They figured out the physical layout of the FLC. They hashed out a consensus on many different and difficult decisions. And as time went on, they seemed to pay particular attention to three areas: 1) standardization of rules, so every freshman knows what to expect; 2) character education, and 3) reading. Team members Scott, Meghan, Linda, Ruth, and business education teacher John LaBelle summed up the year's efforts in a recent conversation. "We wanted to focus on two or three things and really nail them down, and then next year we can add other things," said Scott.

*(Continued on page 3)*

<sup>1</sup>No Child Left Behind School Public Accountability Reports

A slogan summarizes the theme of the new FLC:

*NFL: New Focus on Learning, Leading, Living.*

## Standardized, User-Friendly Policies

The FLC team spent considerable time defining standards that all freshman teachers could agree to enforce. They compared it to parenting—when dad says “no” and mom says “yes,” kids get confused about the rules. In the new FLC, freshmen will clearly understand what is required to succeed when it comes to discipline, dress code, and even how assignments should be turned in. Ruth commented, “We call it ‘TOFU’—Teachers of Freshman United. You can ask any teacher and you’ll get the same answer.”

## Character Counts Here

One of the team’s goals is to create a caring school community, fostering qualities like respect, integrity, and a strong work ethic. Common sense tells us that when these elements are in place, school becomes a much nicer place to be. The converse is true—in an uncaring environment, it’s that much easier to quit. As the team planned the FLC, they took an intentional and proactive approach to character education. They will involve student government leaders in the process, who will help create fun and creative “infomercials” at the school’s TV studio. These infomercials will air throughout the year during morning announcements. Also, the FLC plans to kick off the year hearing from guest Eddie Slowikowski, a motivational speaker whose powerfully interactive multimedia presentation has inspired thousands to achieve their dreams.

## Read, Read, and Read

Reading and success are tightly intertwined, and all across the nation schools are focusing on reading improvement. In all of the FLC planning, there has been a big push toward cross-content reading.

“Reading is huge here,” said Meghan. “We’ll teach reading in every class—even long-time algebra teachers will



*Freshmen Center team members. From left: John Labelle, Business Education; Linda Bogue, Math; Meghan Fetzer, Math; Ruth Slay, Math; and Scott Cooper, Assistant Principal.*

have a word wall.” She plans to read math-related works aloud in her class, reinforcing the sound of good reading to students. For example, she may read *A Beautiful Mind*, a book about a mathematician recently made into a popular film.

In her math classes, Linda plans to promote recreational reading. For a small part of their grade, students will read recreationally and tell her about it orally. They’ll be charged with finding a new vocabulary word each week and writing the definition. And they’ll win a prize if they can stump the teacher!

## Ready or Not, Here They Come!

After a year of planning, strategizing, working, and struggling with class schedules and physical room locations that grouped freshmen closer together, the FLC team is ready to begin.

“We’re so excited!” said Meghan.

“A little tired—but *very* excited,” Ruth added.

At the mention that the real proof will come in four years when the class of 2009 graduates, Linda summed up the team’s response. “We’re looking forward to saying, ‘Look how far we’ve come!’”

## SEHS Plans Two New Academies

In addition to the new Freshmen Learning Center, SEHS has previously established a **Visual and Performing Arts Academy** under the leadership of Barbara Tapley-Kenney and Donna Timmons. New academies in the planning stages include a future **Business and Marketing Academy** and a **Health & Athletic Academy**. The Business Academy will

focus on preparing students for careers in business. The Health Academy is tentatively known as “HALO”—Health, Athletic, and Leadership Opportunity—and will focus on sports, nutrition (including culinary), and wellness. In the future, Southeast students will enter the Freshmen Learning Center first, and then can choose an academy in tenth grade.

### Character Education Resources

[www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)

[www.character.org](http://www.character.org)

[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

[www.charactered.net](http://www.charactered.net)

## From The Principal's Desk



### Mike Horne, SEHS Principal

*"The 2005-2006 school year opened as smoothly as I can remember in a long time. The vast majority of schedules were complete and we picked up from where we left off in May. Our freshman were welcomed by an enthusiastic core group of teachers who have made the commitment to change Southeast High by motivating our younger students and giving them a sense of belonging. Improved reading is first and foremost for all Southeast students; this is our focus, our mission. The concept of "smaller learning communities" will continue to be integrated as we implement the district-wide strategic plan "EdVantage." Southeast High will do its part to take this district from "Good to Great.""*



### Scott Cooper, SEHS Assistant Principal

*"I am very excited about this new school year. The start of the Freshman Learning Center is going to give our students a great opportunity to start their high school career off on the right foot and get them going in the correct direction. I am truly honored to have such a dedicated group of teachers who share the same vision and think of teaching in the Freshman Center as a great professional opportunity. I can not wait to see how successful the class of 2009 will be."*



## SLCs Moving Forward

### Angie Grasberger Comments

Over the past year the staff at each of our high schools has met the challenge and has developed smaller learning communities to assist students in the transition to high school and along their career paths. We can boast at having eight certified academies in the district and a Freshmen Learning Center at each high school. In addition, there are nine new academies in the planning stages for 2005-06. As we embark on another exciting and challenging school year I look forward to continuing to work with each of the school teams in developing and sustaining the smaller learning community's initiative.

## State Funding Hopeful for Two New Academies

### From the Desk of Doug Wagner

As we kick off the new school year it is exciting to see the plans that are now taking shape to further our efforts with the Smaller Learning Communities. In addition to the 2.3 million dollars already received for the 2004-2007 school years and the \$250,000 planning grant received in 2003-2004, Manatee County has applied for an additional \$400,000 in State funding from the Florida Department of Education under the SUCCEED Florida – Career Paths Grant which is designated to implement career and professional academies at the high school level.

The first academy that we are looking at for financial support is the Engineering Technology Academy at Braden River High School. The objective of this project is to implement an engineering technology professional academy which will work in partnership with the local business, civic, and educational leadership to address the shortage of qualified workers in this high-skill, high-wages area of employment. This is critical to the economic stability of the region and has a significant impact on the success of our students.

The second academy is the Hospitality Academy located at Community High School. It is a challenging course of study that combines integrated high school courses with hands-on culinary arts and/or travel and tourism studies. By providing students with real world skills and experiences, students will be preparing for exciting careers while completing their high school diploma. The academy will be the first step in preparing students for higher education and a wide world of career opportunities through accreditation agreements among Manatee Technical Institute (MTI), Manatee Community College (MCC), and the University of South Florida (USF). BRHS and CHS were selected because they are exempt from federal support as they have less than the 1,000 students required to qualify for grant applications to the feds. We are optimistic that we will be fully funded by the State for this additional \$400,000. Stay tuned for more information on funding opportunities and progress.