

Students 'hit the ground running' in Clarendon 1 schools

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SUMMERTON - Much of the talk leading into the 2012-13 school year for Clarendon School District 1 has been about the new St. Paul Elementary School.

The \$7 million facility that took a little more than two years to build opened to the public in late July and features state-of-the-art technology that will save the district thousands of dollars in the next few years while also providing students with matchless educational tools.

But St. Paul Elementary isn't the only school in the district focusing on the new.

"I'd say probably our biggest change this year is that we've implemented a 120-minute block of uninterrupted teaching time for English language arts (ELA) in our schedule for all grades pre-K through second," said Summerton Early Childhood Center Principal Tamika Riley.

The school's theme for the new school year, which started Monday, is "Soar with Eagle Pride."

"And everything we do academically will be about showing our students how to stay true to that theme," Riley said.

Part of that effort includes the addition of a literacy coach on top of the block of ELA teaching time.

"We are also implementing Response to Intervention, or RTI, which are strategies that we utilize to help those students who may be struggling while also helping those who are advanced learners."

Scott's Branch Middle-High School Principal Gwendolyn Harris is also focused on helping her students soar, though the combined school's individual theme is "I Believe."

"(That is) because teachers and staff members have resolved to take students to the next level while encouraging every learner to believe that they indeed have what it takes to get there," Harris said. "We believe that as we continue to propel students forward, we will become an educational system that is second to none."

The school's ultimate goal, as always Harris said, is "to ensure the success of every student, while preparing all students for college (or) career readiness."

"This year's focus will be on the use of high-yield instructional strategies, increased inquiry-based learning, student collaboration, increased use and analysis of data and expanding our Advanced Placement (AP) program," Harris continued.

While preoccupied with the current school year, Harris and her faculty and staff will also be building the foundation for the school's transition into the New Tech Network in the 2013-14 school year.

Founded in the mid-1990s in Napa, Calif., when local business leaders became concerned that graduating students who met state standards would still not be prepared for the quickly changing working world, the network now has 86 high schools across the nation that stress Project-based learning (PBL) that is "contextual, creative and shared," according to New Tech President Lydia Dobyms.

When the transition is complete, Scott's Branch will be one of only two schools in the state using the changes advocated by New Tech.

"Students collaborate on projects that require critical thinking and presentation skills," Dobyms said. "By making learning relevant in this way, student engagement reaches new levels and produces better educational outcomes. All classrooms have a one-to-one computing ratio. Every student becomes a self-directed learner who no longer needs to rely primarily on teachers or text books for knowledge and direction."

Harris said she expects her students and staff to "hit the ground running."

"The middle school is one of only six middle schools in the state that made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) three years in a row," she said. "Since we did not make the expected growth this year, however, we are revamping for a year of intense teaching and learning with a focus on rigorous instruction."

She hopes to turn the high school's "incremental growth" exponential.

"We have (set) the bar high and (will work in) supporting every child as he/she strives to reach it," she said. "We are looking forward to a prolific, challenging and exciting school year."