

New Dimensions releases test scores

Kindergarten, first- and second-grade students attending The New Dimensions School received outstanding scores on recently administered Metropolitan Achievement Tests.

The young students attending Burke County's first tuition-free public charter school, which is scheduled to expand through fifth grade for the 2003-04 school year, posted scores showing that 78 percent are performing at or above grade level in reading, 85 percent at or above grade level in mathematics, and 80 percent at or above grade level in language.

While only 43 percent of students with disabilities statewide achieved scores at or above grade level on end-of-the-year testing, 54 percent of students with disabilities at the New Dimensions School scored at or above grade level.

When scores of students with disabilities are removed from the totals, the percentages were: 86 percent at or above grade level in reading, 95 percent in mathematics, and 93 percent in language.

"Our students have done extremely well," said Carol Trivette, Ph.D., president of the school's governing board and co-director of the Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute in Morganton. "The educational approach we're using is clearly working. Not only did our students do well last year, but we now have a second year of data that strongly demonstrate the power of our curriculum and educational model."

Trivette said that the school's inclusive approach has been successful with students who have special learning needs, as well.

More than half of the students with disabilities are performing at or above grade level in reading and math, for example.

"In our educational model, children at many levels are taught together, and everybody learns," Trivette said. "There are challenges, but with a solid model and a lot of support, all children can learn."

Jennifer Wilson-Kearse, school director, said, "We're delighted by this evidence of student achievement. Our

teachers, parents, and students worked hard to make this happen. I'm thrilled to see that our school is able to educate children in a meaningful way based on what they are interested in and still get great results on a standardized test."

The New Dimensions School, which operates four multi-grade kindergarten-through-second-grade classes at three community-based sites in Burke County, uses a strengths-based, interests-based approach to the education of young children.

The school also uses a portfolio assessment system to measure student progress.

Samples of children's work, regular teacher observations, and the New Dimensions School developed Teacher Observation Scale of Key Abilities (an instrument used to chart mastery of abilities recommended by state and national standards in each area of the curriculum) comprise the portfolio.

"We find that the portfolio provides families with a more accurate and detailed picture or story of the progression of learning that takes place during the school year," Wilson-Kearse explained. "Because we do not grade in a traditional way, parents asked that we test the children to verify they were performing at or above grade level."

"We used the Metropolitan Achievement Test, a nationally normed test used in schools across North Carolina and all over the United States."

The New Dimensions School has announced plans to expand in the coming school year.

Two multi-age third-through fifth-grade classes are planned for the 2003-04 school year.

The school continues to offer a dual-language-immersion option in which English-speaking children learn Spanish and Spanish-speaking children learn English along with their regular academic experiences.

Applications for new students at all grade levels are now being accepted.

For information, please call the New Dimensions School office at 437-5753.