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Grapevine's Hill School to Add More Grades

By Scott Price
Staff Writer

The Grapevine campus of the Hill School, a full-service school for first- through sixth-grade students with learning differences, plans to add the seventh grade in August and an eighth grade in August 2010.

Last year the Grapevine campus had 34 students. This year the campus has 72 students.

Kathy Edwards, Hill School Grapevine campus principal, said the plan is to have about 85 students during the next school year. She said student primarily transfer from Grapevine-Colleyville, Keller and Northwest school districts, but students come from all over North Texas.

The Hill School's Fort Worth campus, which has 236 students, serves second through 12th grades. Both locations primarily serve students dealing with issues such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.

"Everyone who comes here is here because they weren't getting what they needed elsewhere," Edwards said.

About 5 percent of the students have not been diagnosed with a learning disorder, Edwards added. She said some parents just want their children to have more individualized instruction.

"A private school like this is trying to maximize the student's potential," Edwards said.

The Hill School started its Grapevine campus by using space provided by the First United Methodist Church of Grapevine. Then in March 2008 the campus was relocated to a leased building at 204 N. Dooley St. in Grapevine.

With the 2,500 square feet of additional space the school has begun leasing, the school now has a total of 14,300 square feet. Edwards said there is also the potential to lease another 5,000 square feet, but she said that space won't be needed for a few years.

The Grapevine campus has a total of 14 employees. Edwards said a seventh-grade teacher and an elementary teacher will be added for the next school year.

The students wear uniforms, mostly khaki pants and red or white polo shirts. Parents pay \$14,500 per year to send a student to the school. Some of the teachers offer after-school tutoring so that students not enrolled at the school can get help. The Hill School also offers summer programs.

The Hill School in Grapevine has a hawk as its mascot. Although the school does not have a real hawk, they do have a love bird named Bug, as in love bug, that hangs out at the reception desk. The school also has aquariums, guinea pigs and other animals.

Edwards said the animals can be used to motivate students. She said one student wasn't completing his work, so the student was offered a chance to feed and care for the bird if he completed his work. Edwards said the student is now very motivated to complete his school work.

The school also offers a "hawk buck" when a student does something exceptional. The student can use the "bucks" to buy a day that the student doesn't have to where a uniform. For 25 "bucks" a student can earn the right to keep one of the principal's five dogs for a day in the classroom. For 50 "bucks" a student can take one of the dogs home for the weekend.

Edwards said animals are great motivators.

"Everything is earned here," she said. "They will tell you they don't get grades, they earn them."

Edwards said each student received specialized testing which is used to guide the student's instruction. She said teachers use a student's strengths to improve weaknesses.

A student in a traditional school who may have an issue such as dyslexia, which affects reading and the processing of language, can find that they are falling behind and then are not allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities, Edwards said. She said this leads to other students treating the person differently. The Hill School is designed so that students enjoy coming to school, Edwards said.

sprice@alliancenews.net 817-685-3865