



Children First!

News & Information from Metro Nashville Public Schools

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Hillwood Freshman Academy Gives Students a Voice

During the 2007-2008 school year, several MNPS comprehensive high schools launched Freshman Academies, part of the high school redesign initiative based on small learning communities. The schools have seen a tremendous impact from the academies, from better student performance to a greater sense of school pride, loyalty and student leadership. Anecdotal information provided by faculty, students and principals also indicates significant academic improvements, and we are eagerly awaiting the state test scores.

At **Hillwood High School**, a few highlights of the inaugural Freshman Academy, as reported by faculty, students, administrators and parents include:

- a significant drop in freshmen retention rate -- down more than 10% from years prior to the Freshman Academy;
- an enormous demand for more Honors and Advanced Placement courses -- with all freshmen enrolled in at least one honors course;
- a strong bond between Freshman Academy teachers -- what used to be a building of independent contractors is now described as a true team atmosphere;
- a stronger sense of leadership and ownership among the freshman class;
- more clubs and extracurricular activities and freshmen participation;
- students feel a higher level of expectations set by teachers;
- an increase in freshmen class self-esteem and growth;
- other classes want what they see happening through the Freshman Academy; and
- significantly improved teacher/parent communication.

This past year, Hillwood administrators and faculty worked diligently to help the freshmen class stay on track through various content recovery programs. One hugely successful program at Hillwood was the *Red Shirt* program. *Red Shirts* are those students who had difficulty managing their freshman year – whether it be due to academic struggles, behavioral issues, or any other individual setbacks. *Red Shirts* are teamed up with a guidance counselor whose job is not just to get them to the next grade, but to help the student get on track academically, emotionally, culturally, or socially. *Red Shirts* meet with their assigned guidance counselors once a week to track their progress, teachers provide progress reports to the guidance counselors on each *Red Shirt*, and students work in small groups with other students facing similar challenges to correct their personal setbacks. *Red Shirts* are also offered a chance for both Credit and Content

Recovery, and they receive highly personal attention from school leaders to help them stay focused and get back on track. Another benefit of the *Red Shirts* program is the ability for counselors and teachers to keep much closer contact with the students' parents and offer more dynamic interventions for the students.

This fall, Hillwood will implement four Career & Thematic Centers: an **Audio-Video Technology and Communication Career Academy**, which will include pathways in journalism and broadcasting, design communications, and interactive multimedia; a thematic **Academy of Arts and Cultural Studies** with pathways in visual arts, performing arts (choral, instrumental and theatre), and humanities; a **Health Career and Thematic Academy** with pathways in diagnostic services, health informatics, support services, therapeutic services, exercise science and environmental science; and a **Hospitality and Tourism Career Academy** with pathways in food and beverage services and hospitality, management and lodging services. For more information about Hillwood's Freshman Academy or Career and Thematic Centers, contact the school at 353-2025.

Next week, Children First! will offer a special section on Pearl-Cohn High School's Freshman Academy – the successes of its first year.

Back to School Savings – State Sales Tax Holiday

Just in time for back to school, the state has issued a **Sales Tax Holiday** for the weekend of August 1-3. Tax exempt items are:

- School and school art supplies with a price of \$100 or less per item;
- Clothing with a price of \$100 or less per item; and
- Computers with a price of \$1,500 or less.

An important note for parents: standard school attire will be back during the 2008-2009 school year. This Sales Tax Holiday will be a great opportunity for parents to purchase clothes for next school year and save money.

For more information about the Sales Tax Holiday, visit www.tntaxholiday.com. This website lists exempt items, a retailer's guide and frequently asked questions.

MNPS Customer Service Center Taking Your Calls

The start of school is right around the corner, and it is never too early for families to find information that will help students begin the school year on a good foot. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools provides a **Customer Service Center** so families can get assistance for any back to school questions, including school assignment and transportation. Families are strongly encouraged to start asking questions now to avoid any last minute worries or confusion. Contact the Center any day from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. at **259-INFO (4636)**. The week of Monday, August 4, the Customer Service Center will be open extended hours from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for last minute calling.

The Customer Service Center opened in August of 2005. Since its inception, the CSC has taken nearly 600,000 calls. The center is equipped to take calls in English, Spanish and any special needs calls. For more information, visit www.mnps.org.

More than a Hundred Walk at Summer School Graduation

More than 100 MNPS students proudly received their high school diplomas after successful summer school sessions, Thursday, July 24, at Hillsboro High School. This was the largest number of summer school graduates in MNPS history. Interim Director of Schools Chris Henson delivered the commencement speech. Students represented 15 MNPS high schools, including magnet and optional schools. Congratulations to all of these students for their hard work and for reaching this important milestone.

Una Elementary PTO Receives Honorable Mention

Congratulations to the PTO at Una Elementary for receiving an honorable mention in the PTO Today's 2008 Parent Group of the Year search. The organization was nominated by last year's PTO President, Phronda Buckley, and will be profiled this September on PTO Today's website (<http://www.ptotoday.com/pgy/index.html>) for the awarding of an Honorable Mention.