

## **Christian-based alternate school plans to blend teacher-parent learning**

**By Michelle Brooks**

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An educational option doesn't have to be all or nothing.

This fall, parents can choose to blend a traditional classroom setting with the learning-at-home method. Or for the motivated learner, Lighthouse Preparatory Academy will offer a rigorous, more individualized course of study.

The University-Model School weaves teacher instruction and home-mentoring giving parents a primary role in their child's learning while also offering a college-simulated program preparing students to be independent learners.

In the summer of 2006, several parents met each other through the common thread of a new alternative in education. The University-Model School has been emerging nationally with successes from higher test scores to college performance.

Other proven elements of the school's program include character education, low student/teacher ratio, hands-on learning, a strong student work ethic, an effective college-preparatory curriculum, character-building student activities, and servant-minded local operation and management.

So these organizing parents incorporated in October 2006 with the intent to open classes on the Columbia College campus, 3314 Emerald Lane on Aug. 20. They're hoping for 50-75 enrolled in sixth through 12th grade.

The non-denominational Christian school will serve sixth-twelfth-grade students who come from both the public school setting and longtime home-school families. About 70 parents and potential educators attended the first of several information meetings recently.

The next informational meeting will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Columbia College campus. Registration packets will be available.

We want this to be a good fit for a family which is why attendance at an informational meeting is required, Alexander said. Our academics are rigorous, it's definitely college preparatory.

Students will attend classes three days each week, up to six courses or as little as one. Courses will be taught by community professionals with a passion for children and a knowledge of the subject, said board member Mary Alexander.

We know we have a wealth of quality people to tap into - retired teachers, community experts with professional positions, Alexander said. A job fair will be held at 7 p.m. May 21 for those interested in teaching a course.

As in college, students are expected to spend the other two days each week in preparation for the classes with parent coaches.

The demanding curriculum should produce independent learners, Alexander said. As a university professor, her husband has found that most students are not prepared for the pace of college learning, she said.

We hope to offer the best instruction from someone passionate about the subject matter, Alexander said. It's time for them to take charge of their own learning.

A pre-admission test will help place students at their learning level in core classes.

We will tailor their education to fit them individually as students, Alexander said.

But parents will be key because they know their kids best, she said. So the curriculum has been developed with meaningful things for parents to do with each course.

We will not usurp the role of the parent, said board member Sandy Hall.

As a non-denominational, Christian-based school, Lighthouse will take kids that already have a faith base, then encourage, equip and prepare them to reach the rest of the world with their faith.

Area mom hopes new school will leave more room for family time.

With 40 hours each week in a public classroom plus hours of extracurricular activities in the evenings, Twana Wiens found it difficult to maintain the family time that she wanted with her son Cory.

It's hard to instill our values and goals with little family time, said Wiens, a stay-at-home mom.

This fall she hopes to send Cory to Lighthouse Preparatory Academy, a University-Model School.

With classroom work three days each week, Wiens said she is looking forward to regaining the family cohesiveness during the other two days when she will help him with his class preparations.

The new educational alternative will offer extracurricular activities too - from sports to speech and theater to science competitions.

But we will be careful to guard and respect family time, said Lighthouse board member Sandy Hall.