

Ivy Preparatory Academy: Breaking the Education Mold

Norcross girls-only charter school produces results and provides education alternatives

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Searching for models of school excellence within and also outside of the traditional education system is part of the Georgia Chamber’s efforts to find solutions that foster excellence within each of Georgia’s local school districts. Alternatives to the traditional school experience are being established at a rapid pace, and a successful example of education innovation can be found at Ivy Preparatory Academy in Norcross.

Created in 2008 as a tuition-free charter school, Ivy Prep will provide a middle school alternative for 480 students during the 2010 – 11 school year. Ivy Prep also offers a unique benefit that most other schools don’t offer – a single-gender education option for girls. Research through-

out the years has shown that boys and girls have very different ways of learning, and Ivy Prep has developed a model of success based on these studies.

Nina Gilbert, head of school, founded the school after years of working as a teacher in the traditional public school system. Frustrated with trying to effectively reach students in a large school setting, her interactions with parents and students led her to believe that a different type of educational environment was needed to equip students with the qualities to excel both academically and personally.

“As a small single-gender school, we have eliminated the social distractions that prevent students from being academically successful,” says Gilbert. “We have a very structured culture that promotes discipline, personal values and sisterhood. Everything from how scholars ask and answer questions to how they sit at their desks is a big deal here.”

This attention to detail ensures each student develops the work habits and social competencies needed to be successful



Left: Ivy Prep students smile before starting the school day.

WHAT IS A CHARTER SCHOOL?

A charter school is a publicly funded option for primary and secondary grades that is exempt from many of the rules and regulations that apply to public schools. How does this work? In exchange for flexibility, charter schools are held to a higher level of accountability for producing certain results that are set

in each school’s individual charter. Charter schools are not permitted to charge tuition, and often offer lottery drawings for student slots.

For more information on Georgia charter schools, visit www.gacharters.org.



and well-educated young ladies, and also has helped build a reputation of excellence overall for Ivy Prep. The number of students on Ivy Prep's waiting list ties the current student enrollment, proving that demand for the school is high.

Ivy Prep offers features that can't be found in the typical public school experience, such as mentorship/sisterhood programs that allow students to bond with one another and activities that focus on the health and well-being of the girls.

"We have a strong focus on service and self-advocacy so that students learn to speak up for themselves and take charge of their learning and health," adds Gilbert.

Gilbert also proudly, yet modestly acknowledges that her faculty is mission-aligned and passionate about serving their students. The faculty comes from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, and many have held school leadership positions and received Teacher of the Year honors in their former schools. Several of Ivy Prep's teachers are currently pursuing advanced degrees in specialist and doctoral programs, and the school is hosting exchange teachers from Vienna, Austria for three years.

This year, Ivy Prep includes sixth, seventh and eighth grades, with plans to expand one grade per year until the school reaches Grade 12. "Preparation for high school is definitely on the short-term plan for Ivy Prep," stresses Gilbert, "along with finding more partners to support technology and international travel opportunities for our scholars."

And on the long-term plan? Gilbert says graduation and acceptance of the school's first scholars to college and replication of the Ivy Prep model are at the top of the list.

"Every moment (at Ivy Prep) is a proud moment for me," says Gilbert. "Every morning when the scholars arrive, and every time I enter a classroom, I am proud of the tenacity and steadfast commitment of our teachers, scholars and parents. I cherish each moment at Ivy Prep."

For more information about Ivy Preparatory Academy and its mission, visit www.ivyprepacademy.org.

A Typical Day at Ivy Preparatory Academy

Before Homeroom

Scholars arrive at 7:30 a.m. and eat breakfast before reporting to homeroom.

Throughout the Day

Two Math Classes (Math Analysis and Math Operations)

Two Language Arts classes (Literature and Writing)

Two Electives (This can include Fitness, Music, Mandarin, Spanish, French, Collegiate Studies and Art)

After School

Although the academic day ends at 4:00 p.m., enrichment classes are held from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. These classes include Violin, Drama, Gavel Club, Double Dutch, Student Government and Engineering. Students also participate in activities such as soccer, basketball, cheerleading and tennis.