

New curriculum, more technology at Legacy Christian Academy

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[by Eric Hagen](#)

Staff Writer

It has been a very busy summer at Legacy Christian Academy.

All the athletic teams will finally have new uniforms that will display their current school name instead of the identity of its former name Meadow Creek Christian School.

On the academic side, new math and reading curriculum has been adopted. The laptops that secondary level students got last year will be utilized more than ever. Students from fifth- to eighth-grades will also be recognized as middle school students for the first time.

New curriculum

Singapore Math is the new curriculum that will teach first- through sixth-graders about the fundamentals of math in a much different way than the school's president Dean Erickson learned about the subject.

Erickson said instead of just completing a math problem in a textbook, students will be working hands-on with manipulatives that will give them a visual sense of how basic math works.

To work on fractions, for example, sixth-grade teacher Joleen Kubiszewski showed different sizes of plastic pieces that will add up to one full circle when combined. Some circles will need eight pieces to completed, so each piece is one-eighth of the circle. Other circles only need two pieces, so each piece is one-half of the circle.

"It's sort of a visual approach to math in elementary school," Erickson said.

The big theme from first grade through 12th grade is the reading and writing curriculum will be teaching students how to process information they have read and how to get their new knowledge across to others, according to Jennie Sorenson, the new director of instruction and technology integration.

"They can access information in seconds at the tip of their fingers with the technology, so we feel it's our job to teach them how to process information, how to evaluate and decide which is good information and which is not and pick good resources to use," Sorenson said.

For all subjects going forward, a key effort in the minds of the curriculum leaders will be engaging the students in their education and spending less class time on teachers lecturing. Erickson has read research that shows



Left to right: Lorie Niessen (fourth grade), Susan McLaughlin (fourth grade) and Jodi Larson (Discovery Center) and other Legacy Christian School teachers trained with manipulative math kits Aug. 18. These kits will allow students to learn math in a hands-on way rather than just from a textbook. Photo by Eric Hagen

students may retain only about 20 percent of what a teacher talked about during a lecture, even if that teacher had a great presentation. As students become more involved by having small group discussions and working on projects, they learn much more than just listening to a teacher talk, Erickson said.

Erickson said instead of a history teacher telling students what they must know to pass a written test, he or she could ask students to demonstrate what they have learned about an important historical period such as the Great Depression. Perhaps the student has a talent for writing songs, producing videos or writing a research paper. The students could have the flexibility to show the teacher what they have learned in many other ways than just a multiple choice test.

Sorenson said even though teachers will be lecturing in front of the whole classroom for less time, they still have a very important role to make sure the students are staying on track and not learning any misconceptions about a particular subject.

Using the technology

At the beginning of the last school year, a donation from a person who wished to remain anonymous enabled Legacy Christian Academy to purchase laptops for every single seventh- through 12th-grade student. The school hands out the laptops to the students at the beginning of the school year and collects them at the end of the school year.

Students and teachers at the secondary level have already begun utilizing these new tools. Students could access the Internet to research projects. They could also create Power Point presentations or videos or papers for a homework assignment.

School leaders have even more plans for the 2011-2012 school year.

Moodle is “an online learning environment” as Sorenson described it. It is a free web application that allows teachers to post educational material on this web-based management system and allows students to view this material.

All course material and assignments will be on a teacher’s Moodle site. Students would electronically hand in their assignments through this Moodle system. If a teacher knows a student has an excused absence, they could record their lecture and upload the video online. Each laptop has a webcam, so a student could record a lecture and review it at home if they had trouble following along during class.

A student’s overnight homework assignment could be to watch a teacher’s lecture and be prepared to work on an activity with their classmates the next day to demonstrate what they learned. This allows for more collaboration and hands-on learning during classroom hours, Erickson said. Students who are having more trouble with the material could watch the lecture more than once at home as well.

“It’s really a classroom online,” Erickson said. “Even though we’re not an online school, it creates an environment where it’s accessible 24/7.”

Middle school

Legacy Christian Academy, once known as Meadow Creek Christian School, always gave parents the ability to send their kids to one school. They did not have to go from an elementary school to a middle school and then to a high school. They were all in the same building, although in different sections.

Erickson said middle school students are at a very unique age, so he felt fifth- through eighth-graders needed to be identified as middle school students rather than be lumped together with the elementary or secondary students. The school previously identified first- through sixth-graders as elementary students and seventh-through 12th-graders as secondary level students.

“It’s kind of an age where they want to think and they want to create and they want to do all those higher-level thinking things, but they don’t quite have the skills to do that yet,” Sorenson said of middle school students.

Erickson said middle school can really become a make or break period in these students lives.

“You need to treat that age carefully,” Erickson said. “I really believe if you make it through eighth grade with your feet on the ground and you’re set to go, you’re going to do well in high school.”

After every chapel service, the school has a block of time set aside for character and team building lessons. They learn about respect, accountability, courage, patience, honesty and many other personal traits that are as important in their lives as the knowledge they take from the classroom.

Once a month, a person from the community, such as a business owner, will visit the school to talk about how these traits have served them well in their lives.

“I’m really excited about it,” Erickson said. “One of the reasons I went into education is I believe learning history is important, but shaping students character and how they interface in this world is pretty vital and we’re really going to emphasize this this year.”

The message for the middle school students can no be specifically tailored to them rather than them being lumped with the elementary or high school students.

Eric Hagen is at eric.hagen@ecm-inc.com

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