

For some, it's back to school

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HIGH POINT — At the Middle College at GTCC-High Point, teachers and students forgo reviewing syllabi and taking notes on the first two days of school to have some fun.

It's part of the high school's mission to make school feel like family.

"The sole purpose of what we do, we can achieve it because of the relationships we establish here," said Principal Darrell Harris. "Today and tomorrow are the foundation of that."

The high school located within Guilford Technical Community College in High Point was one of several area schools resuming classes this week. The first day for middle colleges and academies was Tuesday, and extended-year schools return today.

Traditional-calendar schools open Aug. 27.

At GTCC on Tuesday morning, returning students welcomed new students in a convocation-like ceremony. Two members of the senior class presented each new student with an enamel pin of the school's mascot, a lion.

Senior Dakota Watkins said he quickly became part of the close-knit community after transferring to the alternative school last year.

"It helps a lot of kids with a lot of things more than academics," he said. "When you come to this school, the people who work here are more than just your teachers, they become your family."

Before long, the newbies will be joining their fellow classmates in both high school and college courses. The goal for students at the school is to obtain an associate degree, or at least several college credits, by the time they graduate high school. Students can stay at the middle college for an additional year, grade 13, before graduating to continue taking college classes free of charge to them and their families.



LAURA GREENE | HPE

Phylicia Lockhart, left, a math teacher at Middle College at GTCC-High Point, leads a group of juniors in a team-building exercise called the human knot Tuesday. Students returned to school this week and spent the first two days involved in activities designed to assist them with personal growth.

Freshman will start out with classes that only include other high school students but are taught by college professors on a college level. Harris said staff work with the professors to provide extra support for the students as they adjust to the demands of higher education.

Throughout their high school years, more traditional college courses are sprinkled into their schedules until they're fully immersed in GTCC as upperclassmen.

"The sprinkle becomes bigger and bigger as you get older, and that high school pie gets smaller," Harris said.

A majority of students are first-generation college students, from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education or labeled "at-risk" for some other reason, like behavioral problems or disabilities.

Harris and his staff, who have 219 years of education experience between them, work with the students to prepare them for college, not only helping them handle the workload but teaching them skills like how to approach a professor when they have a problem.

Harris said the goal is to help students build a foundation for lives that will have a positive influence on those around them.

"We really want to make sure when kids leave here they're impacting their communities and changing circumstances for their families," he said.

Success looks different for each student, he said. While many students are aiming to get their associate degrees and move on to a four-year college, others just want to graduate high school, and will be the first in their families to do so.

For junior Brittany Kosterlytzky, taking on the challenge of middle college is about living up to the example of her mother, who was homeless for a good portion of her life but earned a college degree nonetheless.

"Growing up with her as a single mom, I didn't want to be the kid who started drama or made a fuss," Brittany said. "I wanted to better myself for her. I wanted to become a more improved version of myself that she could be proud of."

Harris is challenging all his students and staff to be better versions of themselves this school year, which is themed "Season for Greatness."

"We've done some great things in the past; that's in the past. We're going to do great things in the future; that's in the future. But we are currently sitting in our season for greatness, and we're really excited about it."

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