

School to serve kids with learning disabilities

by Philip Haldiman - Apr. 26, 2009 12:00 AM

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A school cast from a different mold is scheduled to open in August in Scottsdale.

Lexis Preparatory School is a new kindergarten through eighth-grade college-prep private school serving students in Maricopa County. The school will provide a customized, high-quality learning experience for children with ADHD, ADD and other learning differences, said Dana Herzberg, head of the school.

There are schools in Arizona that serve kids with learning disabilities, but they are therapeutic models, Herzberg said. Educators at Lexis hope to work with students who lack functions such as planning, organizing, strategizing and paying attention and provide them with a core college-prep curriculum.

"Lexis is unique," Herzberg said. "We want our students to go on and achieve a college education. Our goal is to teach students so that they can go on to whatever school they want to go to. Arizona has needed this for a long time and I think parents will be pleased with what their kids will receive from Lexis."

Around 10 percent of children have ADD or ADHD, with a small percentage of those kids requiring highly specialized placement, said Rick Lavoie, who holds three degrees in special education and has served as an adjunct professor and visiting lecturer at numerous universities.

"I wish every kid could go board the school bus with his siblings and go to the neighborhood school, but for some kids, that is neither practical nor advisable," Lavoie said.

Lavoie recently spoke at two workshops in Scottsdale geared to education professionals and parents of children with learning disabilities. He said he was impressed by the new school.

"I have no affiliation or connection with Lexis, but I know a solid, mission-driven educational program when I see one," he said.

Lexis Preparatory is working on developing scholarship programs and tuition support. About 40 to 50 students are targeted for enrollment in the first year, and about 30 have been accepted.

Herzberg said Lexis will have a small staff the first year with roughly six to eight teachers, but that classrooms will never have more than 12 kids.

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"This school will have the top trained and credentialed teachers who want to have success stories," Herzberg said. "You can't come in and work for this population and not have a passion for what you do."

Students at Lexis will be taught the skills they are lacking on an individual basis, which is something that Herzberg didn't have growing up.

"My parents weren't quite sure what to do with me," Herzberg said.

She was diagnosed with a learning disability in the fourth grade. Being born to high-achieving parents and feeling outcast because of her inability to learn like other students, Herzberg said she can relate when she says she often hears students with learning disability say: "I feel stupid."

In high school, Herzberg took part in a volunteer program in which she helped children with severe learning disabilities. She said the experience changed her life and taught her how to learn. She's been working with them ever since, and it's one of the reasons she is opening Lexis.

"I knew from that point forward what my mission in life was," Herzberg said. "These are incredibly bright kids and we can't ignore their gifts."

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