

Smooth start for City on a Hill Charter School

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NEW BEDFORD — Jason Berry said one of the things he likes about City on a Hill Charter School is its size.

"You can know everyone's name, say hi to everyone," said the freshman who attended Keith Middle School last year. "It's not like other schools, where there is too much people."

In its first weeks, the school's 98 freshmen and 25-member staff are getting used to their temporary home inside Fisher College on Church Street. In a few months, the school will move downtown to the former ArtWorks! building on Acushnet Avenue. Over the next few years, it plans to expand to take in students in all high school grades.

Horyzan Stewart said she enjoys the lunch break.

"It's so different," said the 14-year-old, who also attended Keith last year. "You get to talk to your friends and get to communicate with all the teachers and they are really friendly."

Horyzan said students are also allowed to take their phones out at breakfast and lunch.

She said she has had a harder time adjusting to the school uniform.

"They want it perfect and tucked in," she said, but added she also sees advantages to it. "You won't get judged because we are all wearing the same thing."

Kim Wall, the school's principal, said this year she plans to build the school's culture, which is based on academic achievement, citizenship, leadership and public accountability.

The school's leadership team has also been meeting with the parents of every student, she said.

So far, she said, "We are cruising. ... One of the things that just really impressed me about our staff and our students is their flexibility."

Marisa Burgess, assistant director of development and community relations, said educators had three weeks of orientation before school opened.

Staff members from the two other City on a Hill charter schools in Boston led workshops and presentations for them, Burgess said.

The school's mission is to get its students ready for college, she said.

"Our job is to take students at whatever level they are coming in and get them ready to apply to college, get into college and most importantly, succeed in college," she said.

Four days a week, students receive 55 minutes of tutoring in small groups of threes or fours, said Samantha Johnson, one of the tutors.

On Fridays, students spend 45 minutes getting MCAS test preparation for the statewide standardized

test, she said.

Johnson said she hopes students build a relationship with the tutors.

"In a tutorial, where it's one on one sometimes, or one on three ,you're going to have that really dedicated person to make sure you learn," she said, adding they can push students to make sure they stay focused on their work and "don't opt out."

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