

## ***The da Vinci Academy at South Hall Middle School***

Hall County Schools  
Gainesville, GA

### **What is *The da Vinci Academy*?**

*The da Vinci Academy* is a program of choice that uses student interest in the arts and/or sciences as the foundation for advanced learning in all content areas. One hundred twenty students will be selected to work closely with six multi-talented, creative teachers who will guide the students in developing deep understanding of subject matter through direct instruction and collaborative exploration and discovery. Additionally, adjunct professional scientists and artists will join the *da Vinci* learning community to work with small groups and individual students in their areas of interest.

Instruction will be interdisciplinary, and there will be an emphasis on international education, world languages, and technology. Georgia Performance Standards will be integrated into thematic units centered on issues of importance to adolescent learners -- my place in a global society, resolving conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, environmental stewardship, etc. For example, all students will master English Language Arts standards; but one group might practice the writing standards when they compose a report to be submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency about a stream study they have completed; another group may demonstrate mastery of the same standards when they create brochures on significant works of art of an historical period. Student-designed gardens that feature both sculptures and planting areas, for example, might be used to teach science, mathematics, art and social studies concepts such as sustainable communities! Emphasis for all students will be on applied learning experiences that help them function with increasing competency as researchers, creators, problem solvers, or practitioners in a field. Problem-based study using a variety of research strategies, group activities, and independent work will allow students to pursue their areas of individual interest in depth.

It is the goal of *The da Vinci Academy* to instill in young people lifelong intellectual curiosity and commitment to learning by building an extraordinary educational foundation on their strengths and interests. The dual emphasis on rigorous academic standards and creative productivity will create a dynamic learning environment that inspires authentic learning, motivation, innovation and enjoyment!

### **How is this program different from more traditional middle schools?**

All Hall County middle schools offer a variety of excellent courses and activities that meet diverse learners' needs. *The da Vinci Academy* differs, however, in its special focus on the arts and sciences and its totally integrated curriculum. Daily "hands-on, minds-on" learning focuses on the individual strengths and interests of each student.

*The da Vinci Academy* will feature a "Museum of Inspired Learning," offering students opportunities to research and create museum-quality exhibit galleries. Students will be able to work with professionals in their fields of study as they develop their own expertise, and then they will share their findings with others when they serve as museum docents.

Sophisticated uses of the latest technology will be pervasive in *da Vinci Academy* curriculum. All students will have laptop computers, purchased by their families or leased at a special rate

through Dell Financing. Wireless mobile technology will replace many of the teaching and learning resources used in traditional schools.

All *da Vinci* students will be able to earn high school credits in their areas of strength and interest, thus getting a head start on advanced coursework in high school (e.g., AP, IB, Honors Mentorship Program) and early dual enrollment.

Physical development, so important during the adolescent years, will focus on lifetime fitness and wellness. *da Vinci Academy* students may participate in all extra-curricular activities available at SHMS, including athletics and band. But at the *Academy* special emphasis will be placed on lifetime wellness through activities such as running, yoga, and weight training.

Parents will be an integral part of the success of this program. They will commit at least 20 hours of volunteer work a year and, if they live outside the SHMS zone, will be asked to provide transportation for their child to and from school. In return, *The da Vinci Academy* will offer their children an opportunity to thrive in an environment dedicated to meeting the needs of the passionate learner both academically and creatively.

### **Who may attend *The da Vinci Academy*?**

The program will begin with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students for the 2009-2010 school year; 8<sup>th</sup> grade will be added the following year. Any Hall County School District student who is currently in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade may apply.

*The da Vinci Academy* is designed for students who love to learn, particularly those with strong interests in the arts and/or sciences. Students who are curious and who learn best in a creative educational setting are prime candidates for this program. Intrinsic motivation, resourcefulness, and a problem-solving disposition are characteristics that applicants should possess.

Students will be selected based on evidence from their applications, recommendations, and transcripts of (a) interest and advanced ability in the arts and/or sciences, (b) creativity, (c) motivation, and (d) ability to work well independently and in small group settings.

Diversity is valued at *The da Vinci Academy*. It will be a learning community in which each individual feels connected and supported while, at the same time, their individuality is respected.

### **Application Deadline:**

Applications will be distributed at parent information meetings:

- Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 pm, Hall County Schools Central Office
- Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>
  - 11:00 am, Hall County Schools Central Office
  - 7:00 pm, South Hall Middle School
- Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 7:00 pm, West Hall Middle School

Applications will be due by Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**For additional information**, please contact Dr. Sally Krisel, Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning (Academic Rigor), 770-534-1080, ext. 246 or [sally.krisel@hallco.org](mailto:sally.krisel@hallco.org).