

The Learning Curve

This page was written and designed by Education First in cooperation with the Bibb County Board of Education, the Peyton Anderson Foundation, and The Telegraph.



Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Bibb County students selected for six-week summer program

"It's a mix of going to summer camp and going to college," says Central High sophomore Cody Dunwoody. He and ten other Bibb County students have been chosen to participate in the Georgia Department of Education's 2005 Governor's Honors Program. According to the Program's Web site (<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/support/sss/ghp.asp>), it "is a six-week summer instructional program designed to provide intellectually gifted and artistically talented high school students challenging and enriching educational opportunities not usually available during the regular school year."

Students are nominated for the program by a teacher in a specific instructional area they are interested and excel in, including biology, chemistry, communicative arts, French, German, Latin, mathematics, physics, social studies, Spanish, dance, music, theater, visual arts, commercial and industrial design, executive business management, technology, and agriculture/biotechnology. Students nominated must first pass a local interview to move on to the state level; there, they are interviewed as to why they want to go, what they can bring to the program, and what their interests are. Also, they must pass some form of audition or test, as well as having their transcripts and resumes reviewed by judges. The judges wanted to test "your knowledge of the subject areas," says rising Central junior Abdul-razao Adeniyi, who will be studying English.

Music students performed a prepared piece and a sight-reading excerpt as well as took a music theory test; English nominees had a written exam; chemistry students had to turn in an extract; French students, along with taking a test, conducted their entire interview in French. "It was quite scary,"



Governor Sonny Perdue welcomes and congratulates the students on their acceptance to the 2005 Governor's Honors Program.

says rising Central senior Lucy McLees. Even the woman checking her in was speaking French. "I was real nervous the whole time."

With the rigorous standards to get in to spend six weeks of their summer in classes, why would students work so hard to attend the Governor's Honors Program? Rising Westside High junior Tracy Yang, who will be studying social studies, talked to students who had done it in past years, and "it sounded like it'd be a lot of fun." Yang decided to participate in the music program as her minor area of study "to make myself practice."

"They get talented teachers to come in and teach us," adds rising Westside senior Tawny Waltz, also studying social studies.

This year, students will be spending their weeks living at Valdosta State University, staying in dorms, attending fine arts performances, meeting students from around the state, and, most importantly, studying with the state's top high school teachers and college professors in the academic or arts field in which they were nominated. "I hope to gain some experience and knowledge," says rising Hutchings Career Center senior Justin Stanley, who will be studying technology.

"You'll learn a lot from your instructors in the coming weeks," Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue told them. "You'll learn a lot from each other. But most of all, you've got a great opportunity to learn about yourself and what you are capable of achieving. So savor the experience. Make the most of it."

"I'm very proud of them," says Central Principal Dr. Erin Weaver.

"These students are wonderful," agrees Westside Counselor Theresa Roller.

Perdue finished off with a personal show of admiration for the accomplishments: "I'm proud of you - Georgia is proud of you - and I look forward to being amazed and astounded by what you will do and how you will transform Georgia in the years to come."

The other Bibb County students chosen were rising Westside junior Chui-Lai Cheung (English), rising Westside senior Margo Gunterman (math), rising Central senior Tarver Petersen (chemistry), rising Central junior Pei Lin Ren (math), and rising Central senior Matthew Reese (vocal music).

Hutchings Career Center trains students to become master technicians

Use hands-on work, internships, and competition to hone skills

"Did you ever figure out what these relays were?" Hutchings Career Center teacher Sonny Reeves asks two of his students as they inspect the engine of a 2005 Ford Taurus.

The school is in the process of developing a program to help students become master technicians and mechanics. "What we're trying to develop here is an automotive youth education." According to Reeves, working on cars has become more advanced and requires expert training in computers as well as mechanics. When he grew up, it involved changing plugs and checking liquid levels. Nowadays, cars have several computers running them - brakes, engine, body - which need to be checked.

"If you can't learn the electrical, you won't be able to do anything," says junior Sean Mixon.

Car manufacturers were saying there were not have enough trained technicians for them to hire, so they began identifying good high school programs that could support a more advanced training program. After building a similar program in North Georgia, Reeves was tapped to begin the work on one here in Bibb County three years ago.

"It's what I came here to do," he says,

pointing out the high concentration of dealers in the area. "We're going to supply Bibb County dealers with entry-level technicians."

One end of Hutchings has become a working shop, complete with diagnostic tools, lifts, and cars in various states of repair. In early classes, students are taught how cars work, the different parts, differences between makes and models of cars, how to use the tools and equipment, and how to repair many problems. Having the shop gives them a great opportunity to actually work on the cars. "The hands-on is so valuable," says Reeves.

"I've been around cars all my life," says Mixon, "and I wanted to take it up a notch."

Students can do work on their own cars or on one of the ones donated by individuals and local dealers; the cars can then be sold to help buy equipment for the shop. "[The dealers] are really helping us develop the product," commends Reeves.

For the past three years, students have had the opportunity for a paid learning experience by mentoring with a master technician during the summer. Once enough dealers have signed onto the program, Reeves would like to have every student work directly with a dealer. "I'd like to have one or two [students] at every dealership in town."

Near the end of the year, students were able to test their skills against other students across the state and nation in the Ford AAA Competition. Each student takes a written test at the school on the basics, and those scoring high enough get to compete at the state level on a 2005 Ford Taurus.

"[The written test] wasn't anything we haven't done before," says sophomore Chris Whidby, who represented Hutchings at the state level along with Mixon.

The hardest part, he says, is diagnosing the car to see what is wrong with it. "If you try to turn on something, and it doesn't work, you need to be able to say why. You've got to go back through all your training to find the answer."

To prepare, Mixon and Whidby spent the weeks prior reading through all the manuals and information on the Taurus to figure exactly how it works. A local dealer even lent them a car which had some special things wrong with it so they could practice the diagnostic part. "[This engine] is exactly what we'll see in competition," says Mixon as he compares readings on his instrument to those in a manual.

"The community is really behind this class," says Reeves. "They're hungry for technicians. This is something they need."



(above) Chris Whidby, Sonny Reeves, and Sean Mixon go over why they think their test car won't start.

(below) Hutchings' students take the written exam for a chance to compete at the state level.

