

50 high-achieving students take Honors Academy entrance exam in Fitchburg

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FITCHBURG -- Fitchburg High School invited the city's best academic performers from the eighth grade to take an exam for its new Honors Academy, and about 50 showed up Saturday.

Competition for a seat in the academy is stiff, said Albert Mercado, the assistant principal for freshman transition and curriculum who will head the academy.

"We only have room for 30," he said.

Maggie Chalifoux, 14, of Fitchburg Arts Academy, walked into the high school confidently with her mother, Donna, who was also excited.

"I think it's a very good opportunity for her to do well in her freshman year," Donna Chalifoux said. "I'm just looking for it to keep her interested in learning strong and excel in the areas she will be studying at Fitchburg high."

Students were given a two-hour Accuexam from the Plato Online Learning Systems, said high school Principal Jeremy Roche.

Each exam was individualized, unlike a standard exam.

A right or wrong answer determined which question followed in the intuitive exam.

The test included comprehensive reading, language arts and math.

It will be used along with references from teachers and academic standing to determine entrance to the academy.

The honors academy will offer classes to promote critical thinking and problem solving, offer diverse perspectives and promote effective communication in writing and verbal skills, Roche said.

The hard work will pay off with increased scholarship

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opportunities and look good on college resumes, he said.

Their high school transcripts will show they studied in the academy, so college admissions officers can know they worked hard for their grades, Roche said.

"You are here because we are trying to put together a select opportunity to bring you to the next level," Roche said.

The school will start the second year of a grant for providing Advanced Placement courses next academic year.

"It's a perfect time to grab a group of freshmen who in years three, four, five (of the grant) will be in perfect place to take advantage of all those AP classes we started putting in place this year and will be adding to in the future," Roche said.

Students who are not in the Honors Academy can also take AP classes.

Erin Chambers, 14, of Memorial Middle School, arrived with her sister Erica, who is a student at Fitchburg State University.

"Feel pretty good," Erin said quietly, before admitting she was a little nervous.

Mary Ptak, whose daughter Megan, 13, of McKay Arts Academy, said she was proud her daughter was invited to take the exam.

The academy sounds like a wonderful opportunity, she said.

"She's always been an excellent student, she's confident, social and outgoing, and her education is important to her," Ptak said.

The academy will be the only one of its kind in the region, but there are others such as the Lowell Lyceum, Boston University Academy and Massachusetts Academy of Math and Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester.

Mercado and school officials studied those schools as well as a doctoral dissertation about honors academies to prepare for their own.

The school wants a way to connect Advanced Placement classes to the ninth grade and even the eighth grades, Roche said.

"At Fitchburg High School we feel we have a lot to offer for any student but we're really excited about what we're putting together for you," Roche told students and their parents.

Invitations were based on information that included seventh-grade academic grades and MCAS results, Mercado said.

"It came out to the top 90 in eighth grade for all three (public) middle schools," he said.

Students must maintain a B average to remain in the academy.

The application deadline is April 12, and an admissions decision will be made

Read more: http://www.sentinelandenterprise.com/local/ci_22860754/50-high-achieving-students-take-honors-academy-entrance?source=email#ixzz2OXs7a1Bd