



PLANO STAR COURIER

Allen man starts new private school

By Troy Brakefield, Staff Writer

For some people, childhood memories can come back later in life to lead to innovation.

An experience from his school days in Homedale, N.J., has led Randy Reiners to found Yorktown Education, a new school he describes as more attuned to children's individual learning paces.

"When I was young, I was part of an experimental learning situation in fifth grade where they let the kids go as fast as they could go," Reiners said. "Pretty much everybody in the class finished everything by Christmastime."

But Reiners remembered the experience wasn't without problems.

"It was great because kids got to learn what they wanted to learn. But when they tried to roll it out on a wider basis, it really didn't fly because they couldn't track kids, they didn't have minimum standards — you have to remember this was back in the '70s," he said.

"It wasn't a problem with the kids; it was a problem with the administration."

As a former executive for the parent company of Auto Zone, Reiners got his first return trip to the classroom by speaking with young children about his job. When he moved to Texas, he chose to live in subdivision in Allen where could attend a Blue-Ribbon school in Plano.

"My kid was in first grade, and he was coming home and I was told, 'He's got learning problems or difficulties or whatever else' — but I'd see him come home and do two hours of math on the computer each night," he said. "I thought, 'It's not the kid.'"

Reiners said when his son was tested in the third grade, he was told his child was intelligent. This made Reiners think schools weren't adjusting to apply new technologies to challenge children's learning abilities.

After selling his IT firm in Dallas, Reiners spent the next year talking to educators, foundations, teachers and officials at the U.S. Department of Education. In the end, he said, he decided to open a school that would deliver a customized, individual, accelerated education for each child.

"Let's assume you're really good at math, but you don't write so well — which is a common profile ... Under this program, you'd actually get a lot more individual teacher attention and personal tutoring to bring your writing skills up," Reiners said, adding students will receive about 20 hours of tutoring in learning sessions with other students limited to eight.

Reiner said his approach is to use the technology to track each child's progress and reduce the busy work of the instructors so they're more available to students.

"Teachers are important. If you look at where a teacher's time is spent, a lot is actually spent on administration or other issues instead of actually interacting with the kids in what the industry likes to call 'teachable moments,'" he said.

Each master's-degreed instructor — who will have a specialty in science, English or another academic focus — will be free to roam and give individual instruction as needed. Since all levels will learn in the same group classroom, students would be able to have long-term relationships with their instructors who could teach them throughout their stay at Yorktown.

To attract the best teachers, Reiners said teachers will have more authority, like partners in a firm, and be better compensated — salaries could be \$70,000 with quarterly bonuses of up to \$10,000 based on student performance and parental satisfaction.

"I believe in attracting the best employees we can have. In the case, we want the best teachers," he said. "We pay them like they're professionals."

Smaller student bodies of about 200 per campus would also allow for a stronger sense of community, and the campuses will partner with local organizations to have extracurricular opportunities in sports, arts and other activities.

Reiners also said the individualized curriculum will allow children to have flexible schedules to work around activities and the family's schedule. The school will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and parents can visit their children anytime or take it easy in the parents' lounge if their student will be there for a short while.

Academic years will be divided into four quarters and tuition will be under \$700 a month with a minimum of two quarters. Students should be able to finish a semester's worth of material each quarter and should have two years worth of college credit by the time they're 18, Reiners said.

Yorktown's initial campus will be in Addison and will be geared toward older students in grades six through 12. Reiners said future schools will address the needs of younger students once Yorktown has established itself and the tracking software has been adapted for lower grade levels.

Since the Midway Road campus will be for older students, they will have a commons area as well as a recreation area complete with video games, a plasma television and a pool table for socializing between schoolwork. Think Silicon Valley technology companies with game rooms for employees.

Yorktown is accredited through the National Accreditation Agency and will use Advanced Placement curriculum from the College Board.

Reiners is joined on the Yorktown Advisory Board by Dr. John Pepper, former superintendent of two of the country's largest school systems; Susan Patrick, president of the North American Council for Online Learning; Bruce Friend, founder of Florida Virtual School; Bruce Wilcox, founder and CEO of Appender Inc.; and Karen Bruett, senior marketing advisor for E-Luminate Group.

Enrollment information sessions will take place at 10 a.m., May 3, 10 and 17 at the Crowne Plaza, 14315 Midway Road in Addison. For information, visit yorktowned.org.

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