

# Charter school honored

## Roger Bacon Academy one of most improved in State

By Sarah Peterson  
Staff Writer

One year-round school in Brunswick County is showing steady and marked improvement.

The Roger Bacon Academy Charter Day School near Leland recently was named one of the state's 25 Most Improved K-8 Schools, as well as an Honor School of Excellence. On the North Carolina ABCs report card, the school's composite score for reading and math was 91.9 percent, up from 86 percent the previous year.

"That 92 percent is noteworthy," said headmaster Mark Cramer. "But what I told the staff is that there's still eight percent who are not proficient. We've got to target that eight percent who did not have success."

Still, school officials don't hide how proud they are of the success of Roger Bacon Academy and that it appears on the list of the 25 Most Improved K-8 Schools, which is a first for a school in the region.

"We're excited," Cramer said. "It demonstrates that the students and teachers are working hard. They've done a great job."

*The school's distinction is based on attaining the state's 25 highest values on the exemplary growth composite.*

Even though the school was only a K-6 school last year, the one middle school grade made it eligible for the honor. This year the school serves through the seventh grade. It plans to add an eighth grade next school year.

The composite is an average of the reading and math scores for tested grades. At the charter school, the reading score was 89 percent and math was 96 percent.

For reading lessons, students are divided into groups based on their reading level. Math is taught in whole groups.

Results for the 2004-05 school year are up considerably—more than 40 percentage points— from 51.9 percent the first year students took the state end-of-grade exams in in 2001-02.

"The next year we brought



Headmaster Cramer

in some materials to assist with our programs," Cramer said.

It made a difference. The composite score shot up to 80.9 percent. The climb continued the following year with 86 percent of students at or above proficiency, leading to 91.9 percent this year. The headmaster credits the school's success to two factors.

"Number one is the environment," he said. "The classroom management we use. It's a positive reward system, and we trust the children."

The second element is the curriculum.

"It's not my idea or (school founder Baker) Mitchell's idea," Cramer said. "The curriculum is a proven curriculum based on research."

Part of teaching the curriculum, Mitchell said, is giving new ideas and concepts to students in small segments to master step-by-step.

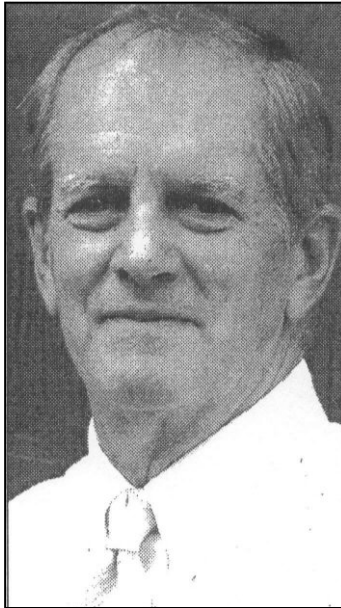
Being on the year-round calendar has helped keep many at-risk students on track, he said. The first week of the three-week intercessions are used for remediation.

"We identify struggling students," Cramer said. "A large amount of parents want their children to come to remediation."

Because the school started out as a K-2 school its first year in 2000, some of the students' older siblings attended the year-round schools in the northern part of the county. For that reason, the charter school's board decided to go with a similar calendar. "We have found that it is a more effective calendar," Cramer said.

Mitchell agreed.

"The research shows students



Founder Mitchell

have better retention," he said. "Teachers like it. Parents like it." While no decision yet to be made, it appears the Brunswick County Board of Education will vote to put the three northern schools back on the traditional calendar because those schools are not improving at the pace set by the state and federal government.

### Doing more with less

The charter school is held to the same accountability standards as regular public schools. The state's 100 charter schools, though, receive \$3,000 less per student. Funding is solely for the operational budget. Money for capital improvements have to be raised by the schools.

This year the school has 618 students from five counties—Brunswick, New Hanover, Columbus, Pender and Bladen. Of that student population, approximately 18 percent are minorities and about 30 percent are on free or reduced-price lunch.

Once the school reaches K-8 status, it will stop adding grades - at least for a while.

"We'll take a pause and complete infrastructure, Cramer said. "We'll build a gym, auditorium, cafeteria and backfill the rest of campus. We want to round it out so children have all the things that most schools have that we

*What the school lacks in resources, it makes up for in successful programs.*

As have Brunswick County Schools this year, Roger Bacon Academy has taken extra measures to improve students' reading skills. The school uses DIBELS reading assessments to

benchmark progress three times during the year,

"We use it school-wide," Cramer said.

*"Everything we do is not by accident - it's by design. If you implement things correctly, you can identify where students are and help them."*

The program was implemented last year and was a good indicator of how well a student did on the end-of-grade (EOG) reading test.

"In third grade, if a child read at 100 words per minute, they did well on the ABCs," the headmaster said.

### Success on state, national level

Wanting to see how its students compare nationally, the school has opted to participate in the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT 9), for the past few years.

"It's been rewarding, too," Mitchell said. "We've been in the top third."

Cramer said the results validate what the school does.

"Being in the top 30 percent nationwide is very significant, if not more significant than EOG's," he said.

Mitchell emphasized that student competition is not just across the state.

"It's nationwide, even international in scope," he said. "It's important to see where you stack up on a broader basis than just statewide."

Charter schools as a whole did well on state and national exams, the school's founder said. Success on test scores has meant more interest in Roger Bacon Academy. Presently, there is a waiting list for almost every grade level.

"The word is getting out," said Cramer, who expects the waiting list to continue to grow.

The school's charter allows for 88 students per grade level with a ten-percent increase in that number each year.

"Our growth is really bounded by the need," Mitchell said.