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Charter school enrollment to double in July

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When Columbus Charter School Principal Steve Smith rings the bell on the new school year July 22, he will have twice as many students as the school increases from six classrooms to 10.

The nearly one-year-old school is adding 120 kindergartners and first-graders to its current enrollment of 130 students.

Smith said that the school's four new classrooms are nearly completed. The school will have two third-grade classes of 25 students each; two second-grade classes of 25 students each; three first-grade classes of 25 students each and three kindergarten classes of 25 students each.

Sixty students are currently enrolled from the Columbus County school district. That number will rise to 96 students.

The 37 Whiteville City school district students enrolled will rise to 79 students. The 33 Bladen County school district students will increase to 75.

There are 48 students on a waiting list.

Smith said additional teachers have been hired. Only one of the current staff is being replaced. She is expecting and plans to stay home with her baby.

Smith said that as word of the school spreads, more teachers have expressed an interest in working there. He heard from 30 teaching applicants this year – not including those he talked with at job fairs.

All of CCS's teachers are state certified. Smith said that most of the teaching assistants have four-year degrees and none have less than a two-year degree.

The school is adding a full-time art teacher this year and plans to add a full-time music teacher at a later date.

A new library and music room will be added during the upcoming year. The library will house the \$11,000 worth of books the students raised money for.

Because the school is year-round, students will have six weeks off this summer.

After each nine weeks of class, students have three weeks off.

The school's start last summer was delayed two weeks when permits for the school's sewer system hit a snag. Concern with the delay caused the original 180 enrollees to dwindle to 130.

Many of those are enrolled for the new year. Some are on a waiting list.

"This has been a very successful year," Smith said. "A lot of folks have heard about all the good things we have going on. This year has far exceeded my expectations."

Smith lauded the school's parents for their support as well as the staff and the students.

Next year, CCS will see its third graders take their first end-of-grade tests.

An expert with Direct Instruction has been hired to train new and existing teachers at CCS and its sister school, Brunswick Day School.

CCS will add 100 students annually from here on out until it reaches eighth grade. Ultimately the school will have been 800 and 900 students.

Roger Bacon Academy runs the Brunswick and Columbus charter schools.

Parents must provide transportation to and from the school as well as pack lunches for the students.

Bladen County parents contracted with the owner of a bus to transport students between the Elizabethtown area and CCS. Smith said that, by July, about 30 students will ride that bus.

Parents have donated trees for campus while students have raised money to expand the playground equipment.