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EDUCATION

GROWING MINDS



Small private school enjoying fast growth

By Linda Florea
Correspondent

LEESBURG — Growing minds has turned into growing enrollments at Lake Preparatory School in Leesburg.

First-year enrollment in 2011 was 10 students. This, their fifth year of operation, they opened school with 75 students. Growing pains motivated a location change last year into an



TOP: From left, Samantha Sapp, Drece Williams and Kate Mahr work on their computers with the rest of the middle schoolers at Lake Prepara-

change last year into an 8,000-foot-facility. "We provide an environment for the kids to be successful — that is what we do," said Principal Katrina Palmer. "Our four-year-olds are reading, they learn

sounds, they learn phonetics. Our third graders are doing long division." Palmer has approximately 19 years of teaching experience in Central Florida, SEE SCHOOL, A8

SCHOOL

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starting at Minneola Elementary, which is now Minneola Charter School. She went to the Montessori teaching methods because her daughter was in a Montessori school.

Palmer decided to start a school when the school where she was teaching changed ownership.

"A group of parents came to me and said, 'If you leave, we'll follow.'" Palmer said.

She started Lake Preparatory with middle school grades six, seven and eight. Adding grades as needed, this year the school enrolled 75 children ages 18 months through eighth grade. Class sizes are 10 or 11 students and there are six teachers at the school — all of them with master's

degrees.

Field trips are part of the education and middle school students have field trip Fridays while lower grades get one field trip per month. Students also compete with other schools in speech, robotics and intramural sports, spelling and essays, among other things.

Extracurricular activities include weekly visits from art and Spanish teachers, physical education, theater, guitar, sewing and cooking.

School tuition costs about \$7,000 per year. Step Up For Students and McKay scholarships are accepted.

Palmer said many parents request high school grade levels.

"My kids have the skills to succeed in any environment," Palmer said. "At this point it's (high school) not somewhere

we are willing to go. I think kids need real world exposure. I can't offer band — I can't offer a football team. I think there are so many things in clubs and the real world that kids are going to have in four year colleges."

Fruitland Park resident Missy Robinson's youngest son, Jake Robinson, 10, will be in fifth grade at Lake Preparatory this year.

"The teachers are what make you want to send your children to Lake Prep," Robinson said. "They make you part of the academic family."

Her other seven children have also been enrolled in private schools and at Lake Preparatory and have done well in high school and college.

"The academic background is what counts," she said. "It gives them the work ethic."