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# THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES




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Valdosta State University's Associate Dean of the College of Education Dr. Brian L. Gerber speaks to the group of VSU staff and faculty, Valdosta City Schools staff and faculty as well as community leaders during a reception for the Valdosta Early College Academy Tuesday evening.



Valdosta Early College Academy math and science teacher Lanita McDuffy, left, describes aspects of her new classroom to Assistant Superintendent of Valdosta City Schools Joann Mabry, assistant principal of J.L. Lomax Julie Hires and Valdosta Middle School sixth grade math teacher Karen Smith during a reception for the Valdosta

Published August 13, 2008 12:03 am - The Valdosta Early College Academy celebrated the beginning of its first school year Tuesday night.

## VECA embarks on first year

**Johnna Pinholster**  
The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta Early College Academy celebrated the beginning of its first school year Tuesday night.

The reception brought together Valdosta State University, the Valdosta City School System and community members to learn more about the new educational program.

The Valdosta Early College Academy, a partnership between VSU and VCS, is a way to help students that may not succeed in a traditional classroom setting to be prepared for college by their 11th grade year.

Dr. Philip Gunter, Dean of the Dewar College of Education said that VECA was the pinnacle of the partnership between VSU and VCS.

"I have a feeling this program will become the best in the state and I hope the best in the nation," Dr. Bill Cason, VCS Superintendent said.

  
  
  
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Early College Academy Tuesday evening.

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The first early college academies were started in 2005, the success of those first six paved the way for six more, including VECA, said Dawn Cooper, the Georgia Board of Regent's Early College Initiative Director.

"This program focuses on students traditionally not represented on higher education campuses," she said.

Dr. Patrick Schloss, VSU President, said the sixth grade VECA students were some of the first people he met on campus and that their excitement for the new learning environment was overwhelming.

Schloss said it was easy for a school and university to develop and graduate the students in the top 10 percent of a class and a child that has been raised by college-educated parents. What is much harder and takes more dedicated work is to take children that do not have a strong family background in higher education and are not making the best grades and shift their whole way of thinking, he said.

"That's what someone should be proud of and I am proud to be a part of it," Schloss said.

Dr. Brian Gerber, Director of Curriculum and Instructional Outreach, has been helping the VECA teachers, principal and students get acclimated to their new environment.

As school began Gerber said they have begun to interview students to get their reactions about VECA and so far they have been positive.

Students have said their parents forced them to come but after experiencing the school they are happy to be here, others have said that they would have already faced disciplinary action had they been at Valdosta or J.L. Newbern Middle School, he said.

The academy currently has 36 sixth grade students and at the beginning of each school year two more classes of sixth graders will be added to the program.

By the beginning of their 11th grade year students will have the option of dual enrolling at VSU and could earn up to 60 hours of college credit courses before graduating high school, Gerber said.

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