

Press Release

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X Marks the Spot for Discovery

Moultrie, Georgia – March 20, 2017 - Williams Middle School recently announced the start of a new program geared toward providing highly motivated students with the research skills needed for success in upper-level high school and college courses.

Allen Edwards, Director of 6-12 Gifted Education for Colquitt County Schools, said the program, currently called PackerX, is slated to begin in the 2017-2018 school year and will give sixth grade students the opportunity to conduct research in their areas of interest. “The primary goal is to create an opportunity for students to learn, experiment, write, and debate about topics that are important to them, our community, and our world,” he said.

Dr. Jamie Horne, principal of Williams Middle School, said PackerX is as much about future success as middle school achievement. “We want to continue to challenge our students and stretch their academic advancement by improving their research skills and helping to prepare them for the challenges of a growing technical society,” said Horne.

The program’s name alludes to the process of discovery. “In math, X is a variable that represents an unknown,” said Edwards, who first began using the name PackerX as a placeholder in presentations around the county. “We may let the students name the program next year, but the name PackerX is starting to grow on me.”

The discovery process begins with an interdisciplinary approach to core subjects. “The middle school team concept is a perfect setting to blend academic areas together,” said Edwards, who anticipates teachers from math, science, language arts, and social studies collaborating to create problem-based activities for students, which require the students to research in order to generate solutions to a problem facing the school or local community.

“An example is recycling and answering the question of why Colquitt County doesn’t have a recycling program,” said Edwards. “Students can research the value of recycling, calculate the mass tonnage of trash that could be saved by a recycling program, as well as the cost of starting a program here in Moultrie, and then write a presentation for the Colquitt County Commissioners or Moultrie City Council.”

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PACKERX

Students in the program will also attend a one-hour research class each day and complete four independent projects over the course of the school year, which Edwards said would allow students to participate in a variety of competitions. “There is an almost endless list of quality events, from the regional science fair and National History Day to the Imagination Foundation’s Global Cardboard Challenge, and the Georgia Envirothon,” said Edwards. “I hope this program will provide students with opportunities they might not otherwise have and allow our teachers the chance to guide students through activities that might not ordinarily fit in the regular curriculum.”

PackerX will require students to complete 20 hours of community service each year and participate in at least one extracurricular activity, both of which, Edwards said, are important components of holistic education. “Students need the chance to grow in ways other than academically,” said Edwards. “Plus, kids need time to have fun.”

Participation in the program will be limited to 50 students. Edwards recently met with fifth grade students across the county to outline the program and give each student an application. Qualified applicants will participate in a group interview and writing assignment before a selection committee performs a blind review of each student’s interview, writing assignment, grades, test scores, and teacher recommendations.

The program is intended for any highly motivated student who enjoys school and demonstrates the responsibility necessary to complete independent projects, not just gifted students. “This isn’t a program for kids who just want to do the bare minimum to get by,” said Edwards. “We want students who exhibit strong communication skills, possess creativity and curiosity, and have the resilience to get back up when they try something new and fail.”

Edwards also stressed the importance of diversity. “PackerX should reflect the demographics of our school system in every way possible,” said Edwards, who hopes to have participation from all of the system’s elementary schools.

PackerX will not be separate from the rest of the school. Instead, the program will be housed on Team 6A and follow the same basic schedule as every other student on that team. Edwards also noted PackerX should not be considered the highest level of study at Williams, which is the accelerated pathway. “This is a companion program that offers a different experience for highly-motivated students who are interested in research, problem-solving, and creative activities,” said Edwards. “This is not for every gifted sixth grade student at Williams, nor is it confined only to gifted students.”

If you are interested in learning more about PackerX, please contact Allen Edwards at allen.edwards@colquitt.k12.ga.us or by phone at (229) 890-6200 ext. 10074.

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