

Quaker school comes to area

Friends School of Charlotte will open this fall for kindergarten through third grade

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Friends School of Charlotte, a new independent Quaker day school, will be just the fourth of its kind in North Carolina when its doors open for classes in August.

The school will serve kindergarten through third grade, with a plan to eventually go through eighth grade, said **David Kern**, head of the school.

Kern comes to the new Charlotte school from Germantown Friends School in Pennsylvania, where he organized its middle school and was middle school principal for 13 years.

"I've really grown to respect Quaker education quite deeply," said Kern, who is not a Quaker himself. But that isn't unusual.

In most Quaker day schools, Kern said only about 10 percent of students and faculty are actually Quaker. He expects his Charlotte school to eventually look quite similar.

Kern said the system of education has been one of the Quakers' greatest gifts because it is not exclusive to their religion.

Friends School of Charlotte teacher **Michelle Anderson**, a product of Quaker education herself, said the Quaker model of education is both morally and cognitively based.

"Quakers have a way of really empowering the individual, so students at Quaker schools are encouraged to think for themselves," Anderson said.

She said students are given a voice and their thoughts and ideas are given consideration in the classroom. For example, students often weigh in on the community service activities the classes are involved in.

Multiple grade levels will be housed in one classroom, which gives a nurturing, family feel, Kern said. This makes younger children step up to the challenge and older children become mentors. Children also get to stay with a teacher for longer than one year.

The Friends School Charlotte location is currently being renovated and will include three classrooms and a gathering space. Each classroom can house up to 15 students, but Kern expects they will only utilize one class-



The Friends School of Charlotte will hold its first classes in August and will follow the Quaker model of education.

room their first year.

There is an option to expand to a fourth classroom at their current location, then Kern hopes the school will be able to buy their own land and build a green campus.

Though Quaker schools hope to build children spiritually, and children are involved in school-wide "meetings," the Quaker form of services, being a Quaker is not necessary.

Quaker meetings are a form of silent worship where people "go inside (themselves) and find your relationship with God on whatever terms that is," Kern said.

Then, as it feels relevant, meeting members stand up and share their thoughts.

"Anyone of faith, or no faith, can find meaning in that style of worship," Kern said.

"It's unbelievable what goes on in those gatherings."

For the children, the meetings are of the same style. Meetings are shorter and the students share what is important to them. Parents and others can also attend, which makes for an interesting dynamic of ideas.

Kern said that for the students, meeting becomes a safe place and a break from the norm.

Though Friends School of Charlotte grew out of the Charlotte meeting, there is also a Quaker base in Lake Norman.

The Davidson Friends Meeting is made up of about 20 families, meeting member **Jan Blodgett** said.

For more information on the Friends School of Charlotte, visit www.friendsschoolofcharlotte.org or call (704) 877-8043.