

EDUCATION

Pupils wanted

New local charter school serves kindergarten through fourth grade

By ANNETTE BAIRD
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

THE principal of a new northwest charter elementary school wants to get the word out that even though school has started they are still accepting pupils.

Principal Jeannette Byrd continues to welcome new children to Southwest Schools Mangum Elementary, 4515 Mangum Road, the latest addition to Southwest Schools' group of charter schools and services.

The 4,000-student Southwest Schools also includes a combined middle and high school at 6400 Southwest Fwy., a virtual school, a preschool program and serves students in residential treatment facilities.



BYRD

Situated in a former Randalls supermarket, which has been transformed to accommodate the charter school and AVANCE, a United Way and Head Start program, the Mangum campus offers kindergarten through fourth grade. A fifth grade is planned for next year.

Byrd said what differentiates them from other schools like nearby Katherine Smith Elementary in Houston Independent School District is their overall smaller size, smaller classes and a lack of temporary buildings.

"(The smaller size) gives us an opportunity to get to know our kids and to establish relationships with each student and their parents," Byrd said.

Currently at 81 pupils and counting, the school, which is free, has a capacity for 400, while each class will be maxed out at 20 pupils.

When Linda Reed first heard about the new school she needed no convincing it would be a good fit for her 9 year-old grandson, LaTerrius Johnson, who is in second grade, struggled at Smith Elementary and Reed was looking for other options.

"We thought he would be able to get the extra help he needs at the new school," Reed said. "They work in small groups and on an individual basis. He loves it already, and he even has a different outlook on homework."



ARTS AND CRAFTS: Andrea White helps her first- and second-grade pupils set up for an activity during class recently. The new charter school has less than 100 pupils, but can teach up to an enrollment of 400.



R. CLAYTON MCKEE PHOTOS: FOR THE CHRONICLE

GROUP TIME: Ted Schwank teaches health and reading to his third- and fourth-grade class at the newly opened Mangum Elementary School, part of the Southwest Charter Schools group.

Mangum is one of two elementary schools under the umbrella of Southwest Schools. Stated on its website, the school's goal, "is to provide an exemplary education to students and parents through a school of choice." Southwest Schools Bissonnet Elementary is located at 8440 Bissonnet.

However, Southwest Schools Superintendent Janelle James said the Mangum campus is unique because of the partnership with AVANCE.

"This will ensure a seamless transition from

preschool through fifth grade," James said.

Mangum elementary occupies more than half of the 43,000-square-foot facility and features 18 classrooms equipped with SMART Boards, a computer lab and multi-purpose room. Outside there is playground and small green space.

The school offers English-speaking and bilingual classes for each grade, meeting the needs of the majority Hispanic population.

Byrd said their focus is on strengthening academics

by providing a differentiated curriculum delivered by certified teachers and meeting the physical and emotional needs of all children every day.

Confident of the school's success, Byrd foresees the only challenge they will have is accommodating all the children who want to come.

"Right now we don't have that problem," she said.

"But I think we're eventually going to have a waiting list."