

Gifted classes boosted

Durham schools set up new division

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DURHAM - About one in seven Durham Public Schools students are identified as academically and intellectually gifted.

School administrators are hoping that number will increase with the help of a new school system department, the Office of Advanced Academics, announced Monday.

The new division will work to identify gifted students earlier in their careers and expand academic opportunities for them, overseeing honors and advanced placement courses and development of magnet programs, according to a news release.

The number of Durham students identified as academically gifted has fluctuated, but total enrollment in advanced courses has increased gradually over the past two years, according to statistics presented to the Durham school board in August.

In the 2005-06 school year, the district had more than 4,600 gifted students in the system, or about 15 percent.

This school year, those students filled nearly 16,000 slots in honors courses, a 20 percent increase over two years ago. The school system so far this year also has more than 5,000 enrollments in advanced placement classes, more than double the enrollments two years ago, the statistics show.

One of the newest initiatives in increasing honors enrollment is creating schools focused on such programs, including W.G. Pearson Elementary, a magnet school that opened this year.

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