

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Alamo Colleges Early College High School students kick off school year in style

Before heading to the Newcombe Ranch with her future high school classmates, Sharon Wasson never trusted anyone enough to be walking a tightrope more than 30 feet in the air with them.

That all changed during two days of team building activities for the nearly 100 incoming freshmen that will make up the first class at Comal ISD's

new Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High School (ACMECHS).

Students went through high and low rope and climbing courses, a trail hike through 50 acres of wooded area where team members had to navigate using a compass, and a roped off maze in which blindfolded students had to problem-solve to negotiate their way to freedom.

Each day was capped off by a dip in the facility's large swimming pool.

Wasson completed the "body bridge," two-person challenge in which she and teammate Cassandra Garcia leaned on each other for support as they made their way across tightropes.

Trained Newcombe Ranch staff closely supervised each drill, and students had safety harnesses on at all times.



“I’ve never done anything like this,” Wasson said. “It definitely makes you trust who you’re up there with.”

ACMECHS principal Dr. Dolly Adams climbed 50 feet to jump off the “zip line,” which propelled her back down to earth attached to the freely moving incline cable pulley, much to the delight of her students.

Adams said the team building exercises were a huge hit.

“The students went through both physical and mental team building,” Adams said. “This is an extremely important component of our school model, because we are a small learning community.”

Adams said she saw strangers become classmates right before her eyes.

“I was watching one exercise where a team of 12 students hardly said a word during their first task because they didn’t know each other,” Adams said. “By the second challenge, they all started talking and problem-solving together. It was wonderful because collaborative learning and problem-solving is exactly what we want to see from them in the classroom.”

Incoming student Allie Valdez agreed the team building events were invaluable.

“Now the first day of school won’t be so scary,” Valdez said. “Even though most of us have just met, we feel like we’ve known each other a long time after this experience.”

Ashley Talerico is certainly looking forward to attending the school, which will be comprised of students who attended all five Comal ISD middle schools.

“I consider this a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Talerico said. “I think it’s going to turn into a real family atmosphere. I can tell by the way everybody has been rooting for each other to do well during team building.”

ACMECHS is partnered with St. Philip’s College in San Antonio. Students will have a chance to earn an associate’s degree or up to 60 college credit hours from St. Philip’s in addition to their high school diploma.

ACMECHS students traveled to St. Philip’s College on Aug. 11 to hear president Dr. Adena Williams Loston speak about the importance of the educational journey they are about to begin.

Students then had the rare luxury of receiving their college identification cards before their high school IDs.

“Our students will actually be registered college students the first time they step on our campus,” Adams said. “We are considered a satellite campus of St. Philip’s College.”

Adams said the curriculum at ACMECHS, which is geared toward enrolling students who would not normally have the chance to go to college, will be made up of Pre-AP, AP and dual-credit courses. Students earn both high school and college credit in the dual-credit courses.

“We have the largest group of at-risk students in the district,” Adams said. “But we have a different kind of strategy from the traditional classroom, including smaller classroom settings and a lot of social and emotional support.”

Student Alek Schuler said he appreciates the extra attention he’ll receive at the new school.

“I got in trouble a little bit in middle school trying to be the class clown,” Schuler said. “This high school will give me more of an opportunity to be successful in life.”

Social studies instructor Keith Cunningham is looking forward to the new teaching experience.

“Just being in such a unique academic environment will be great,” Cunningham said. “These students know they are here for academics. We will embrace the concept that learning is a good thing.”

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IN PHOTOS: Sharon Wasson (left) and Cassandra Garcia lean on each other for support standing on tightropes more than 30 feet in the air during an Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High School team building drill at Newcombe Ranch.

His classmates were cheering Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High School student Dustin Wright on before he took a leap onto a horizontal trapeze bar at Newcombe Ranch during team building activities.

Students Cory Gonzales (left) and Taylor Couch get ready to embark on a trail hike through 50 acres of wooded area where team members had to navigate using a compass at Newcombe Ranch.

Kayla Burgmann exhales after riding the zip line at Newcombe Ranch more than 50 feet back down to the ground. Burgmann and her Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High School classmates will have a chance to earn up to 60 college credits or an associate’s degree from St. Philip’s College upon graduation from high school.

Alamo Colleges-Memorial Early College High School students (from left) Ashley Vega, Michael Culbertson, Elissa Weir, Joseph Bennett, Lindsey Longoria, Anthony Saucedo, Kara Brickei, Dylan Hayslett, and Petro DeSantiago try to balance themselves on a ski on the "lava lake" at Newcombe Ranch.

