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## News - Education

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# Program aims to prepare Bibb students for higher education

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Before Cedric Waters attended the Macon Bibb Early College School Summer Academy, he was nervous. He thought it would be just like regular school.



JASON VORHEES/THE TELEGRAPH - Trayesha Washington recites the poem 'Myself' by Edgar A. Guest on Friday during the Macon Bibb Early College School Summer Academy at Macon State College.

Waters completed the two-week academy Friday with 57 of his fellow seventh-graders. They are part of the inaugural program, which is a joint venture between the Bibb County public schools and Macon State College.

The goal of the program is to prepare participants for college, said Sonya Thomas, dean of the Macon Bibb Early College program.

The academy concluded Friday at Macon State College with a ceremony attended by parents and academy teachers, many of whom are Macon State professors.

Lisa Furgerson said she knew she was going to enter her son in the program when she heard about it. She said it's offering him a head start on college.

Jackie Wade, another parent, agrees. "I think it's going to be a railroad to college," she said after

Friday's program.

Cedric Waters said he is participating in the program because he "thought it was a good opportunity to be



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somebody better in life and to have a good career."

If the program works for Cedric, he will be the second person in his family to graduate from college.

He wants to be a doctor.

Students enter the program the summer before entering the seventh grade. They're in the program until they graduate high school. With each year of the program, a new class will be added.

The students are recruited for the program by middle school teachers, guidance counselors and graduation coaches if they're considered "high-potential, under-performing students traditionally under-represented in higher education," according to a Macon State news release.

Diana Rodgers, Bibb's deputy superintendent of teaching and learning, said the program will have its own teachers. The students will be affiliated with their neighborhood schools but will attend classes at Hutchings Career Center, she added. During their junior and senior years, they will attend class at Macon State.

Students will be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities and sports at their neighborhood school and transportation will be provided for them, Rodgers said.

Some students might have two years of college credit by the time they finish high school, but everyone will have completed at least some college credit, Rodgers said.

Some of the program, like the summer academy, is funded by a \$350,000 grant, given out over three years, from the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia.

Students in the program already have Macon State IDs, said Rodgers. Macon State professors will be working to supplement the program's students' educations. Kim Pickens, assistant professor of biology at Macon State, said, "I think it is a great opportunity to involve faculty with the school." They can do things like take the students on field trips, she said.

The students went to the Okefenokee Swamp as part of the summer academy. Many students said it was their favorite part of the academy. Kianna Thompson, 11, said she liked it because she got to see animals.

The summer academy not only gave the students an opportunity to prepare for the start of school, it also gave them an opportunity to get to know each other. Students came from public middle schools throughout Bibb County, but after spending two weeks at the academy, they left as friends, said Loleta Sartin, an assistant professor of education at Macon State.

In the closing ceremony Friday, students demonstrated what they learned. They presented "Podcasts" on topics like pollution and the dangers of smoking. Students also participated in their own version of "Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?" during which they showed off the knowledge they learned by eagerly answering questions like "What is a dichotomous key?"

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