

Point Option: Where education meets life

By Terilyn J. Goins, Ph.D.

There is much to be said about an educational endeavor that takes into account the unique qualities of the individual mind, realizing that a cookie-cutter education simply isn't the answer for quality learning. Unfortunately, it's impossible to tailor-make the learning experience to match each individual need. Every now and then, however, a great idea is born out of a desire to make a difference. Point Option School, located on Diligence Drive in Newport News, is the fruit of one of those ideas to create positive change.

Because of the belief that, in education, one size doesn't fit all, Mary Passage applied for a grant program in 1973 to create an educational experience that would meet the needs of high school students who were getting lost in the system. The educational program was so successful that the city of Newport News decided it was worth continued funding even after the grant expired.

Point Option School offers young people, who don't fit into the comprehensive high school environment, an opportunity to experience success through individualized instruction, project-based learning, small class environments and flexible scheduling. Over the course of the academic year, the school serves between 120 and 130 students, some of whom graduate

► TO THE POINT

Point Option School

Address: 813 Diligence Dr., Ste. 100, Newport News, VA 23601

Phone: 757-591-7408 ext. 38500

Contact: Mike Bonfiglio, principal

Website: www.pointoption.nn.k12.va.us

TPTI, continued from previous page

with their families. MacMasters and his wife of 25 years, Debbie, have a 21-year-old son and two daughters, ages 18 and 15. Verhoef has been married to his wife, Joan, for almost 32 years and is father of two sons, 29 and 23, a daughter and a three-year-old grandson. In 10 years, these men see themselves on a boat, in the middle of the James River with some good drinks in their cooler, fishing for cobia. ◀

May 2014



Mike Bonfiglio, better known as "Mr. B"

DENISE HILTON

in 3.5 years, as opposed to the traditional four-year cycle.

Students may enter school in the second semester of their freshman year, after a stringent interview process to determine whether they are a fit for the Point Option program. Entry into Point Option is entirely voluntary; if the student doesn't want to be there, he or she will not be accepted into the program regardless of whether a parent, counselor or other guardian wants the student to attend. This admission policy contributes to student success as individuals recognize the power to succeed or fail rests on their shoulders.

At Point Option, students do a lot of hands-on learning and engage a great deal with technology. The school has 85 computers and 20 iPads available for student use, and there are some courses, such as government and English 12, that are only taught via distance learning.

Students get to learn about multiple subjects in very unique ways. For instance, for one of their English courses, they take field trips to places such as the Great Dismal Swamp, a trip they prepare for six weeks in advance. Students are required to read, write and journal about their experience before, during and after the field trip. In the process, they're also learning about history, outdoor education and recreation, and lessons about life in general.

According to Mike Bonfiglio, princi-

pal, the success of Point Option resides in the relationships developed between teachers and students. "Relationships come first. There's no blame game here—when you get here, you're a human being first and a human doing second. We care about who you are first, not what you do or how you perform. We empower kids to take control of their lives."

Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not preparation for life but life itself.
—John Dewey

Bonfiglio's commitment to Point Option and to student success comes through loud and clear as evidenced in one testimonial from a student who gave him a clock with an engraving that read, "Mr. B.—Best Principal. Thanks for saving my life."

Point Option School gives a new meaning to the concept of education as "life itself." As "Mr. B" puts it, "Mutual respect is of utmost importance. There isn't anything we can't solve if we sit down and talk about it." ◀

IVANKA TRUMP

HAUSER'S
JEWELERS
1898

City Center in Newport News ~ 757-595-6006
www.hausersjewelers.com