

EIS unveils partnership with Bellarmine University

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By Brad Bowman, Henry County Local

Wednesday, May 2, 2012 at 3:26 am (*Updated: May 2, 9:58 am*)

Tuesday morning, Eminence Independent Schools revealed a project they said was two years in the making.

Eminence High School juniors and seniors will soon have the opportunity to take college courses at Bellarmine University for free.

Juniors and seniors with qualifying ACT scores in math, English, reading and science can earn a dual high school and college credit while attending classes at Bellarmine's campus.

Tuesday, EIS Superintendent Buddy Berry revealed a brainstorming project he and Instructional Supervisor of Eminence Independent Schools Thom Coffee started on a napkin.

"We had the attitude of 'Why can't we do this?'" Coffee said. "It could take years to make something like this happen, but we came to them (Bellarmine) and pitched the idea to the provost."

EIS juniors will be able to take up to 13 credit hours and 16 hours their senior year — accumulating 29 hours of college credit in two years. The district will have a course schedule similar to most universities. Students will attend core classes at school on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Students will attend classes on the university's campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Students also will be assigned to a teacher to monitor their progress, set learning goals and schedule instruction if needed. Students will have the opportunity to participate in the college's clubs and student organizations during a "free period" Bellarmine has on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Bellarmine will also offer its Pioneer Program specifically designed for first generation college students, which is approximately 90 percent of EIS students.

"We are a small school and some would think what kind of audacity do we (EIS) have approaching Bellarmine with this idea," Berry said. "But we saw Bellarmine as similar in size to Eminence. Our boat is so small we can turn it fast."

Berry said the program will provide an opportunity for teachers to spend more time with students in the class room that don't participate on Tuesdays and Thursday when the class size decreases.

"If a student needs help in a certain subject they will be able to get more one-on-one time with the teacher. Ultimately it's a win-win for the whole school," Berry said.

Berry tried to anticipate parents' concerns when designing the program: The school will not lose any funding as it can have off-campus learning for students, the school will pack lunches at the school or work out an arrangement with Bellarmine for those that receive a free or reduced lunch, students will not be allowed to drive themselves to the program and students will not lose class time in transit to the college campus.

"We will put a Macbook Pro in the hands of every student on the bus," Berry said. "We have equipped the bus with a Wi-Fi hotspot and they will be able to work on homework assignments."

Bellarmino is giving EIS student classes at \$100 per hour. Bellarmine classes usually cost \$755 per hour. Full-time tuition for undergraduates cost \$15,995 per semester. Berry said he expects 30 students to participate the first year and tuition costs would be paid by the district out of its general fund. If all 30 students complete 29 hours of college credit work it would cost the district \$87,000 over a two year period plus an annual cost of \$56,000 for 150 MacBook Pros.

Bellarmino University's president, Dr. Joseph McGowan is enthusiastic about the partnership.

"We can't wait to welcome these talented students to our campus! And we appreciate very much the collaborative work of Superintendent Buddy Berry and all the great educators in the Eminence Independent School District."

McGowan said the university is excited for the opportunity and to provide groundbreaking programs for talented high school students.

"Through this early exposure to college life, these students will participate in extraordinary classroom experiences, college orientation and campus culture," McGowan said.

Bellarmino and the staff are still working out which core classes will be available to students, but for Coffee the opportunity coincides with EIS philosophy and vision.

"School needs to look different. It needs to be fun," Coffee said. "School needs to challenge students and engage them."

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Eminence Independent Schools Superintendent Buddy Berry, left, listens while Dr. John Nash, discusses how Eminence will be using technology to further education.



Dr. Terry Holliday, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education, discusses the Eminence-Bellarmine partnership.



EIS stacked Macbook Pros in the shape of an E for the ceremony.



Bellarmino University President Dr. Joseph McGowan discusses the partnership during Tuesday morning's press conference.



A member of the audience films the press conference at Eminence Independent Schools on Tuesday.