

Researchers to evaluate camp school

UALR receives grant for Pfeiffer study

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Pfeiffer Camp, the alternative classroom program nestled among pine trees and quiet grounds in western Pulaski County, will soon have a visitor.

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock plans to evaluate and study Pfeiffer Camp.

Could Pfeiffer Camp be adopted by other counties or geographic areas in Arkansas? Would the program work in other states? Is Pfeiffer Camp the ideal model for a new magnet school concept?

These are some of the questions UALR's research might answer.

"Something is happening there that could be at the forefront of national education trends," said Karen Ballard, a professor in the UALR department of social work and director of the Mid-South Center on Alcohol and Other Drug Problems.

Ballard received a two-year grant for UALR from the U.S. Department of Education — \$203,638 the first year and at least that same amount the second year — to study the camp.

Researchers will study the Pfeiffer Camp program and collect information the first year. In the second year, they might suggest some minor modifications for Pfeiffer Camp officials to try out.

Since 1988, more than 300 students in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades from the three Pulaski County public school districts have been served in Pfeiffer Camp's program.

Students come in as members of a 32-member group, and each group stays for six weeks.

They are children who, for various reasons, are not doing as well as they should have been doing in their traditional schools. In a different setting, most tend to excel. Ballard wants to find out why.

The children live at Pfeiffer Camp, sleeping on cots in cabins.

They attend classes for four weeks at Pfeiffer Camp, then return to their traditional schools while continuing to bunk at the camp for two more weeks.

At Pfeiffer Camp, their curriculum includes reading, English and mathematics — as well as tent building and outdoor living skills.

The goal is to improve student behavior in the classroom, improve academic performance, develop better community and home relationships, and build self-esteem and motivation.

Ballard and her staff will, among other things:

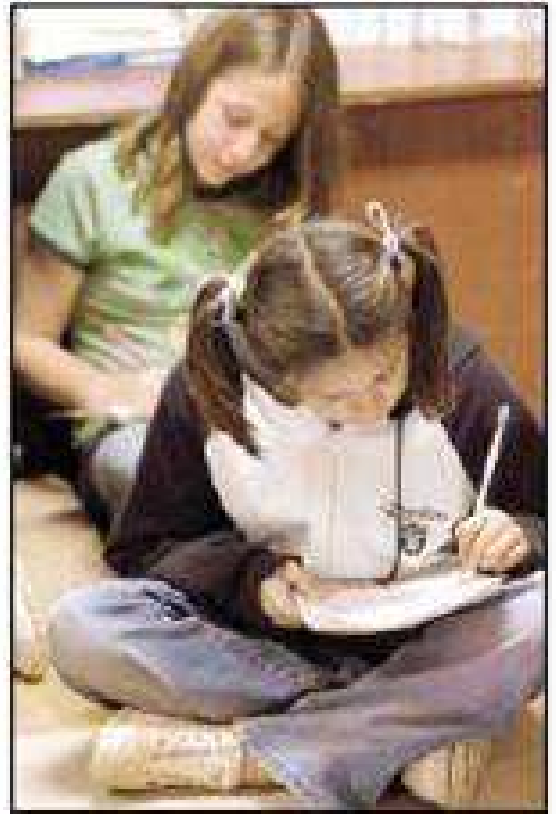
- Study students' academic achievement, behavior, attendance and attitudes, comparing Pfeiffer Camp students to similar students who fit the same profile but who are in traditional schools.

- Observe teachers' attitudes toward students.

- Determine progress students make and the techniques that are used to produce these outcomes. One central question is whether students learn better by doing and seeing how subjects apply to real-life situations rather than by attending traditional classrooms where the teacher stands in front of the room and lectures.

Ballard is now working on hiring graduate assistants to help with the work and is ironing out agreements with the three school districts.

"I think Pfeiffer Camp may open the door for non-traditional education options for kids," Ballard said.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette photo by KAREN E. SEGRAVE
Math teacher Tammy Roberson helps student Dustin Noblett with classwork at the Joseph Pfeiffer Kwanis Camp while Kristen Johnson (top photo) ponders a multiplication problem. (Below) Brianna Massey (front) and Lauren Guajardo study quietly.

