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SBHS gets ready for New Tech

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Scott's Branch High School will become a New Tech Network Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) School starting with the freshman class in the 2013-2014 school year, which begins Aug. 19.

Eleven teachers, administrators and district technology staff members attended the New Tech Network training conference in late June at the Amway Conference Center in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Scott's Branch Middle-High School Principal Dr. Gwendolyn Harris described the training as intense but with plenty of excitement and eagerness throughout the weeklong conference.

"It was the anticipation that something great was about to take place at Scott's Branch High School," Harris said. "We spent the week mapping the year for our ninth-grade students."

Harris said that the term "New Tech" is more than just upgrading technology and embracing technical careers. The goal, she said, is to transform the **school** into an innovative learning environment and to ensure that students have the skills, traits and knowledge needed to succeed in postsecondary education, career and civic life. The transformation will start with the incoming freshman class and add one grade each year until all four high school grades are operating under the New Tech system.

Lottie Fleming and Alfreda Cooper, two of several teachers who attended the training, will have an integrated classroom of Algebra I students in the 2013-2014 school year. A wall separating two classrooms in the school has been torn down to create room for the first New Tech classroom, which will combine the Algebra I classes with Fleming and Cooper serving as the two facilitators. Other teachers will continue teaching stand-alone classrooms, incorporating the New Tech method.

"The training held in Grand Rapids was intense and most informative in preparation for the implementation of our New Tech Curriculum which is project-based learning," Fleming said.

Fleming said that the teachers were given the opportunity to participate in several sessions, from planning to effectively assessing students using a system called ECHO. ECHO is a learning management system that supports project-based learning, while facilitating communication and collaboration.

"I was most impressed with the interweaving of standards as they are applied to real-life situations," Fleming said. "Each session began with a problem that we had to analyze, allowing us to play the part of both the teacher and the student. One of the most powerful things I did was to be engaged in a critical friends activity. The activity allows both students and teachers to assess each other's work critically, but sensitively, using terms such as 'I like' and 'I wonder,' rather than 'I like this' and 'I don't like that.'"

Fleming said that from the experience she received a much clearer understanding of New Tech and a greater degree of confidence in her ability to hit the ground running with New Tech in August.

"I also enjoyed the opportunity to network with other educators which will be a valuable resource," she said.

Alfreda Cooper said that the New Tech Network training gave her a "growth mindset" that will help her

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refine strategies to meet the needs of their students more effectively.

“I am excited about the fact that it will change the culture of our school,” said Cooper. “All students will be provided the knowledge, skills and attributes that they need to be college and career-ready.”

Administrators also went through sessions that helped prepare them for the New Tech classrooms.

Harris and Dean of Students Sheila Barringer attended sessions that focused on the first-year implementation of New Tech.

“We received practical strategies on how to foster a culture of high standards, trust, respect and responsibility,” Harris said.

Harris said that emphasis was placed on the use of ECHO.

“We learned how the ECHO system allows teachers, students and parents at all New Tech high schools to access course resources, project plans, assignments and grades, to name a few,” Harris said. “In leadership sessions, we received ongoing opportunities to see and discuss the importance of a culture that empowers every New Tech class where students and teachers own the learning.”

Harris said that ECHO was emphasized throughout the training, along with its vital connection to project-based learning as the core instruction.

“This enhances student collaboration, critical thinking and effective communication,” Harris said. “The week was intense, but I believe that we are ready for the New Tech challenge.”

Scott’s Branch High School will host a New Tech Festival from 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 10 at the school, located at 9253 Alex Harvin Hwy. in Summerton. There will be vendors, games, activities and free food. The community is encouraged to attend.



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