## Verde Independent

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## 8th graders gear up for fall at Mingus

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COTTONWOOD -- Eighth graders are "Movin' on to Mauraders" after this spring, and school officials are working to make sure they're ready to be freshmen.

Mingus's eighth grade parent night Monday represents one of several ways the high school is working with the Cottonwood-Oak Creek district to ease eighth graders into their next level of education.

Gear Up coordinator Gretchen Wesbrock said the "Movin' on to Mauraders" campaign was started during this shortening window of time between spring and fall to bring high schoolers to the three COCSD feeder schools and answer any questions they might have.



"They're excited, they're nervous, they have questions," Wesbrock said.

MUHS intervention specialist Regina Gee selected the students who sat on the panel, and digital media teacher Jeff Wood's students made introduction videos that cover concerns ranging from trash can dunking to cute boys.

The first panel was held at Mountain View Preparatory a little more than a week ago, and Cottonwood Middle School held theirs Friday morning. Oak-Creek School is next, though the amount of students attending will be lower.

She played a video for them, which showed the classic myth where a freshman gets thrown in a trashcan by some burly upperclassmen. The "reality," shown next, has the girl jumping in the trashcan herself when one of the boys greets her.

"I've never seen these students so quiet, so interested," Wesbrock said.

Some students are being put into Link Crew, a program that selects an upperclassmen to mentor between eight and 10 students during their first year of high school.

Mingus Union High School guidance counselor Cindy Forsythe is going with Wesbrock to a Link Crew training, where they will learn how to run the program for Mingus and COCSD. As facilitators, the two will be able to pass down the training at no cost.

Gear Up is funding one teacher to attend training at \$2,500, and an Arizona College Access

Network grand is covering the other half of the costs.

"It's going to be a great leadership opportunity for those juniors and seniors," she said. "For our incoming freshmen, it's going to be wonderful because I've been talking to some of my students who are particularly nervous, just reassuring them that they're going to have someone to set some of their minds at ease."

Juniors and seniors will most likely be chosen before Spring Break, with a possible meet and greet near the end of this academic year. In the fall, mentors will help their freshmen with academics and have periodic social check-ins that can be something as small as a Facebook message.

"The students at schools that have used it have higher grades, less truancy, and it's reduced bullying in schools," Wesbrock said. "Having these juniors and seniors who are looking after these freshmen, it just sets this tone."

Parents can learn more about Common Core and Advanced Placement classes at Mingus during a Feb. 10 event in conjunction with Expect More Arizona. Career and Technical Education day is Feb. 14, where all the COCSD eighth graders get to tour the CTE programs at Mingus.

Wesbrock said even at 12 and 13, students are interested in engineering programs. CMS has a robotics club, and MVP has a STEM club.

"I have so many kids who want to go into engineering, or they don't know it's engineering," she said.

Eighth graders will also be exposed to the Certified Nursing Assistant program at Mingus offered in collaboration with Verde Valley Medical Center.

"There are so many students interested in the medical field, which makes sense, since there are high-paying jobs there."

Students will be registering for Mingus after the CTE day.

Wesbrock said she tries to schedule as many events at Mingus as possible so that students are familiar with the campus. College campus visits allow students to envision themselves in that environment, the reason behind taking the Gear Up cohort to visit Northern Arizona University.

"The more exposure they have to different things, the more they're going to open their minds," Wesbrock said. "The kids all of a sudden go, I actually think I can do this."

Mingus Parent Night starts at 6:30 p.m. and gives families the chance to be welcomed by administrators as well as explore booths set up by athletic groups and clubs.

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