



Anderson school to be idea incubator

BY ANNA B. MITCHELL
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Tucked into the middle of the Nevitt Forest neighborhood in southeastern Anderson is an elementary school with big plans for the next three years.

Nevitt Forest Elementary School has been singled out as an incubator for ideas – whether it be doing away with grade levels or starting classes at noon – that local and state officials say will be key to developing schools for the 21st century.

The school is spending the next year using a \$25,000 grant through the South Carolina National Commission on Teaching and America's Future Coalition to develop plans, with help from people who live and work nearby. Nevitt Forest will then be able to use \$4 million in Anderson School District 5 money already budgeted for renovations at the school to help turn those ideas into physical reality.

Nevitt Forest beat out hundreds of other schools for the honor, which it also shares with Forts Pond Elementary in Lexington.

"We are learning how the community would like to see the school evolve as a bigger piece of the area," said Nevitt Forest's principal, Kelly Elrod.

The school is looking for ways to open the building to the community after hours and on weekends for a variety of public needs – be it a medical clinic or workout room to go with the walking track people in the neighborhood already use.

The changes in store come under the

concept of an Inside-Out Center for Learning, said Joanne Avery, a member of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

The underlying concept is flexibility – having a school that responds to the individual needs of students and their parents.

"We are trying to move beyond the concept of a school that requires six-and-a-half hours of seat time, 180 days a year," Avery said. "Students will have individual study plans, and they will advance once they've mastered certain skills, whether it takes 150 days or 220."

The century-old education model of one teacher in an isolated classroom with 20 students is also on the way out, Avery said.

"Students will have teachers working in teams flowing in and out, with community members also able to come in," Avery said.

Nevitt Forest already has volunteers who come into the school regularly, but Avery said she would be looking to local employers to work with the schools on providing more mentors or cash donations on a regular basis. Michelin Corp., she said, has already shown its support by donating \$25,000 to the initiative.

"I know it sounds cliché, but children are our future," Avery said. "With Michelin supporting us so quickly, we are hoping this makes a statement and other businesses will come on board."

Inside-Out Centers for Learning, Avery said, will cost more to run initially. For that reason, the state's chapter of the



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

INNOVATION EDUCATION: Nevitt Forest Elementary teacher Amy Sanderson helps first-grader Drekeivius Brownlee recognize letters of the alphabet during class last week. The school, already on a year-round calendar and dabbling with single-gender classes, earned a \$25,000 competitive grant to develop more innovations.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future aims to raise \$500,000 more to help the Nevitt Forest and Forts Pond schools.

More than 90 percent of Nevitt Forest's students receive subsidized meals. In the classroom, poverty manifests itself many ways – from kids who show up on cold days without coats to kids showing up obviously sick.

"We can try to tap into resources in the community through our guidance department," Elrod said. "But for some of our families, it's still difficult to make that connection to some of those resources. So having some of those things here on

site and available to students all the time – that would be a benefit."

Although the school employs a full-time nurse, she said the school could keep a nurse practitioner – someone with the authority to prescribe medicines and help with diagnoses – busy. Last Thursday, Elrod drove a little boy home who had a 101-degree temperature.

"I was talking to the school nurse about him," Elrod said. "More than likely he won't get additional medical care before he comes back to school, unless his condition turns severe."

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