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Learning Center opens in Vienna

Educational Connections will emphasize one-to-one learning

BY JERRY SCHANKE

Like any other responsible entrepreneur, Ann Dolin, president and owner of Educational Connections, which recently opened a Learning Center in Vienna, has a business plan for her enterprise's economic future. But Dolin said it is her confidence in one-to-one tutoring to help school children develop "lifelong learning success" that she believes will continue to bring her business success.

A 35-year-old mother of two and former Fairfax County special education teacher, Dolin is taking a big entrepreneurial step in opening the new 2,420-square-foot facility in the Birch Building at Maple Avenue and Pleasant Street. But, she said, it is a logical step up from the business she started in her home and more recently operated from a small office in Herndon.

Dolin began her business as a personal tutor. "I loved the one-on-one teaching," she said, "because it made such a difference. It's the Cadillac of education."

Dolin said she began her business from her home in 1998 as an individual tutor. She soon had more potential students than she could possibly help and began contracting with other tutors, applying and refining her one-on-one techniques.

Today Educational Connections, which grew out of that experience, has a small staff of mostly former teachers. It has reached some 1,500 area students through a network of more than 100 contract tutors. All the instruction has taken place in the home; a parent must be present. The trick, according to Robyn Rabatin, director of client services, "is matching the student and tutor to ensure personal compatibility as well as finding tutors with the requisite skills."

In addition, Rabatin noted, Educational Connections makes the often necessary connections with the student's classroom teacher and tracks the student's progress. "Follow-up is really important," she said.

The new center adds eight on-site support programs for students from kindergarten through high school to its off-site network. They include Study Connections, aimed at defusing homework stress for parents as well as students by "providing a more structured studying experience."



Times Staff Photo/Jerry Schanke

LEARNING: Ann Dolin (left) is the president and owner of Educational Connections Inc. Staff members surrounding her are: Robyn Rabatin, also seated, and standing, Wanda Thornton, Alex Garrett & Michelle Joseph

"We can get a lot of information off the Internet," Dolin said, explaining that many teachers post assignments online, which is a big help in the Study Connections program.

Other "connection" programs include reading, college, summer and even home school connections.

While many of the students have attention deficit and other learning disabilities, others do not.

Michelle Joseph, who grew up in Vienna and holds a law degree from William & Mary, is director of advocacy and college planning. She said advocacy includes working with parents and schools to fashion accommodation plans and college planning through the selection and application process.

"Most are good students and get good grades," Joseph said, "but (they) need to work twice as hard."

Wanda Thornton, a former kindergarten teacher from Springfield, rounds out the management team. Thornton recruits, tutors and also directs Kindergarten Connections, a new half-day program designed to "enrich and enhance instruction received during the regular school day." It is most definitely NOT day care," Thornton said.

The Learning Center will hold an open house from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, April 21.

For more on Learning Center programs and costs, call 703-938-TUTOR or visit <http://www.educational-connections.com>