

## Abilene Private School Gets Early Start

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Most public school teachers reported to duty Monday to attend meetings and set up classrooms a week before students swarm into Abilene and Wylie public schools, but one small private school got off to an early start.

Just before 8 a.m., Anne and Nathaniel Jones pulled up to the parking lot of Providence Classical Academy, the first school in Abilene to kick off classes for the 2009-2010 school year.

First-grader Natalie hopped out of the car, clad in her blue plaid uniform and diamond-studded spectacles.

"I made myself get up early," she said, almost forgetting her backpack in the car. "It's the first day of school!"

Her father snapped photographs as she trotted up to the school, located at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Natalie attended the school as a kindergarten student last year.



"We had been researching classical education and realized there was a school here," her mother said, noting the emphasis on Christian morals, academic rigor and Latin instruction. "We have loved the smaller-size classrooms. And the teachers are great. We couldn't ask for better influences to shape her little heart."

Providence Classical Academy started with about 16 students in 2007-08, expanded to 37 last year and has enrolled 44 this year. Many of the families formerly home-schooled, and some only attend the classical academy for certain classes.

The school expanded this year to offer prekindergarten through ninth grades and plans to add grade levels each year to a full high school.

Tuition is an average of \$4,800 a year, with discounts based on income and the number of children a family has enrolled.

First-grade teacher Jami Amerine's classroom looks like a traditional public school space, with an apple wall calendar, a chart to record "Who lost a tooth?" and a reading corner with Dr. Seuss books. Just like any other school, the students pledged allegiance to the flag.

Amerine deviated from the typical public school form to lead the students in a morning prayer and the first Latin lesson.

“When I say ‘primus,’ it’s time to get quiet and fold your hands in front of you and get ready to learn,” she said, using the Latin word for “first or foremost” to draw the students into prime position for quality class time.

But the “primus” position didn’t quash the pupils’ eager spirits.

“I was so excited last night I couldn’t sleep!” said one.

“I was jumping all over my bed,” said another, not minding that school started a full week earlier than most of her Abilene peers.

Kevin Willhelm, president of the PCA board explains, “It’s so hot that the kids aren’t playing outside anyway. Why not get them in school now and out early in May when they can still go out and enjoy the weather?”

