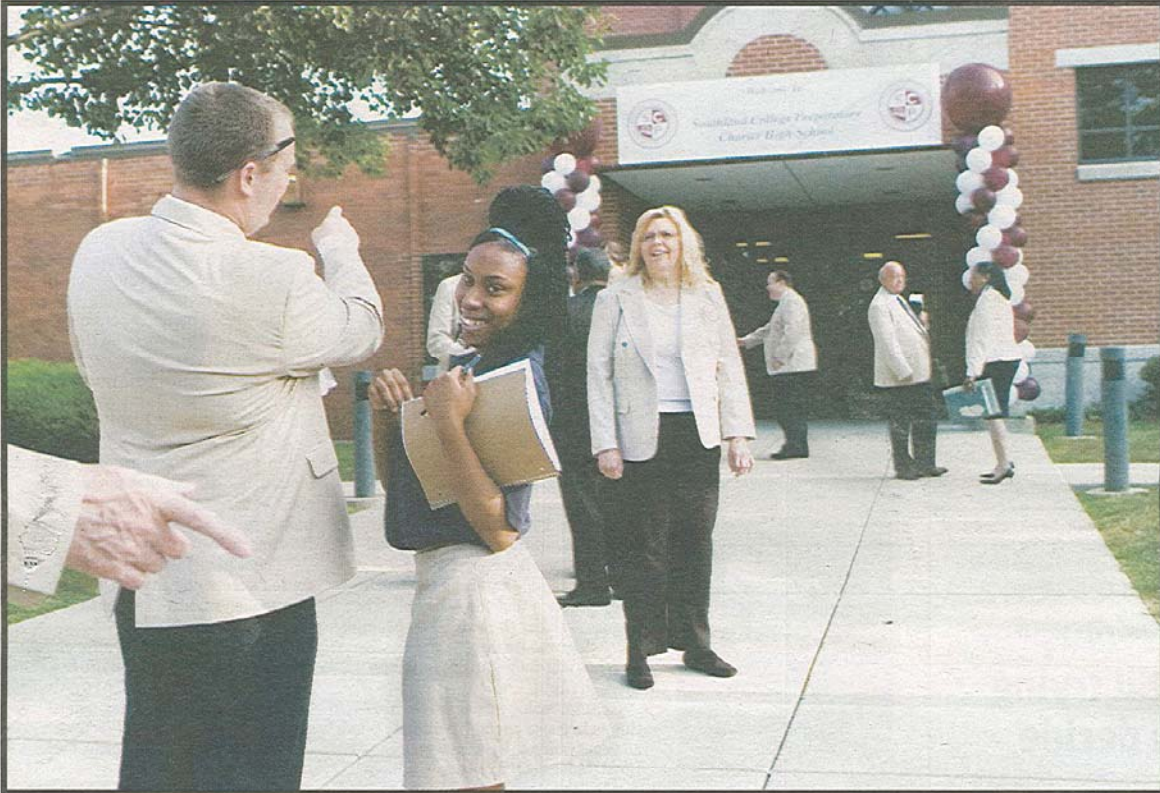


# SOUTHTOWNSTAR

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## SOUTHLAND COLLEGE PREP CHARTER SCHOOL



# A DREAM ACHIEVED

**Fresh beginning:** Incoming freshman Shannon Anderson swings around to be photographed by family members while teachers greet her at the door of Southland College Preparatory Charter High School in Matteson. JOSEPH P. MEIER — SOUTHTOWNSTAR

Thursday, we brought you a behind-the-scenes look at the Southland's newest school. Today, read about what parents and students found when the doors opened.

**STORY, PAGES 8-9**



# CHARTER SCHOOL OPENS – NOW COMES THE TEST

Students adjust to new realities on first day of class

BY KATE MCCANN  
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**T**ypical high school students wait four years before they march across stage, shake hands with the principal and accept that piece of paper that can make or break a future. The 125 students who opened Southland College Preparatory Charter High School on Thursday did it on the first day of the ninth grade.

"You are not only going to enter, you are going to graduate from college. That is the promise of Southland. That is our commitment to you," Southland CEO Blondene Davis told the students.

"You're going to have this tangible thing called a quality education," Davis told the class Thursday. "You're going to think about how, on the first day of Southland, (you) began this transformation."

Earlier in the day, Southland staffers cheered as the students from the Chicago-area's only suburban charter high school spilled out of school buses. And as beaming parents snapped pictures of embarrassed students, some teenagers admitted they had reservations.

Southland has no football team, no mascot, no school colors. None of them envisioned freshman year would take place inside of Huth Middle School — the school's temporary home while a larger building in Richton Park is renovated. And there is, of course, the issue of the mandatory uniforms and a school day that lasts until 5 p.m.

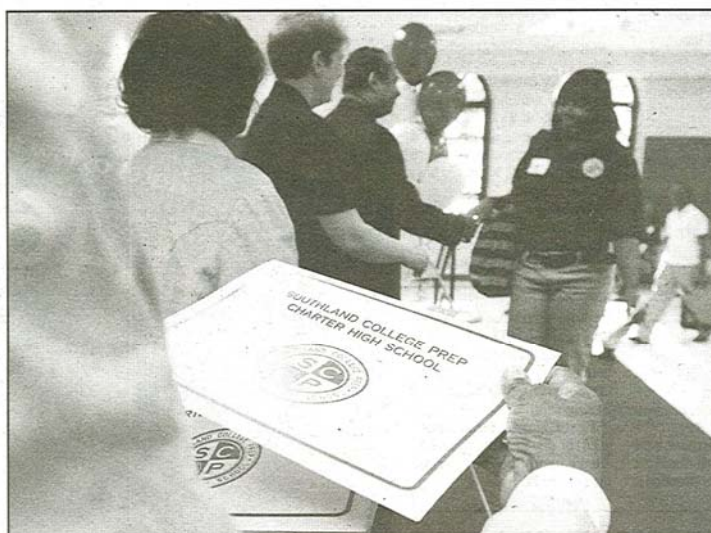
In short, it's not what they pictured when they imagined their first day of high school.

Some of them, like 14-year-old Adriean Williams, said their parents made them apply.

"I was upset because I had high placement at Rich East," Williams said. "(Southland) is just a name now. I don't know how good the school is yet."

Others had their own reasons for applying for the Southland lottery.

"I wanted to do it because I know the Rich (Township High School District 227) schools are going downhill right now," said 14-year-old Aronna Wynne, of Olympia Fields.



**High goals:** Incoming freshmen are handed their diploma holders Thursday on the first day of classes at Southland College Preparatory Charter High School in Matteson. PHOTOS BY JOSEPH P. MEIER — SOUTHTOWNSTAR

For nearly a year, Davis and a team of Chicago-area educators have battled to make Southland a reality, despite opposition from District 227.

"What happens when we no longer have to talk about Langston Hughes' dream deferred, when it simply is a dream achieved? What happens when a community ... makes a conscious decision to take not only the road identified by Robert Frost as the one less traveled but makes that road the standard?" Davis said to Thursday's crowd.

That can't truly be answered until Southland proves itself as the model academic institution organizers want it to become.

That doesn't concern John and Monica Foun-

tain, of Olympia Fields. For six years, the Fountains have worried about where their daughter Imani would attend high school. After years of hearing negative reports about the public high school Imani would have to attend, they mulled their options: Either they would move out of District 227 or send her to a private school.

When Davis announced her plans to open a charter school at a holiday concert last December, the audience cheered and said 'hallelujah,' Monica Fountain recalled. And the Fountains found new reason for hope.

"It takes a community to bring this vision to pass," Monica Fountain said. "This is seeing a dream fulfilled."



**Getting adapted:** Freshman change classes on the first day of school at Southland College Preparatory Charter High School.



**Starting off right:** Freshman Kayla Ingram organizes her locker at the school.

**'You are not only going to enter, you are going to graduate from college. That is the promise of Southland. That is our commitment to you.'**

Blondean Davis, SOUTHLAND COLLEGE PREPARATORY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL CEO

## SD 227: Charter part of shortfall

Administrators say  
loss of students,  
state aid delays  
behind deficit

BY BOB RAKOW  
Correspondent

A loss of students to Southland College Preparatory Charter High School, a delay in state funds and a lack of new property tax revenue are the primary reasons for a \$4.2 million deficit in Rich Township High School District 227's 2010-11 budget, district officials said.

"We have this triple impact to the district," Ilandus Hampton, the district's director of fiscal services, said during a budget presentation this week.

A delay of \$2 million in state funds is responsible for half of the deficit in the \$72.6 million budget, Hampton said. The district has been told it eventually will receive the money, but Hampton is not convinced.

"We may get that song-and-dance from the state," he said.

The loss of 125 students to the charter school caused the district to lose another \$1.8 million, Hampton said.

District 227 has filed a lawsuit against the charter school, arguing it will render the district bankrupt within a few years because of the loss of the approximately \$13,000 per student the district gets from the state.

Within four years, the charter school will house 500 students who otherwise may have attended District 227's three high schools: Rich South, Rich Central and Rich East.

The proposed District 227 budget includes \$4 million in cash reserves that will prevent the district from laying off staff or cutting programs, Hampton said.

"The next three to five years are going to be crucial to the operation of the district," Hampton said. "We just need to work through it and get it done."

### BY THE NUMBERS

# 125

Number of students in Southland College Preparatory Charter High School's first year

# 500

Number of students expected to attend the school within four years

# 1,300

Number of applications received by the school for eight full-time teaching positions