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Faith Lutheran home of the Crusaders

## OVERACHIVERS

Private school welcomes 3 students with special needs

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It is a Rhodes family tradition for the children to start sixth grade at the Faith Lutheran Junior/Senior High School with its reputable college preparatory program.

Shelley Rhodes wanted the same for her 11 year old son, Clayton even though he has Down syndrome.

As Clayton neared the of his schooling at Lummis Elementary School this spring, his mom asked Faith Lutheran's executive director Kevin Dunning to consider implementing the Mark 10:14 program. Named for the Bible verse "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The Mark 10:14 program integrates special-needs children into regular classrooms while maintaining specialized curriculum.

Dunning put the program into action this year at the private school of 1,278 children in grades six through 12.

"The idea is, obviously, that everybody should have access to Christian education," Dunning says. "These students won't achieve the academic standards our other kids will achieve, but they do the best with what God has given them."

Clayton and fellow sixth-graders Billy Wolfbrandt, who has Down syndrome, and Luke Kecman, who has autism, attend classes with their peers even though they complete individually-crafted curriculums. They also participate in school activities such as the flag football team and choir. Their families all attend the church.

Lee Segalla, who taught Clayton at Lummis, says the program works well.

"Is it important for a child with Down syndrome to know what mitochondrion is? Not necessarily," say Segalla, who goes on to explain that for a student to stand up in front of a class and answer questions on something he has made is a "valuable life skill."

For the Rhodes family, enrolling Clayton at Faith Lutheran fulfilled a dream. Clayton attends school with his three siblings and cousins. He learns from his classmates and they learn from him.

"We want our kids to be exposed to diversity because that's the way the world is," Dunning says. "(The three boys) are integrated into everything we do."

The original plan was to follow the students' progress through middle school, but there is new demand for the program and Dunning is working on managing its future.

Meanwhile, Shelley remains thankful.

"This was a big chance (the school) took," she says. "They did it because it was the right thing to do, not because it was the lucrative thing to do."