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Ground Is Broken For Great Path Academy's New Building

By JIM FARRELL

Courant Staff Writer

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MANCHESTER

Great Path Academy opened up five years ago with its 30 students, all high school juniors and seniors, sharing space with older students enrolled at Manchester Community College.

On Friday, dozens of officials gathered at the college to celebrate groundbreaking on a project that soon will give Great Path students a building of their own.

"This is a glorious day," said Marie Spivey, one of nine speakers who addressed about 200 people, many gathered under a large, white tent that shielded them from the hot sun.

"This endeavor was an experiment," said Spivey, vice chair of the board of trustees for the Connecticut Community College System. "It has succeeded in many ways."

Great Path, a magnet school that was created to help students at risk of dropping out, now has an enrollment of 112 but will be able to accommodate 325 students when the building is finished in early 2009.

The \$32 million, state-funded facility, which will be connected to the college, will have 16 classrooms, three science labs, a student meeting center and a gymnasium.

College President Jonathan Daube, wearing a Great Path Academy sweat shirt, thanked dozens of people - from legislators to educators to architects - during Friday's ceremony.

Mark McQuillan, commissioner of the state Department of Education, noted that Great Path has benefited from an array of supporters.

"What's so impressive is the number of people who have pulled together to make this possible," said McQuillan, who arrived from Massachusetts 10 months ago.

Citing the value of small learning communities, McQuillan said Great Path represents "precisely what we should be looking to do in so many different ways."

Marc Herzog, chancellor of the community colleges system, said many problems have been identified within the American educational system.

"This is a solution," he said.

Brea Bell, a Hartford resident who attends Great Path, said she has been able to take select college classes and earn credits.

"I am in a great place," she said, adding, "Thanks to all of you, Brea Bell is on her way to a bright future."

Bruce Douglas, the executive director of the Capitol Region Education Council, said plaintiffs in the landmark Sheff v. O'Neill desegregation case also deserved credit because they were the ones "who made it clear to us that there are two Connecticut" and thus spurred the creation of magnet schools.

Contact Jim Farrell at jfarrell@courant.com.

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