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Imagine School at Land O'Lakes attracts a crowd

By [Jeffrey S. Solochek](#), Times Staff Writer
In print: Monday, August 25, 2008



[KERI WIGINTON | Times]

First-grader Cameron Schmid, 6, holds up a book in class at Imagine School at Land O'Lakes on Friday while classmate Sydney Simon reads.

LUTZ

Just a year ago, Sue Cordova kept her children at home and schooled them herself.

They had once attended Lake Myrtle Elementary in Land O'Lakes, but "they were coming home and they were zombies," she said. "When they were in the public school, they were asking me to homeschool them."

Then along came the Imagine School at Land O'Lakes, a new charter school that focuses on hands-on, independent learning through a method called Project Child. Cordova checked it out and, along with nearly 900 other families, registered her kids for a chance at one of the school's 450 seats.

"It seemed like a great place," she said as she put stickers into the school's library books. She listed as especially appealing the school's uniforms, small classes and use of multiple student stations in each classroom.

Her youngsters initially balked at leaving their homeschool, she said, but four days into the academic year at Imagine, "They love it."

Imagine School had a tough time getting to opening day in Pasco County.

Getting started

The School Board rejected its first application for a charter and fought all the way to the State

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Board of Education to prevent the Virginia-based management company from operating here. District evaluators had doubts that the school could make its budget, saying its enrollment estimates appeared too ambitious.

Imagine came back with a revised proposal that the School Board approved. But then it ran into snags while trying to secure a permanent home for the school.

When it appeared that the county would not grant the permits needed to build at US 41 and Morgan Road, the school turned to leased property about 3 miles north, just across State Road 54 from the Ballantrae subdivision.

The developer erected enough space for the school in just 51 days.

Sure, it looks just like a doctor's office. It is, after all, a professional office plaza. Imagine is looking for a new site to call home.

But all things considered, principal John Selover said, "We couldn't be happier."

That appears to be the case for students, parents and teachers, as well.

A visit Friday morning found students still getting to know the ropes of Project Child. They were discovering the six learning stations in each classroom, the passports they will use to evaluate their progress and behavior, and the way they will shift from teacher to teacher depending upon the subject matter.

Groups of three teachers will have students for three years. Each educator focuses on one subject: math, reading or writing.

"It's very cool," first-grader Rahul Kumar said about rotating among a group of teachers. "In my other school, I never did that before."

Second-grader Spencer Delabio also liked being able to change classes and teachers and said he was having fun learning about the passports and stations. He didn't even mind wearing a school uniform.

"It's a great school," Spencer said before heading off to his physical education class.

Writing teacher Susan Reiss, who came to Imagine from Carrollwood Day School, shared that opinion.

"This is a very exciting new program," Reiss said, taking a break from her planning period. "I'm very excited that this is a public school with a really innovative curriculum."

Teachers like concept

Pasco public schools have used Project Child in the past. Some teachers still use some of its concepts. But the district stopped widespread use of the program, saying it was too expensive.

Math teacher Lisa Daily, who also came to Imagine from Carrollwood Day, said she particularly liked the idea of focusing on one curriculum area while having the same set of students for three years.

"We know exactly what they need to work on," Daily said.

"We know how far they've come," Reiss added.

Cari Kerrick, another mom who was volunteering in the library, said the entire package appealed to her enough to send her three children to Imagine instead of Denham Oaks Elementary.

She looked forward to the school moving to a permanent site, which could happen as early as next August, and understood the school still is getting students familiar with its methods.

"My kids are really enjoying their classes and their teachers," she said.

School district officials said the school has had some of the normal glitches that every new school sees. But other than that, everything there has gone well.

Cordova, the former homeschooling mom, agreed.

"I got all this free time," she said, laughing. "You don't know how happy Mommy is."

Imagine School at Land O'Lakes, which currently offers kindergarten through sixth grade, plans to add seventh grade next year and eighth grade the following year. It has a target final enrollment in Pasco of 728 students. The company has opened 10 new schools throughout Florida this month.

Jeffrey S. Solochek can be reached at solochek@sptimes.com or (813) 909-4614. For more education news, visit the Gradebook at blogs.tampabay.com/schools.

[Last modified: Aug 26, 2008 06:20 PM]

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Comments on this article**by Tim****Aug 26, 2008 5:15 PM**

I love the school. I really know what is going on. The teachers are wonderful and the principal is a good decision maker. Where was Imagine when my oldest was in elementary school?

by Jessie**Aug 25, 2008 7:32 PM**

This school so far has been great except for the drop off and pick up line. It takes about an hour to pick up my child and I get to the school 30min prior to him exiting school. The school has a big problem with this.

by Joan LoBianco**Aug 25, 2008 4:00 PM**

I was a project child teacher here at my school, Floyd Elementary in Hernando. I taught Language arts and loved having the same kids for 3 years. It gave you an opportunity to know them very well and watch them grow. Project child is a great program

by good grief**Aug 25, 2008 3:19 PM**

Most schools and families would love uniforms if they would just try them out. Why is it a + for this school to have uniforms, but not the rest of Pasco County? Schools that have uniforms, love them. Just ask!

by John**Aug 25, 2008 3:17 PM**

"I got all this free time," she said, laughing. "You don't know how happy Mommy is. YUP SCHOOL IS NOTHING BUT BABYSITTING TO LOTS OF PARENTS

by Mack**Aug 25, 2008 2:50 PM**

Imagine is a great place. I am glad it is offering an alternative. Some good families have enrolled at Imagine!

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