

Specialty schools part of city education reforms

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As Brooklyn's 287,500 public school students returned to classes yesterday, 19 new small schools opened across the borough - many in troubled high schools or middle schools that are being phased out.

"It's great. The kids will get the attention they need," said mom Asia Gallman, 29, as she picked up her daughter, Jaquasia, 11, from her first day of sixth grade at East Flatbush Community Research School, one of three new schools at Intermediate School 232 in East Flatbush.

The long-troubled middle school now also houses the Middle School for Marketing and Legal Studies and a high school, Arts and Media Preparatory Academy.

The changes are part of a trend to break up large, poor-performing neighborhood schools and replace them with themed minischools designed to give students more attention.

Three chronically failing Brooklyn high schools also are being phased out - Tilden in East Flatbush, which just made the state's list of "persistently dangerous" schools for the second year; Lafayette in Bensonhurst, and South Shore in Canarsie.

"It'll be a lot of fun," said Maurice Tracey, 13, a freshman at the Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School now housed at Tilden, one of two new Outward Bound-themed schools for Brooklyn.

Maurice said he was looking forward to experiencing "the new stuff I'm going to do and the fun activities" he expected from the small sixth-to-12th-grade school focused on leadership.

"It's been around for so many years. I don't think they should close it," said Tilden senior Jahnikea Doliveira, 17.

Yesterday was also the first day for two new so-called transfer schools aimed at students who are too old for traditional high schools or who are severely behind and at risk of dropping out.

Brooklyn Bridge Academy opened at South Shore, while Liberation Diploma Plus opened at the shuttered Our Lady of Solace School in Coney Island. That school used to house the popular High School for Sports Management, which has now been moved to Lafayette.

"There was definitely a need for those students who had nowhere else to go," said City Councilman Domenic Recchia (D-Coney Island). "They're doing a lot of outreach to all of [southern] Brooklyn."

Brooklyn also opened one new charter school this year, Kings Collegiate Charter School, which boasts an extended school year and started classes two weeks ago.

"It's our third week of school," said school founder Brett Peiser.

"It's part of the reason we start early, so we can hit the ground running," Peiser said.