

## Twice as nice

By Angela Weatherford

— Athens Independent School District will soon offer two years of free college to students.

Early College High School is a four-year program where students will take high school and college courses concurrently. The course schedule will lead to the student graduating with a high school diploma and an associate's degree or 60 hours of college credit.

Students will be transported to Trinity Valley Community College where they will take three courses as freshmen: Pre-AP English, Pre-AP History and another college course. The number of courses at TVCC will increase each year.

"We are very excited about bringing another opportunity to our students," AISD Secondary Education Director Karen McAtee said.

Dr. Jeremy McMillen, assistant vice president for academic education/institutional planning at TVCC, said plans are still being made, but it is looking like students will attend classes on the first floor of the Academic Building.

"We want the students to be in a place where they will be successful and not have a lot of distractions," he said.

The program is free, but requires students to go through an application process. McAtee said she hopes students who may not have an opportunity to attend college will utilize the four-year program.

"Any student who is committed to having a very rigorous course schedule is welcome to apply for the program," she said. "This program will provide the confidence students need for college."

According to The Early College High School Initiative Web site, 106 high schools in 24 states had an Early College High School as of 2007-2008.

"Most are in cities and have their own self-contained facilities and faculties," McAtee said. "We are starting small."

TVCC and AISD officials say they will operate the plan as a pilot program for four years. If it is successful, they say they are hoping the program will expand, McMillen said.

"Everything I have read about the program sounds like it will be a great thing for students," he said. "I predict that students in this program will be some of the most desired students on our campus."

An information meeting for interested parents will be held at Athens Middle School Tuesday, April 15, at 6 p.m.