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Peers aid new students at Latin

By William Croyle
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COVINGTON – Annie Scherrer was near tears as she told Matt Krebs about problems she was having with other kids in school.

Krebs was slouched in his chair, picking his teeth and waving to a friend, oblivious to anything she was saying.

Fortunately, they are teachers at Covington Latin School. They were playing students in front of 32 juniors and seniors Monday.

The students were being trained to become peer counselors for new students when classes start Aug. 18. Krebs, of course, was showing them how not to handle a situation.

“You’ve got kids who will bring this stuff to you,” said Krebs. “On that first day, for a new kid to have an older kid who knows the ropes and is your friend from the beginning is very powerful.”

The school has trained upperclass students to be peer counselors for 20 years. And while starting at a new school can be difficult for any student, it can be especially challenging for those entering Covington Latin.

That’s because every new student comes in skipping one or two grades and often knows very few, if any, other kids, since they come from all over the region.

“It’s really a different experience here,” said senior Ashley Brisco, in her second year of peer counseling. “I know I was really nervous about coming in and it helped me. I think it’s good to get in touch with the underclassmen.”

The all-day workshop, run by Krebs, Scherrer and counselor Wayne Homer, taught the importance of listening, empathizing, making eye contact, reading body language, not diminishing a student’s problem, building trust and deciding when to offer advice.

Each counselor will be assigned three or four of the 110 incoming students. Counselors will be expected to make time to talk to new students, answer questions and do little things to make them feel welcome – like just saying “hi” in the hallway. The counselors got off to a good start Monday by writing letters to their new students, offering them encouragement before they get to school.

They will meet each other face-to-face at orientation on Aug. 16.

“We just try to give them the tools to help kids who may have problems adjusting,” said Homer. “Their task is to make them feel comfortable, confident and to just be their friend.”

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