

# The Concord High School Fire Academy: A Model for Training the Future of the North Carolina Fire Service

As you walk up to the door of the Concord High School Fire Academy, you can tell that this is going to be a mind-opening experience. The sign on the door speaks volumes; “Through these Doors Walks the Future of the American Fire Service.” Upon your knock, the Watch Commander rises to answer the door. The command, “Attention on Deck,” is given, and the recruits all rise to stand at attention and welcome their visitor. The Watch Commander asks for your name and announces your arrival. This is a courtesy extended to all adults who visit this classroom. The Fire Chief welcomes you to the CHSFA, one of only three such programs in the state of North Carolina.

Turning to the recruits, the Chief says, “As you were,” and the recruits default to the parade rest position and remain standing. This program is set up as a direct delivery program through the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal and does not involve the state’s community college system. There are two other similar programs— one at E. E. Smith High School in Fayetteville and another at Dixon High School in Onslow County. These three programs are part of a three-year pilot program, with CHSFA being the newest of the three.

The idea for high school students to be able to take Firefighter I and II certification classes through the community college system has been around for many years through the dual-enrollment process. However, the idea for high schools to offer firefighter certification classes as part of the Career and

Technical Education program is a much newer idea. Jay Brooks, the assistant fire marshal of Rockingham County, proposed the idea to David Barbour, a trade and industrial consultant for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. His idea was based on the fact that many high school students across the state were responding to fire calls, and they did not have the necessary training to answer these calls safely. His proposal was to have OSFM and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction join forces to offer career and technical education classes that would provide these students with the Firefighter I and II certification classes, as well as with career technical education class credits.



*(Above) CHS Fire Academy Recruits. (Below) CHS Fire Academy Honor Guard at first home football game.*



These two organizations collaborated, and the first three pilot programs were selected. The 2010-2011 school year marks the second year of the three-year pilot program. If all goes well, and the pilot program is deemed successful, the concept of high school fire academies will become part of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. High schools would only need a strong partner agency to provide the tools of the trade and any additional instructors to assist with the practical skills. The instructors must be North Carolina state-certified teachers, Level II fire instructors with the OSFM, and qualified to instruct Firefighter I and II certification classes.

Welcome to the Concord High School Fire Academy!

As the recruits enter the classroom, they pick up their ID tag from a ring on the back of the door and place their tags on the accountability board. Students must “tag” in and out each class period. If a student is called to the office or needs to leave the class for any reason, the CHSFA has a “2-In-2-Out” policy, and another recruit must accompany them as their “battle buddy.” This is reality-based instruction. The class is considered a battalion, and each neat row of four desks is a company. The class has a battalion chief and each company has a company officer who holds the rank of captain. The officers all sit in the rear seats of the class so they can watch over their companies. When the class attendance is taken, it is done so as a PAR (Personnel Accountability Report) by company.

Announcements are made at the beginning of each class period, much like a face-to-face shift change, with recruits standing at attention. Once recruits are seated, there is the “Morning Minute” and a fire service quote or a one-liner from [www.FireNuggets.com](http://www.FireNuggets.com). Then there is the trademark CHSFA cheer:

Chief: “Whooo?”

Battalion Drill Commander: “Who Are WE?”

All recruits: “CHS Fire Academy CTE – Sir!”

CTE has two meanings for the recruits; career and technical education, and “Committed to Excellence,” the fire academy motto. Posted on the wall next to the accountability tags is a sign that says, “Don’t Train To Get It Right...Train So That You Can’t Get It Wrong.” Another academy motto is “Honor, Service, Pride, Tradition.”

The classroom has a memorial wall with the American flag and state flag flanking it. On the memorial wall is an NC Firefighters Foundation t-shirt, as well as stickers from 9-11, W6 and the C9. At the top of the wall there is a sign that says, “We Will Never Forget.” There is also a plaque with the names of the Cabarrus County line of duty deaths and a current count of the LODDs for the entire country.

As you enter the CHSFA classroom, you cannot help but see the 20 sets of used turnout gear hanging at the rear of the room on the gear racks, which were donated by local fire departments, along with 12 brand new fire helmets and CHSFA helmet shields. MSA Cairns helmet division, Shelby Specialty Gloves and Majestic Fire Hoods were very generous in helping provide this gear. There are also mats used for physical training in the Presidential Physical Fitness Award program and several different brands of self-contained breathing apparatus with which the recruits are expected to become familiar.

Wednesday is uniform day. The recruits are required to wear the fire academy t-shirt, navy blue BDUs with a plain black belt, and black duty boots or shoes. The Introduction to Public Safety class has a red t-shirt and the Fire Science Level I, II and III recruits wear a navy blue t-shirt. The battalion chiefs and captains wear white dress uniform shirts. All of these are pre-owned shirts that have been donated by the partner agency, Concord Department of Fire and Life Safety. The partner agency also made photo identification cards for all of the fire academy recruits.

Whenever a battalion goes outside of the classroom to participate in drill, physical training, or to train with the CHSFA fire apparatus — affectionately referred to as The Black Widow — the recruit class must lead with their guidon, or a small flag used to identify each battalion. One recruit is designated to guard the guidon, and a relief guard is cycled through at approximately five-minute intervals. This is another way that accountability is taught and learned through reality-based instruction.

CHSFA has an honor guard that presents the colors for many different events, including home football games, honor society inductions, and graduation. This fall, the honor guard was called to serve at a military funeral procession. The honor guard teamed up with the police explorers honor guard to begin the holiday season this year by presenting the colors at the Concord tree lighting ceremony the night before the CHSFA marched in the Concord Christmas parade. Early in December, the CHSFA also participated in the Kannapolis Christmas Parade of Lights night parade. This spring, they presented the colors at the county commissioners' meeting and the National Technical Honor Society induction.

While completing the fire prevention, education and cause class, the Fire Science Level I recruits are working on safety messages and acting out a number of children's fire safety story books with puppets. Hopefully these activities will be successful and deliver the messages needed to make people of all ages more conscious of fire safety.

CHSFA has grown from 20 students in late January of 2010 to the current roster of 110 students during the 2010-2011 school year. The school has administered practical skills assessments and 564 fire certification exams in the first year and a half of the program. The pass rate for the written exams has been 95 percent.

The OSFM Firefighter I and II state certification classes are instructed over three semesters.

Semester 1 topics include:

- Orientation and safety
- PPE
- Fire behavior
- Portable fire extinguishers
- Alarms and communications
- Fire prevention, education and fire cause determination
- Fire hoses, streams and appliances

Semester II topics include:

- Ropes and ladders
- Forcible entry
- Ventilation
- The art of reading smoke
- Water supply, sprinklers and foam fire streams

Semester III topics include:

- Salvage and overhaul
- Emergency medical care
- Rescue
- Building construction and fire control (with the exception of the "live burn" training that can be completed after age 18 and after graduation)

The only other class that is not offered by CHSFA, but that is required for Firefighter I and II certification, is the hazmat awareness, operations, and terrorism course. The number of hours required for this class keeps it from being completed along with the rest of the third semester topics. Recruits can take and complete this class with dual-enrollment or at another time.

There has been a strong interest in the Skills USA Firefighter Competition Team that was started this year. There are currently 14 students that gather on Wednesday afternoons to practice turn-out gear racing, raising ladders, forcible entry, advancing charged and uncharged hose lines, tying knots, running obstacle courses, and more. Each team member has a resume, practices interview skills, and studies extra fire science topics.

Two officers from the academy attended the Camp Dixie Fall Leadership Conference at the beginning of the school year so that they could lead and train the Skills USA Firefighter Competition Team. The state competition this year was held in late March and the three recruits who participated did well. Captain Brandon Blackwelder placed 2nd, Battalion Chief Taylor Beverly placed 6th and Captain Kyle Franklin placed 7th. Just recently we learned that Blackwelder will be representing North Carolina at the National Skills USA

competition in Kansas City, Mo. in mid-June. He is currently being trained by the Concord Fire and Life Safety Training Division for this event, which includes a full Candidate Physical Ability Test, written exam, interview, timed turn-out gear event, and timed knot-tying event.

In February, the CHSFA Honor Guard and officers attended the N.C. Association of Fire Chief's Mid-winter Conference at the Embassy Suites Conference Center and Hotel in Concord. Chief David Barlow presented a workshop about the program, and the recruits manned a table display showcasing the high school fire academy concept. The workshop was well-attended and Steve Sloan of OSFM announced to the crowd that the program is now being recognized as the model for the state.

On April 12, 2011, Chief Barlow presented an overview of CHSFA to the North Carolina Fire and Rescue Commission at its spring meeting to let the Commission know firsthand what has been happening with the program since there has been so much interest statewide and beyond.

Other major events that CHSFA has participated in this year include the Cabarrus County Fire and Life Safety Bowl, the Special Olympics, and the Liberty Mutual Drunk Driving Awareness Crash Car event. In addition, the CHSFA Awards Night was held on May 24, and the 1st Annual Firemen's Day & Muster provided skill competition events for the Level I and Level II classes.

The CHSFA Honor Guard conducted 18 performances this year and continues to be busy with the end of the school year approaching. They are scheduled to perform at two different high school graduation ceremonies, and at the International Association of Fire Chief's Southeastern Conference in Montgomery, Ala. in mid-June. It has been, and continues to be, a busy year so far.

The capstone for the school year occurred on Friday, May 27 when Chief Ray Allen of Concord Fire and Life Safety delivered a piece of World Trade Center steel for inclusion on our memorial wall. CHSFA plans on holding a formal dedication of the artifact after school returns to session in the fall and in time to mark the 10th anniversary of 9-11.

*David Barlow, of the Concord Department of Fire and Life Safety, is the Chief Instructor for the Concord High School Fire Academy.*



*Concord HS Fire Academy Logo*