Hampton University will close its **laboratory school** - the only university-run elementary **school** in the region - next summer.

Parents and teachers praise the 33-year-old **school** for blending a firm grounding in the basics with a free hand at experimentation. But Hampton's dean of liberal arts and education, Carlton E. Brown, said the lab **school** offers too sheltered a setting to truly prepare education majors for working in public **schools**.

"You're not looking at a full range of situations our teachers will encounter as they move into their life's work," he said. "...If I make a decision to provide public service at the expense of the quality of preparation (of teachers), I am providing a disservice."

The lab **school** has about 200 youngsters, from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, and a dozen full-time teachers, Brown said. Most of the students are from Hampton, though some come from Norfolk and Portsmouth. Tuition is $1,300 a year, and the university does not provide aid, Brown said.

About 150 - or roughly half - the university's education students volunteer or student-teach at the **school**, adjacent to the library on Hampton's campus. Next year, Brown said, all the students will be at a couple of local public **schools**, where they can concentrate their efforts.

But some Hampton students say the historically black university shouldn't surrender a crown jewel.

"I think it's bad, personally," said Enid Hanes, a senior who sometimes works with the students on speech therapy. "It's a good thing to have. The classrooms are so big, the classes are so small and the kids look like they're enjoying themselves."
The closing is part of a nationwide trend that reflects the cyclical nature of school reform and the changing relationship between public schools and universities.

University lab schools were championed at the turn of the century by reformer John Dewey as a way to give future teachers a taste of the classroom, Brown said.

But in the last couple of decades, "the wave has been to close them," said Donna Evans, dean of education at Old Dominion University. "There are so few lab schools left in the country - I don't know of but a couple of others sprinkled around."

Part of the reason is to save colleges money. In Hampton's case, Brown said that wasn't a factor. He wouldn't reveal the budget for the lab school, but he said that tuition revenues - which, at $1,300 a head, would total more than $250,000 a year - cover only a fraction of the lab school's costs.

Another factor, said Virginia L. McLaughlin, dean of education at the College of William and Mary, is the new attitude of universities toward public schools. Where once it was, "We'll show you the way," now it's more like: "We'll find the answer together."

"We need to work together to improve education," she said. "We can't stay on campus, the proverbial ivory tower, and do things under very different kinds of conditions and then expect people to function effectively in the real world."

Julia G. Williams, who retired from the lab school in 1989 after 26 years as a teacher, recalls an intoxicating spirit of innovation - whether it was to get rid of the grading system or to begin "mainstreaming" disabled children before that became the vogue.

And, she said, the experiments worked: "It was a glorious time. ... Grades were never a factor, but you were taught to do the very best. Children have made contributions to society, and we are very pleased with our products."

Shirley Gross' class of fourth and fifth graders exemplifies the sense of openness and creativity.

Recently, a cluster of girls was lying on the floor, each reading different novels, some sharing their thoughts, others writing critiques in their notebooks. On the other side of the floor, a couple of students were studying compound predicates in their grammar books.

"I let them work wherever they want to work - as long as they're not socializing," Gross said. "I'm a floor person myself."

Another handful of her students were out getting swimming lessons from undergraduates at the university pool. "We have total use of the resources of the university," Gross said. "When there's an eclipse, we can go over to the science building and watch it."

Likewise, Brown said, professors benefit from easy access to the school for their own studies.

More than 90 percent of the students are minorities, Brown said. Unlike many lab schools, Hampton's is not populated primarily by professors' kids, but most of its parents are committed to giving their children a good education and few are dirt-poor, Brown said.

The trouble, he said, is that doesn't give would-be teachers a good introduction to the diversity - and challenges - of the modern classroom.

"All parents are not totally vested in the education of their children," Brown said. "...There are people who are very, very poor and have a lifestyle associated with that that teachers must learn to deal with."
Yet Williams, the former teacher, said that "we had a most diverse population" during her time at the school. "Some parents could pay three times as much as they were charging; some parents were struggling. . . .We've had kids and their mothers on welfare. The uncles and aunts would pay."

Brown said another reason the school is no longer needed is the improvement in educational opportunities for minorities in the last few decades. The school was opened in the wake of "massive resistance" to school integration in Virginia, in part to guarantee good schooling for some minority youngsters - and good training for minority teachers-to-be.

The passing of the school, he said, is yet another chapter in the evolution of school reform. "Just as the laboratory school was opened for clear and justifiable reasons, it departs in similar fashion. . . .You have to keep moving forward and sacrifice nothing for the sake of mere tradition."

Yet others mourn its demise. "My daughter went here years ago," Gross said. "She got early admission into U. Va. . . ." "The school puts out outstanding children. It's a wonderful school. I hate to see it come to an end."

**Graphic**

Color photos, RICHARD L. DUNSTON/The Virginian-Pilot, Reuben Pfeifer, 9, does his language studies at Hampton University's laboratory school. "I let them work wherever they want to work - as long as they're not socializing," says teacher Shirley Gross. "I'm a floor person myself."; Rosalyn Barnes, 20, a Hampton University student volunteer, helps 10-year-olds Somi Heirs and Demario Bowman make world globes.; Photo, RICHARD L. DUNSTON/The Virginian-Pilot, Shirley Gross’ class of fourth- and fifth-graders exemplifies the sense of openness and creativity at Hampton University's laboratory school. The region's only university-run elementary school will close next summer.

**Classification**

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**Subject:** HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES (94%); EDUCATION SYSTEMS & INSTITUTIONS (90%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (90%); PRIMARY SCHOOLS (90%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (90%); TEACHING & TEACHERS (90%); PUBLIC SCHOOLS (89%); TUITION FEES (89%); CHILDREN (78%); EDUCATION REFORM (78%); STUDENT TEACHERS (78%); UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION (78%); TRENDS & EVENTS (76%); SCHOOL BUDGETS (73%); VOLUNTEERS (70%); SPEECH THERAPY (50%)

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CLOSING THE BOOKS; EDUCATION EXPERIMENT ENDS; HAMPTON UNIVERSITY'S LABORATORY SCHOOL HAS BEEN PRAISED FOR INNOVATION, BUT OFFICIALS SAY THE CENTER WILL BE CLOSE....

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