

The News Observer

Darrington closes doors

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Darrington Academy, a private school for troubled teens in Blue Ridge, closed its doors Friday, a move that owner and headmaster Richard Darrington says is due to the current state of the economy.

Darrington said the income from the number of parents who could pay the school's tuition no longer covered the school's fixed costs. He said enrollment at the school had declined from 180 students two years ago to fewer than 90 now, and "at that point it became no longer possible to keep the doors open and the kids safe."

The closing comes as a joint investigation of certain activities at the school is under way by the Fannin County Department of Family and Children Services, the Fannin County Sheriff's Department and state regulatory officials.

Sheriff's Department Investigator Diane Davis said the investigation has been under way for approximately three weeks, and was launched when she was contacted by DFCS officials in reference to reports they had received.

As part of that investigation, a search warrant was served on the school Feb. 13 where video surveillance cameras, computers and numerous files were confiscated.

Davis also said that as part of the investigation approximately 120 interviews were conducted of students and school staff with the assistance of DFCS investigators from surrounding counties.

Davis declined to release any particulars of the investigation as it is still in progress.

Although Darrington said the school's closure was unrelated to the investigation, he said that the school had stopped accepting new enrollments after the investigation was launched, "exacerbating an already existing financial situation.

"We're cooperating fully," Darrington said of the investigation.

"I just want to see it resolved as soon as possible," Darrington said.