



**Left:** THE FANTASTIC FOUR: (Left to right) Eighth graders Louise McCormack, Kate Dodson, Gretchen Hinger and Ben Hiss pose for a photo at the Ramsey Student Center before a swim practice on Jan. 22. Head CCHS swim coach Emily Hulse says that middle schoolers have always been allowed to compete with her high school team, but haven't taken full advantage of the opportunity in years past. "I don't know when it started," Hulse said. "But whenever I've been involved with the program they've been allowed. We just haven't always had people. There were a couple of years where we didn't have anybody, but this year we have quite a few."

Photo by Zoe Peterson

# FRESH STROKES

*The CCHS swim program takes on a total of seven middle school swimmers to train for future seasons.*

BY ALEXANDER ROBINSON  
Sports Staffer

**F**or many middle school athletes, the opportunity to compete on a high school C-team is not always promised. The Clarke Central High School baseball and football programs have such divisions, allowing seventh and eighth graders from nearby middle schools to practice their respective sports alongside high school students.

On the unofficial C-team affiliated with the CCHS swimming program, athletes are expected to focus on more long-term goals. Head CCHS swim coach and foreign language department teacher Emily Hulse says that their main objective is to stay fit and familiarize themselves with the norms of the program.

"The importance (of) eighth graders being involved in the team is the chance for them, if they're not already swimming with another program like a summer league or a year-long league, to start learning the strokes and get ahead before their ninth grade year." Hulse said. "It's not brand new to them by the time they get to ninth grade. They've already done it, they've already been around the program, they've already learned the strokes, they're used to how we prac-

tice (and) they're used to the expectations. That's the main goal for them, to start in eighth grade." Hulse sees the middle school team as an investment of sorts, one that will hopefully pay off in years to come. She believes that the program will serve as a filter that will help younger swimmers transition onto the high school team. "It's not as strict I guess. Attendance is not as strict, I'm more lenient with them," Hulse said. "If

program now. "Everyone gets split into two different swimming levels, advanced and moderate, and I still get to interact with the high schoolers often during practice," Dodson said. "There are a fair amount of middle schoolers on the team. Sometimes it's nerve racking, (but) you also get to meet people. It's exciting too because you get to sometimes compete, just not all the time."

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Clarke Middle School eighth grader

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CCHS junior Isabella DeMarco swims on both the CCHS varsity team and Athens Bulldogs Swim Club (ABSC), a non-profit USA-Swimming registered organization affiliated with the University of Georgia. She would like to see middle schoolers have an official C-team in the near future to contribute more, but recognizes cost as a potential issue.

they really take it seriously, then they make a lot of progress, especially if they start in seventh grade." Kate Dodson, an eighth grader attending Clarke Middle School, practices with the other freshmen on the CCHS swim team. She doesn't feel as though she's on a separate team during practice, and believes that she's more comfortable with the

"As long as the middle schoolers can get themselves to (the Ramsey Student Center), it would be nice to allow the eighth graders to compete," DeMarco said. "Again, though, that's just more money, but a lot of that money just comes from swimmer's individual pockets. It would be cool to create a C-team for eighth graders, giving them an opportunity to swim (for points) before they enter high school."