

School panel honors educator, discusses ongoing themes

By Michaela Kennedy

The School Committee opened its Nov. 16 meeting with a tribute to Ms. Elizabeth Murray, a former teacher and principal who lives on the island. School Committee Chairwoman Cathy Kaiser read a letter of recognition congratulating Murray on her 100th birthday and expressing gratitude for her years of service.

Following the tribute, fourth-graders Matthew Bour and Kerstin Barrette gave presentations about interdisciplinary expressions of geometry and art. Bour presented a paragon as an art form in two and three dimensions. Barrette exhibited a rectangular prism, also in multi-dimensional forms.

In other business, Committee member William "Bucky" Brennan brought up North Kingstown High School's lengthy manual of policies, and that while a simple set of policies was preferable, the policies should nevertheless be addressed and updated, he said. Superintendent Robert Power agreed that it was good not to have a "ton of policies." Policy is "something you want to do before running into the problem," he said.

Committee member Julia

Held suggested prioritizing and targeting policies the board may want to consider. Pinto suggested updating the retention promotion policy, and possibly including an athletic ability policy.

Brennan also brought up the ongoing discussion of differentiated instruction, a proactive approach to teaching with the students' varying levels of progress in mind. "Maybe we should hear a proposal with two grades," Brennan suggested, adding that he would like to see rigor created through potential grouping between grades. "We'd be able to serve the enrichment piece and the differentiated instruction piece more," he said.

Committee Vice Chairwoman Julie Kallfelz noted that the School Improvement Team meeting addressed differentiated instruction and talked of a variety of options to enhance learning. The team discussed giving a push to students who are gifted or above average through pull-out programs.

In an ongoing focus on food service programs, the committee reviewed a draft of six goals for food service operations, targeting nutritional meals at affordable prices. Kaiser noted the goals

created would feed direction for a meeting with food service vendors and give them a chance to review the school kitchen facilities. The committee confirmed the special meeting to be held on Dec. 14 at 7 p.m.

Kaiser noted that the nutrition criteria for school food service programs came from the state, which has asked for feedback from Jamestown on the items listed. "This is a chance for Jamestown to be a test case for a possible statewide policy on food services," Kaiser said. The committee agreed to open a request for proposals for food service programs in January.

Kallfelz suggested keeping other districts informed of activities concerning food service reform "in case they might want to come on board with us."

The committee continued its pre-budget discussion. Kaiser said she asked SORICO, or the Southern Rhode Island Collaborative Education and Training Center, for

a list of anyone who rents space in South County to organizations involved in education.

She urged the board to consider ways to make the maximum use of the school facilities for educational purposes. Kaiser also said she asked the town finance director for the cost of substitutes, asking for a breakdown of the number of days when substitutes were used.

In a reference to home school business, Director of Pupil Services Beth Pinto handed out a draft for home school applications. The committee agreed to review the document and put it on the Dec. 21 business meeting agenda.

As a budget concern, Power, a proponent of wind power, said the district "should take the lead" for installing a wind generator. The electric bill could be "one more bill we wouldn't have to worry about," he added.

Brennan agreed that the school property should be considered as a

possible site. He noted that the feasibility study to be made by the Town Council would determine both the best locations and the best configurations for wind generators.

In his superintendent's report, Power noted that he walked the school property with representatives from the Narragansett Indian Tribe and the state Historic Preservation Society. The groups agreed to do test excavations on the land.

In her principal's report, Kathleen Alamanzor talked about the Second Step program, which teaches social and emotional skills for violence intervention. The program has focused on empathy with fourth-grade students, she noted. In addition, the district has been working on personal literacy programs for those reading below grade standard.

Alamanzor noted that SALT or School Accountability for Learning and Teaching surveys will be going out during the first week of December. "We hope to get a good response," she said.

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