

# Large kindergarten group results in fourth classroom

By Michaela Kennedy

The Jamestown School Committee voted 3 to 2 last week in favor of making a fourth kindergarten class for September. Enrollment for the incoming kindergarten stood at 58 students to date, according to the principal.

Before discussing enrollment, the committee opened its Aug. 22 meeting with a farewell and deep thanks to long-time crossing guard Ethel Kitts, who retired this year.

Concerning enrollment, Principal Kathleen Almanzor noted that the count neared a contractual consideration. A class could be allowed to reach 21 students, "as long as the three classes limit is 60," she said. Almanzor also noted that one class would have lower numbers in order to better serve students with special needs.

Newly-appointed Superintendent Marcia Lukon favored the authorization of a fourth class. She told the committee that if a few more students enter the system, splitting an already established class "can be traumatic for the child." Committee member Julia Held voiced support for an additional class, citing increased expectations for the introductory education level. Held stressed that incoming kindergarten children had not yet been identified for services or extra help needed.

According to School Committee Chairwoman Catherine Kaiser, the number of kindergarten classes was reduced from four to three in 2002. The district continued to run three classes until last year when the numbers dropped significantly, "probably due to the statewide change in kindergarten qualifying start age." A classroom was eliminated last year. "As those students advance to first grade this fall, they

will continue to be our only two-class configuration," Kaiser said. She speculated that the sudden spike in kindergarten enrollment might be partly due to the change in qualifying age requirements that barred some younger students from starting last year. "I see the addition of a fourth classroom this year as the flip side of last year's elimination of a third classroom," she added.

Committee members William "Bucky" Brennan and David Dolce voted against allowing a fourth class.

The committee went on to review the addition of new staff. The committee made four one-year appointments including Jamie Webber, as kindergarten teacher, and Jennifer Barrett-Skazinski, as kindergarten special education teacher. Jennifer Caswell was appointed as a teacher for grade 3, and Tara Higgins as grade 2 special education teacher. The committee also approved Tara Toolen, a part-time grade 4 special education teacher, Janette Warner was appointed as a part-time administrative assistant to the superintendent, Gail O'Brien, administrative assistant to the director of student services, and Thomas Carney, Lawn Avenue soccer coach.

Almanzor introduced administrative intern Carrie Melucci, the new "co-principal" for the year. Melucci is a former second grade teacher from Melrose Avenue School.

In a discussion about hiring a data entry employee, Principal Almanzor voiced concern about the amount of time she is spending doing data entry when her other responsibilities are more important as a principal. With increased documentation insisted upon by the state department of education and federal grant agencies, the district could use a dedicat-

ed data manager, Almanzor said.

Committee member David Dolce agreed that a data entry person is needed. He went on to suggest asking the town about purchasing software that could generate needed reports. "If we don't meet (state) requirements, it's also a reflection on the town," he reasoned.

Business manager Maria Alfred said comprehensive software programs could help the schools create reports for internal use and provide payroll generation.

The committee authorized the administration to draft a job description for the position, which will include data input, management and reporting.

In new business, the committee reviewed information on the district's summer school program, and compared it to other programs in neighboring districts. Summer school focuses on the needs of retained students, remedial students and students receiving special education services. The current policy focuses only on retained students, and specifies that students be charged summer school tuition, which is not currently enforced, according to information provided to the board.

Brennan said the summer program should be self-funded, and parents should pay for the additional schooling. Held agreed, noting the charge would be an incentive for parents to support discipline in studies during the regular school year. Dolce added concern that summer school might be viewed as free tutoring. The committee assigned committee members Held and Brennan to work with the administration to review the policy and recommend appropriate revisions by December.

In the superintendent's report, Lukon noted facilities improvements completed, including carpet replacement and room renovations at both schools. The Lawn Avenue School had windows replaced, the gym floor refinished and a score-

board installed. Chimney work was completed at Melrose Avenue School, and the new generator was tested.

Lukon also reported that a new state law required schools to accommodate students with nut allergies by providing a nut-free table in the cafeteria. In addition, the food service program can serve no peanut or nut products, Lukon said.

In the principal's report, Almanzor announced a School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) visit planned for the week of Feb. 25 to 29, after the winter vacation. The teaching and administrative staff would continue to keep a "big focus on discipline" this year, she added.

In the facilities committee report, Brennan suggested running an ad in the school newspaper for more student members. He also reported collaboration with facilities director Lewis Kitts to have a landscape designed around the new generator.


## Other business

- Acknowledged a tentative contract agreement with the Jamestown Teachers Association. The JTA is scheduled to hold its contract ratification meeting on Sept. 6, and the school committee will vote on the contract at its work session that same night, according to Kaiser.

- Approved a home schooling request "upon completion of application."


- Discussed setting a date for the annual joint meeting with the North Kingstown School Committee in September or October.

- Received a letter from a taxpayer showing concern about rising teacher pension costs. The writer also questioned why Jamestown was not a member of the Government Health Group of Rhode Island. Kaiser said she asked the town administrator to look into possible benefits for changing plans. The current plan is grouped with the town's Blue Cross.



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Sarah and Carol want to say  
**Thank You**  
to Everyone who assisted in looking for Louie - our Boston Terrier - who was hit by a car Monday evening. He returned home with a few abrasions at 10:15 p.m. Again, Thank you from the bottom of our hearts

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