

School panel hears about high school changes

By Michaela Kennedy

Gerald Foley, principal of North Kingstown High School, met with the Jamestown School Committee last week to share updates on programming and anticipated changes for the next school year.

At the May 8 school committee meeting, Foley outlined a new program, called Success Academy, that is expected to provide a stronger learning environment for students typically three years behind grade level in reading. The program, which includes a literacy coach and special needs educator, is designed to replace general level classes.

Foley said that some students placed in general level education courses presently had behavioral, not academic, problems. Those pupils are scheduled to enter college preparatory classes. Others struggled and needed more help. "With proficiency being more at the forefront, we look at kids and what they are proficient in," he said. "It's all about literacy and numeracy."

A criticism of the present general level studies is that not all pupils are being challenged, Foley said. Some students in the general program scored better than average on standardized tests. Those pupils are scheduled to be integrated into college preparatory classes. "Slowing down puts you

behind. You have to accelerate the learning for kids to catch up," Foley said. "We need to offer a different approach to these kids."

Superintendent Marcia Lukon said that Jamestown students seemed to struggle with earth science. Principal Kathy Almanzor asked if the algebra taught at Davisville Elementary School was the same as Jamestown. After some discussion, Foley and Jamestown administrators planned for teachers in both communities to meet and review curricula to ensure that Jamestown students are adequately prepared for high school.

In a discussion about graduation requirements, committee member William "Bucky" Brennan asked about final presentations to complete a high school degree. He echoed a question asked by his daughter who is a senior, "If a student is in AP (Advanced Placement classes) and does well, aren't I already proficient?"

Foley explained that North Kingstown adopted two ways for students to demonstrate learning. He emphasized that it is a performance-based graduation requirement mandated by state law. He noted the importance of standing before a group, expressing oneself and answering questions. "This has affected our curriculum and education overall," he said, adding, "There's going to be nerves

with our best and brightest kids."

Answering questions about budget and staffing, Foley reported that enrollment was growing. Class size would increase, but the number of faculty members remains the same.

In other business, the committee voted 3 to 1 to approve a staff request for a two-year leave of absence. Lukon recommended granting the request by fourth grade teacher Philip Capaldi so he may serve as a teacher in residence in the Guiding Education in Math and Science Program at the University of Rhode Island.

Brennan, the dissenting vote, said he valued Capaldi's work and valued the superintendent's opinion. He could not "philosophically" support the request, especially since the school department already had another teacher in the program who would be able to instruct the staff. "I feel that once a teacher is out of the district for more than a year, we lose some skills and their freshness. We also lose management of our employees."

Committee member Julia Held agreed with Brennan, but also considered the science program to be valuable. "You have to be comfortable with the science to teach it. People coming back can provide that to their colleagues," she said, adding that the sabbatical did not affect the budget.

St. Michael's Country Day School hosts art fair tomorrow night

The St. Michael's Country Day School community will celebrate its commitment to the arts this Friday, May 16, from 6 to 8:30 p.m., at the school's ninth annual ArtsFest.

Each of the artistic disciplines – studio art, chorus, band, dance, drama, computer graphics and video – will be featured, as a way of showcasing the students' many creative talents.

Aside from the school's performing arts center, the hallways, classrooms, common rooms – even the library – will become art galleries and performance areas. Projects by every student, from youngest to oldest, will be on display everywhere.

Admission and parking is free, and the public is welcome to attend.

Parent group to meet

The North Kingstown High School PTSO will hold its final meeting of the school year on Wednesday, May 21, at 7 p.m. at the school's Media Center.

The agenda will include the election of new officers for the 2008-2009 school year.

Also included will be Gerald Foley's Principal's Report and a wrap up of all the end of the school year events and activities, which includes Senior Week and Graduation.

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