

School Committee grapples with wording of 'gift'

By Eileen M. Daly

School Committee members were thrilled on Thursday to receive \$185,000 for a new science and math initiative, Science and Math Scholars, from the Jamestown Education Foundation.

The monies stem from a NASA grant that, according to a letter from Principal Investigator Mary Hall Keen, is to be used for "a one-year pilot program designed to address the problem of stagnating scores on the R.I. state mathematics test (NECAP); gaps in the science curriculum and the lack of connection so many of our middle and high school students perceive between math and science concepts they are taught in school and any practical application these may have in adult life. The SAMS Program seeks to not only improve student performance in these subjects, but to increase the number of students choosing to enter these fields after college."

Keen responded to questions from committee members and reiterated JEF's understanding that once the NASA grant monies are accepted, the school department will manage these funds in accordance with school committee policy, R.I. Dept. of Education regulations, and state and federal statutes.

Keen's letter asked the school committee to formally acknowledge the collaboration between JEF and the school department, and to agree to have the funds (expected to be available by the end of the month) transferred either gradually or as a lump sum to the school department for management.

Committee chairperson Cathy Kaiser expressed her concern that the word "gift" in the agenda could be potentially misleading, as this was more of a collaborative effort than a gift. Specificity in agenda items is required, Kaiser said.

Although committee members expressed enthusiastic approval, official acceptance was tabled until the next business meeting due to potential confusion regarding the word "gift" in the agenda item.

The school committee also discussed the hiring of a project manager as an independent contractor who will work closely with Keen and Lawn School Principal Kathy Almanzor to create and implement the SAMS program. A search committee – formed by the school department and consisting of Principal Almanzor, Keen and members of the JEF board of advisors – is

scheduled to make a candidate recommendation to Superintendent Marcia Lukon on Oct. 30.

School committee members expressed some concern about hiring a project manager prior to the formal receipt and acceptance of the monies from NASA. The committee agreed to allow the project manager candidate to be presented to the committee at the same meeting wherein the funds are to be formally accepted.

Formal hiring, however, will be contingent on the actual receipt of funds, Kaiser said.

In other business:

- The superintendent shared annual enrollment figures. Despite projections of a decrease in en-

rollment, the district experienced a small increase in the number of students enrolled. Military enrollment is up substantially from 59 students last year to 95 this year. This figure includes 24 more military family students at the high school, which is double what was projected, Lukon said. Lukon also reminded the committee that annual enrollment figures are recorded on Oct. 1 and that an additional five students have been enrolled since then, including two high school students.

The next meeting of the School Committee will be held Thursday, Nov. 5, at 7 p.m. in the Lawn Avenue School library.



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