

School district pilots associate's degree

by Michelle Miron/Managing Editor | Posted: Tuesday, September 20, 2011 6:02 pm

SHOREVIEW - Irondale High School will begin a new program in 2012 - the first in the state - that allows students to earn an associate's degree by graduation, and Mounds View High School may not be far behind. The goal: a higher college completion success rate district-wide.

At the Sept. 13 School Board meeting, the board discussed some of the premises of the Early College High School Program being targeted to students in the middle 30th to 70th percentile of their academic class - some of whom may not consider college otherwise.

"If even one student thinks twice about wanting to do this, it's a successful program," said Board Chairman Jon Tynjala. "(College) suddenly seems possible to them, and they get the foundation they need. It's incredibly exciting."

Schools Superintendent Dan Hoverman said one of the best parts is the program is affordable - about \$65,000 per year if the estimated maximum of 800 students participate. He said the pilot program will not impact class sizes or existing college-credit programs at the school, and it could later be extended to Mounds View.

While details are still being determined, the school district tentatively plans to work with Anoka Ramsey Community College to put together classes for juniors and seniors that count for college credit. The program would enable some students to enter a four-year college as a junior immediately after high school graduation.

The program will be separate from the district's College in the Schools and Advanced Placement programs which collectively offer 19 classes that count toward college credit. Those programs are predominantly targeted toward students in the top 20th to 30th percentile.

"We're able to pay for this in a number of different ways," said Hoverman. "We feel the potential gain (the cost) is beyond reasonable - I'd say it's a pretty outstanding return on investment. It will not in any way impact class sizes or section sizes, or any program as offered. It will not detract from our AP offerings, which will remain in place. It will not take away from what is already a quality program. It's going to be an enhancement."

Coordinators of the program over the past year have included Irondale Principal Scott Gengler and Colleen Wambach, the school's former principal who is now a teacher. Hoverman called their progress "a tremendous amount of work researching and looking at options."

"We're not saying college is for all kids," he said. "What we're saying is that it's their choice and their family's choice. We want them to have options. If we can find a community college ready to

go forward with this, we're ready ... and we believe we've found a partner at Anoka Ramsey. It will be a challenge to blend cultures between community college and the high school."

"This opens the door ... for those who think (college) is too formidable," said board member Lisa Sjobeck. "It just gives me the chills."

Hoverman said information will be provided to students and parents as more details become available. He praised Gengler and Wambach for their work.

"The preparedness foundation at Irondale had a lot to do with this, and the staff's willingness to, in some ways, take a bit of a risk."

More students, more funding

In an enrollment update provided to the board, the district logged 9,797 students as of Sept. 8, which is 195 more than projected and 145 more than last year. The increase comes mainly at the elementary level. Together with a recent \$50-per-student allotment increase by the state, it means the district is entitled to almost \$1.69 million more in funding than originally anticipated for 2011-2012. Director of Finance Carole Nielsen noted that \$299,124 of that money will pay for the 5.4 full-time equivalent staff positions already put in place to accommodate the extra students. Another \$20,000 has been allotted for supplies. She noted that none of the extra staff hired are full-time.

"The principals were, in some instances, very creative with their teaching staffs to level off some of this," Hoverman said. "In the last couple of weeks ... we took care of everything."

"When you're going in the other direction you have to cut (the budget) and it creates a lot of problems," noted Tynjala. "Mounds View has had to deal with (declining enrollment) for a number of years, so it's really nice to see us moving in that direction."

Student Information and Reporting Specialist Cindy Fyle said the student increase can't be attributed to a particular trend.

"They're moving in from other districts, mostly - some from non-publics and a few from out of the state or out of the country," she said.

Of 359 students who applied to join the district via open enrollment this year, 242 were approved and 163 or about 45 percent ended up coming to the district. Nine percent of the student population, or 880 students, is there due to open enrollment by non-residents.

Nielsen said the district "captures" about 80 percent of its resident students.

Kauls' Court

In other news from the meeting, the board voted to name the Mounds View High School basketball court "Kauls' Court" in honor of long-time basketball coach Ziggy Kauls, who

announced earlier this month that he will retire after this season. Kauls has been with the district for 45 years.

"To be able to stay in a position like that for 45 years is truly an unbelievable accomplishment, not only from the standpoint of the pressure that can go with that but also the enthusiasm Ziggy has brought to coaching," said Hoverman. "It's been the love of his life, I think. (This honor) is because of his record ... (the) wins and losses are not as important as the impact he's had on kids' lives during the course of that 45 years, and the way he's impacted the entire community."