

2 innovative programs OK'd for Lino Lakes Elementary

Elementary to become STEM school, 'U' partner

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News Editor

Two innovative educational programs have been approved for Lino Lakes Elementary School that are staff and parent driven.

The school board on Thursday, May 5 ratified two plans presented by the school and Principal Ron Burris.

One involves a work agreement with the University of Minnesota Teacher Education Redesign Initiative and is the next step in the TERI program first approved by the board for Lino Lakes Elementary a year ago.

The second is the culmination of three years of internal planning to transform the elementary to function as a STEM school. During this planning period, school staff members in concert with parents have researched initiatives to better incorporate science, technology, engineering and math components into the daily curriculum.

The school board, impressed with the planning and innovation, moved to approve the STEM proposal on May 5 and waived a second reading of what was new business. Under most circumstances, new business items come back for approval at a subsequent meeting.

Under the plan, STEM education will combine all four areas in an integrated, problem-based approach to teaching and learning with an emphasis on cri-

tical thinking, communications, collaboration and creativity. With a hands-on nature of instruction, STEM education teaches independent innovation and allows students to explore subjects in greater depth.

The aim of STEM education is to increase student engagement by transforming the typical teacher-centered classroom through greater emphasis on student-centered curriculum that is driven by problem solving, discovery and exploratory learning.

Burris, speaking to the school board on May 5, said the curriculum will be phased in gradually starting with the 2011-2012 term. During the next three years, he said, the goal is to have 33 percent of the curriculum being taught using the STEM pedagogy.

With ever-growing emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the Lino Lakes project could become a model for other elementary schools in District 831, Burris said. The first-year principal gave credit to the staff and parents for their leadership and interest in finding ways to improve the educational offerings at the school.

Board President Rob Rapheal had praise for the program and the desire to help improve the educational setting. Students are bound to benefit, he said.

"It is fun to be inventing," Rapheal said. "To see them [students] excited [about learning] at that age is a wonderful thing."

Burris, who took over at the school last fall, thanked the board for allowing him to work at a school that he described as a "gem of a school among many" in the district.

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TERI Program

Under the continued work agreement with the University of Minnesota, the school becomes a professional development school and will welcome as many as five student teacher candidates to its staff.

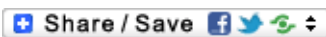
The teacher candidates would be placed at a site for the school year. They would become an integral part of the school community, taking part in the implementing of a co-teaching model at the site. The University will provide professional development for the sites and the teacher candidates.

The cooperative program is seen as means of improving the achievement gap of students now in K-12 programs while better preparing future teachers for their chosen profession.

Principal Burris and one member of the Lino Lakes staff will attend training with University personnel in advance of the formal launch of the program this September.

As part of the agreement, TERI will provide the Forest Lake district with a \$20,000 grant with \$12,000 designated for partnership development expenses incurred at Lino Lakes Elementary.

The school district is also exploring an expansion of the teacher training program to Forest Lake High School in the fall of 2012 where the balance of the TERI funding would be put to use.



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