

# SP-F PTA Council Forum Focuses On Grade 5 Move to Middle School

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN  
*Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader and The Times*  
**SCOTCH PLAINS** — The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Parent Teacher Association Council sponsored its first educational forum for the 2001-2002 school year recently at Terrill Middle School.

Hosted by Council President Mary Cappio, the program offered district administrators their first opportunity to present to parents their plans for the fifth grade's transition to middle school in September 2002.

Park Middle School Principal Rocco Collucci indicated fifth grade students will be housed on the ground and first floors of the building in the wing near the library and media center. Sixth grades will be located on the first floor where they are now. Seventh and eighth grade classes will be housed on the second floor of the school.

At Terrill School, Principal John C. Foulks will keep all fifth and sixth grade students on the first floor, and house all seventh and eighth grade students on the second floor. Both schools will designate certain entrances for grades five and six, and seven and eight.

Superintendent for Instruction Dr. Kathleen Regan outlined the fifth grade curriculum, paying particular attention to areas where administrators plan to enhance the existing program with the addition of a world language exploratory, more physical education time, after school enrichment activities, social opportunities, and guidance services.

Though it will be housed in a different building next September, the fifth grade curriculum will stay pretty much the same. Students will spend most of their time with their homeroom teachers, studying math, reading, and language arts in the morning and social studies in the afternoon.

For science instruction, the plan calls for students to rotate among all the fifth grade teachers through the school year. Students would continue to have fine arts, physical education, and health and safety instruction with teaching specialists in those specific areas.

"We really tried to lift the program as much as possible and bring it over," explained Dr. Regan. "It's the best of both worlds for students who have been self-contained and those who changed for every class."

Within the world language exploratory program, students would study one language, French, German, Italian or Spanish, in each of the four marking periods. Going into sixth grade, they would select one language to study in depth. The exploratory program is currently conducted in sixth grade.

The administration is proposing that two new counselors be hired for the district, one for Park School and the other for Terrill School. This would enable the schools to divide guidance responsibilities for the student bodies into two parts, seventh and eighth grade and fifth and sixth grade.

As outlined, there would be 321 minutes of daily instructional time in grade five, which equates to 1,638 instructional minutes each week. Looking at a sample schedule, which sees students begin school at 8:33 a.m. and conclude at 3 p.m., Dr. Regan indicated scheduling was not definite because the Board of Education's contract with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association is still under negotiation.

An hour-lunch period is being proposed which would give students a half-hour to eat lunch and an additional 30 minutes for recess activities. (There is no recess time for grades sixth through eighth.) The administration is suggesting recess activities include outdoor playtime, library time, access to computers, and the use of board games. The recommendation that recess also include the option for students to participate in chorus and/or band upset some parents.

One parent said that next year's fifth grade students were being "cheated" by making them choose band or chorus over free time. Another suggested it would deplete the music program because children would likely choose playtime over band or chorus. Dr. Regan said she had heard concerns that chorus and band participation was mandatory for fifth grade students, which became the basis for the recommendation to make them optional activities next year.

McGinn Elementary School Principal Mariana Cassidy urged parents to remember the program is flexible. Keep in mind teachers are attuned to fifth graders. They make adjustments when they sense a break is needed, she said, referring to times when teachers take students outside for a 5-10-minute recess in the middle of the day.

To ease the transition from elementary school to middle school for students and their parents, the administration is proposing:

- Student tours.
- Student/parent orientation (May 16, 2002 for Terrill School students; May 20, 2002 for Park School students).
- FAQ booklets.
- "Welcome Mornings" at each middle school before classes beginning next September. These would allow fifth graders to walk through their buildings, meet their teachers and practice using their lockers.
- Fifth-grade family picnic (the evening of September 9, 2002).
- Staff professional development.
- Visits to elementary schools by middle school principals.

Dr. Regan explained staff selections would be made after the winter holiday break. Last school year, the district surveyed teachers to see who might be interested in making the move to middle school.

No current fifth-grade teacher will be required to move to the middle school if he or she chooses not to.

"I'm thinking there are teachers outside of fifth grade who are hoping to have an opportunity," said Dr. Regan.

After school enrichment activities will

include afternoon socials, intramural opportunities and clubs, bringing together fifth and sixth grade students. The administration will survey students this spring to determine where their specific interests lie.

Some ideas under consideration are debating, desktop publishing, sculpture, research skills and homework help and drama/fine arts. Certain fee-based programs will be offered through the Community School.

When asked what would happen if construction is not completed by September 2002, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol B. Choye answered, "Contingency plans will be made public in March if we need them."

However, she went so far as to say that with construction expected to begin in November, new classrooms at Terrill School could be ready as early as next spring. Principal Collucci has already said Park School can accommodate the incoming fifth grade.

Other parents asked if the space allocated for fifth grade at Terrill School would be sufficient come September 2003 when today's third grade (of which there are 11 sections) from Coles and McGinn Elementary Schools converge on Terrill. With respect to class size, Dr. Regan said administrators expect class sizes to remain approximately the same as they are now. Classrooms, by state formula, are sized to fit 25 students.

A number of parents wanted to know if the program as presented is set in stone or if there is still room for change.

"We will tweak and refine it as we move forward," explained Dr. Regan, who indicated groups of parents and administrators will visit several school districts who are operating grade 5 to 8 middle schools to observe how those programs run.

She emphasized that parents had been involved in the planning process from the beginning as part of the Grade 5 Transition Steering Committee.

Dr. Regan reminded parents the program is a "work in progress," and that it will likely take four years to fully implement based on other districts' experience.

One parent asked if space was allocated at the middle schools for extension of the PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder) program. Special Education Supervisor Janet Ramos explained all special needs would be accommodated in the best way for the individual students.

Other concerns from parents centered on drop-off and pick-up procedures at the middle schools, particularly Terrill. Principal Foulks suggested the best way to manage those times would be for fifth and sixth grade students to be dropped off at the front of the school, and for seventh and eighth graders to be dropped off in the parking lot of the church next door, from which they could cross to Terrill's lot and walkways.

In commenting on the configuration of the fifth grade classes, Dr. Regan said, "Every effort will be made to mix the children."

According to Mr. Foulks, class composition would be structured much like the sixth and seventh grade teams have always been — mixing gifted and talented, average, above average and special education students, accounting for "band kids," accounting for racial balance, and combining students from Coles and McGinn Schools.

Mr. Collucci added, "Part of the middle school experience is meeting new kids. We want to make sure they're part of the middle school experience."



**ANIMALS PAY A VISIT...**Children from St. Paul's Day School in Westfield enjoy a visit from their friends at Quiver Traveling Farm. This event was a culmination of a recent study on farm animals at the school. Classes are offered for children ages 2 years to full-day kindergarten. Currently, limited openings are available in a few classes. For more information, please call (908) 233-5417.

## SPFHS Alumni Association Schedules Nov. 20 Meeting

**SCOTCH PLAINS** — The regularly scheduled meeting of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Alumni Association will be held on Tuesday, November 20, at 7:30 p.m. in Room 101 at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS).

Cheryl Iaione, a graduate of the Class of 1976 and Seton Hall University Class of 1980 and Jake Iaione, both SPFHS graduates, will be featured in the meeting's program.

Ms. Iaione is presently Dean of Students at East Mountain Day School at Carrier Clinic and advisor for drug rehabilitation. In addition, she is head softball coach at

Hillsborough High School. She will speak about her involvement in girls' sports.

John Gausz, Membership Chairman, will also be on hand to discuss becoming a member of the alumni group.

Membership automatically entitles the Class of 1976 to a newsletter containing items of interest to SPFHS graduates.

The public is welcome to attend. Refreshments will be served.

For more information, please call Laura Swidersky at (908) 889-2089 or Kathy Van Horn at (908) 232-4132.

## Concepts & Thought

### Steven Krakauer and Adam Turner to Attend National Youth Leaders Conference This Week

**WESTFIELD** — Steven Krakauer and Adam Turner, both of Westfield, have been selected to attend the National Young Leaders Conference (NYLC) from until Sunday, November 11, in Washington, D.C. Westfield High School students, Steven and Adam are both freelance writers for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*.

A unique leadership development program for high school students,

the theme of NYLC is "The Leaders of Tomorrow Meeting the Leaders of Today."

Steven and Adam will be among 350 outstanding National Scholars from around the country to attend NYLC. They will interact with key leaders and newsmakers from the three branches of government, the media, and the diplomatic corps.

The students will interact with prominent journalists at the National Press Club, meet with senators and a

representative or appointed member of their staff to discuss vital issues facing the nation.

Participating in a number of leadership skill-building activities, Steven and Adam will participate in a judicial simulation, called "Testing the Constitution," in which they examine actual Supreme Court cases. The NYLC culminates with the Model Congress, in which scholars assume the roles of U.S. representatives, and debate, amend and vote on proposed legislation.

### Tour of SPFHS to Highlight Education Week Celebration

**SCOTCH PLAINS** — American Education Week will be celebrated from November 11-17, highlighted by a tour of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS).

This year's theme, "Together Making Public Schools Great For All Children," suggests the cooperative effort that brings education to every child, with the concern and support of communities such as Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

On Tuesday, November 13, Principal Dr. David Heisey will begin a tour of SPFHS outside the main office at 9 a.m. Dr. Heisey will welcome visitors and joint staff members in leading parents and other interested guests through the school. Questions about the school's programs

and facilities are particularly welcome during this tour.

Because the school will prepare information handouts for each visitor at the tour, reservations are required. Please call the high school at (908) 889-8600, extension no. 406, for Tuesday morning's tour.

In addition to the school tour, this week features a display of student work from every district school, at the public libraries. Grammar school teachers have scheduled parent-teacher conferences with each student's parent and guardian during American Education Week.

For further information, please call Barbara Cronenberger-Meyer, Vice President of SPFHS PTA Council at (908) 322-9148.

### WHS Teacher Adopts Role Of National Consultant

**WESTFIELD** — Dr. Maria Schmidt, a social studies teacher at Westfield High School, has been asked to take on the role of consultant to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Dr. Schmidt will help the board develop ways of measuring performance against the professional teaching standards it has adopted.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is an organization of teachers and other education policy makers who are working to strengthen the teaching profession, and ultimately, to improve student learning.

NBPTS certification is an advanced credential used by many

states, New Jersey not among them, to recognize excellence in teaching with salary incentives.

Dr. Schmidt has worked as a consultant with the Educational Testing Service in the field of teacher evaluation for 14 years.

### WHS Band Marches To Victory in Contest

**WESTFIELD** — The Westfield High School Marching Band marched to victory at Sayreville War Memorial High School last Saturday, capturing First Place in their division with a score of 89.8 points out of a possible 100. They also won awards for Best Auxiliary (Color Guard) and Best Music.

The day after the competition, the ensemble entertained the crowds at the Halloween Parade of the Y's Men's Club. In the spirit of the occasion, band members wore costumes instead of regular uniforms.

The Marching Band director is Michael Fackelman. Drum Majors Lauren Baeder and Angela Kim led the band on the field. Other student leaders include Kate Lechner, Ryan Leonard, Christine McGrath, James Reber, Ben Ruskin, Bree Sherry, Martha Strickland, Chad Tortorello, and David Zorn.

The band plays and performs its intricate drill to "Red Mountain Celebrations" by Robert W. Smith.

On Sunday, November 11, the band will travel to Sand Castle Stadium in Atlantic City for their championship competition. All of the marching band's competitions are held under the auspices of the United States Scholastic Band Association.

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