



Students Develop Key Skills Through Honors Seminar

Gathered around a table in the school library, ninth grade students in the Honors Seminar class discussed the social issues explored in the novel “The Lord of the Flies.”

After listening to classmates discuss issues such as leadership, loyalty and discrimination, student Linda Sheeley said that is exactly why she enjoys the class.

“The thing I like the most is having a lot of peer discussions to find out how they feel about things,” Linda explained. “It’s more of a common discussion. It’s more comfortable. You can learn more.”

This year, Tamarac Secondary School modified its Honors Seminar class to provide students more opportunities to

develop skills such as facilitating discussions, writing research papers and reading critically.

“We really want to get them used to the college environment,” said Library Media Specialist Michelle Furlong. “It’s very student-driven. They’re generating a lot of the ideas themselves.”

Students meet in the library for the elective class every other day. For some students, fitting the class into their schedule means forgoing their lunch period, although they’re allowed to eat during the class.

During a recent class, teacher Tim Jacques encouraged students to consider a social issue they care deeply about. He reminded them that during the second half of the year they would have to write a research paper on the issue.

“We teach facilitation and research skills in class but these students get the opportunity to hone those skills further,” said teacher Aimee Bishop.

The opportunity to write a five-page research paper is something student Taylor Sweet said she values. She explained that is an essential skill she needs to work on which will help her for the rest of her high school career and college.

“I want to become a better writer because that’s important in college,” Taylor said. “It’s important even when you apply for college.”

Student Chris Lawrence explained he enjoys the program because it challenges him to think “outside the box.” He particularly appreciates the opportunity to present in front of the group, which he noted is a critical skill for many jobs as well as the interview process.

“It’s challenging, in a good way,” Chris said of the class. “Everyone here wants to be here. We’re lucky we can have this type of class. We’re very fortunate.”



WITH LESS REVENUES, DISTRICT TO CUT SPENDING

Faced with the loss of state aid and federal stimulus funding and the possibility of a property tax cap, the district is starting this year’s budget process by looking to significantly reduce spending.

“New York State is facing a \$9 billion budget deficit and Governor Andrew Cuomo has been clear he plans to cut aid to education,” said Superintendent Lou McIntosh. “Faced with less revenue, we have to cut spending. We can’t put that burden onto the backs of our taxpayers.”

Mr. McIntosh explained the district has been fortunate in the past two years to have 34 retirements

which helped the district reduce spending by not replacing 13 positions. But now the district faces the same challenges that other school districts are facing.

Federal stimulus funding that the district has received the last two years will run out this year, Mr. McIntosh noted. Governor Cuomo also is advocating for a 2 percent property tax cap which has been supported by Democratic and Republican leadership in the State Senate.

As a result, the district is starting its budget process by reviewing programs across the board, assessing whether programs are mandated, if they

raise student achievement and other similar evaluations. The district is also looking at ways to achieve long-term savings through operational efficiencies.

“We need to prepare for what school districts expect to be a difficult few years,” Mr. McIntosh said. “Our mission and goal is not only to get through the next three to five years but to sustain the excellent education our community expects as much as possible.”

As the budget process continues, the district will provide updates on its website, www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us, and through future newsletters.

District to Seek Buyers for Parker School

Seeking to put the property back on the tax rolls, the district has decided to seek buyers for the former Parker School in Pittstown.

The building served as an elementary school from 1958 to 1994. It was then briefly used for a district special education program. Most recently, the building was leased to Questar III for a program that is now discontinued. The building has been vacant since 2008.

"It's a nice building but with our enrollment slowly declining, we simply don't have the use for it," explained Superintendent Lou McIntosh. "We haven't had students there in about 15 years. We feel we need to sell it and hopefully get the property back on the tax rolls."

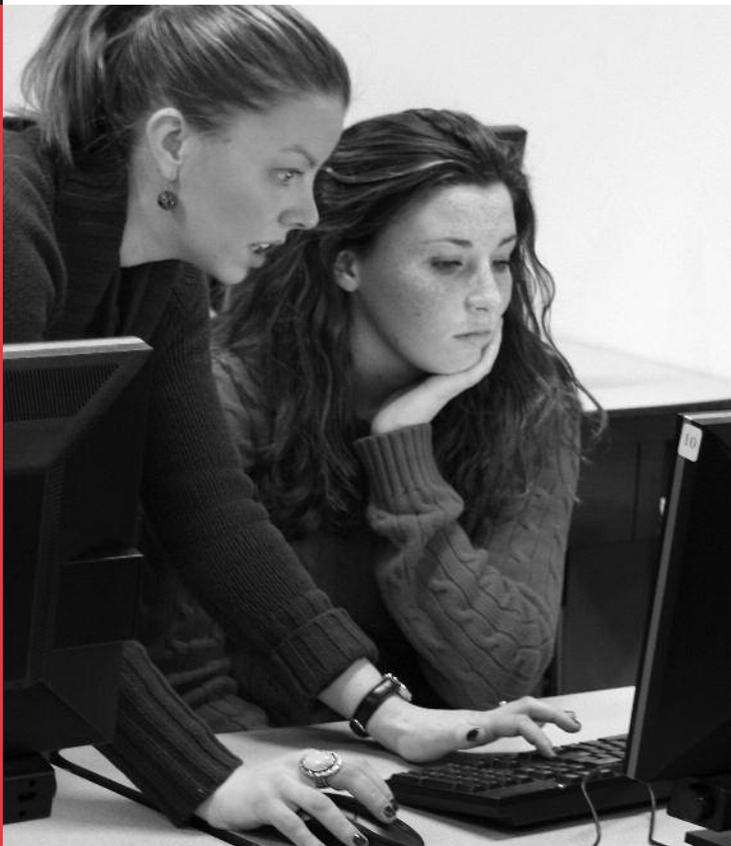
This past fall, school officials asked a commercial realty firm to evaluate the property. In its report to the district,

the firm NAI Platform of Albany noted the 11,844 square foot building is in good condition and the 15.27 acres are well kept.

Comparing Parker School to similar properties in the region, the firm anticipates it will take 12 to 18 months to market the property. The Board of Education agreed at its December 14 meeting to authorize the firm to market the property.

If Parker School was sold and put back on the tax rolls, it would increase the town's total assessment and therefore minimize the impact of taxes on all district homeowners, noted Director of Business Operations Gail Lathrop.

"We also pay about \$30,000 a year in upkeep on the building," Ms. Lathrop said. "If enrollment does start increasing, we can still accommodate at least a few hundred more students in our schools."



Students Learn Graphic Design in Art Class

Students taking Studio in Art this year are getting an opportunity to explore graphic design as teachers Jillian Sheffer and Jennifer Girard have expanded the curriculum to include computer art.

"We usually use computers in school to create PowerPoint presentations or to do research. We're using them to create art," Mrs. Girard explained.

Following the instructions of Mrs. Girard, ninth grader Dan Motzer discussed how he created a unique design by manipulating the letters of his name.

"I tried to make it as unique as I can while still making it look good," Dan said. "I almost like this better. It comes out better for me."

Mrs. Sheffer explained they decided to introduce graphic design this year to allow students to explore computer art. With the class composed mostly of freshmen, it's also an opportunity to show students a possible career path.

"We really wanted to broaden their horizons about what art is," Mrs. Sheffer said. "It also allows students to explore graphic design as a possible career since it's used in fields such as advertising."

Mrs. Sheffer noted graphic design uses many of the elements of art they already teach. That point appeared to get through to Maria Clemente as she worked on her project.

"I'm trying to take the letters of my name and create a shape from it with negative space," Maria explained. "I really like this. It brings out my creativeness." To see examples of student work, visit www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us.

START REGISTERING KINDERGARTNERS NOW

Are you the parent of a child who will be eligible to attend kindergarten at Tamarac Elementary School next year?

Brunswick (Brittonkill) CSD asks that you start the registration process now by filling out a kindergarten census form. This will help ensure your child starts the 2011-12 school year on time and allows the district to adequately plan for staffing.

Parents of children who will be 5 years old on or before December 1, 2011 can fill out the survey online at www.brittonkill.k12.ny.us. Click on "Register a Student" under Quick Links at the top right of the page and then click on "Kindergarten Registration Survey for 2011-2012 School Year." Or you can call the District Registrar's Office at 279-4600 ext. 2611.

RUNNING FOR READING

This fall, teacher Sue Turner discovered a way to encourage her kindergartners and first graders to run around the track.

After her students completed two and a half miles over a series of physical education classes they each received a book paid for by the Brittonkill PTSA.

"I wanted to give the little ones an incentive to run and I know how they love books," Ms. Turner explained. "It's worked out great. They're excited to run and it encourages them to read."

Ms. Turner started her Run to Read program this year as a way to instill the importance of exercise in Tamarac Elementary School's youngest students.

Each time students completed half a mile around the track during their class, Ms. Turner

pulled out a poster with tree frog footprints drawn on it. To the delight of students, Ms. Turner placed a star on one of the five toes on the tree frog's foot to show their progress.

When students completed their two and a half miles, they each received a book. The books were chosen by Tamarac Elementary School's library staff and paid for by the Brittonkill PTSA.

"Students were so excited to receive books," Ms. Turner said. "The program was just a trial run this year but I'll definitely do it again next year."

Principal Karen Lederman thanked the PTSA for agreeing to help support the program.

"I can't say enough about the Brittonkill PTSA," Mrs. Lederman said. "This is just another example of how they are always there for our students."



Students Learn About Virus Research

Eighth grade students learning about immune systems and cell structures heard first-hand how a Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute graduate student is fighting the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

Jake Martin, who is pursuing a Ph.D. degree in chemical engineering, visited Tamarac's advanced biology and life sciences classes on November 19 to talk about his research.

"I wanted them to see there is someone here in the area working on this problem," explained Tamarac science teacher Rebecca Tennyson. "It's good to show students what careers are available in sciences."

Viruses are so small they cannot be viewed with light microscopes, Mr. Martin told students. But they still cause a variety of diseases such as the common cold, the flu, rabies and AIDS.

Mr. Martin explained because viruses can mutate, they can be difficult to fight.

That is why scientists create different vaccines every year to combat the flu because the influenza virus mutates and becomes resistant to medicines.

Viruses attach themselves to cells in the body, breaking through the cell membrane to inject their viral DNA into the cell. Viruses then reproduce, often destroying the cell from within and then infecting other cells.

"That's what causes disease. That's what makes you sick," Mr. Martin said.

Working in laboratories at RPI, Mr. Martin explained his team looks for a way to prevent the HIV virus from attaching to cells. That would prevent them from reproducing and spreading in the body.

"Because the HIV virus becomes part of your immune system's DNA, it weakens it over a period of years and you become susceptible to disease," Mr. Martin said.

Pink Hair for a Good Cause



When custodian Larry Blanchard told coworkers he would dye his hair pink if students could raise \$1,000 for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, they thought he was kidding.

But seeing Mr. Blanchard walk the school hallways with his crop of bright, pink hair, everyone

at Tamarac schools knows he's a man of his word.

"It was just a fun way to help students raise money for a good cause," explained Mr. Blanchard. "I've had family and friends who've been impacted by cancer so why not if it helps raise money for research."

Tamarac senior Lindsay Doyle, president of the High School Key Club, said Mr. Blanchard's offer to dye his hair pink was a big help in their efforts to raise money for the American Cancer Society.

Students had already raised hundreds of dollars before Mr. Blanchard made his \$1,000 challenge. Once people found out Mr. Blanchard would dye his hair pink, students quickly were able to meet the challenge through donations and selling pink hair extensions and pink ribbons.

"We raised just over \$1,000," Lindsay said. "The fundraising fits in with Key Club's mission."

Key Club is a student-led organization which provides students opportunities to improve their communities through volunteer work. Key Club organizations are sponsored by local Kiwanis organizations.

As Mr. Blanchard went about his work, school employees and students often joked with him about his hair color. But not only does he not mind, he's already volunteering for the next fundraiser.

"The school's going to need new defibrillators. I told students if they could raise the money, I'd dye my hair blood red," he said.



Middle School Starts Character Education Program

The Character Education program that has helped students at Tamarac Elementary School has been expanded to the Middle School this year.

“We want students to realize that character is district-wide. No matter what building you’re in, displaying good character is what we do at Tamarac,” said Assistant Principal Chris Rockwell.

For years, Tamarac Elementary School has had a Character Education program in place. Monthly themes such as self control and respect are promoted through daily announcements and activities.

“It’s certainly had a positive impact on our students,” said Principal Karen Lederman. “It’s always something the students are cognizant of. For example, we can walk into the

cafeteria and say ‘self-control’ and the students immediately know what we’re talking about.”

Expanding the Character Education program to the Middle School was an initiative that was identified as a district priority for the 2010-11 school year, Mr. Rockwell noted.

The Middle School has adopted elements of the Elementary School program, such as using the same monthly themes. Student recognition has also been expanded, including announcing Students of the Month in front of classmates instead of handing out the awards individually.

“I think it’s important to recognize students in front of their peers, to see what they’ve done and motivate all students to make good decisions,” said Middle School Counselor Susan Grimmick.



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