School bells ready to ring

Local districts set with new programs, facilities, personnel

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Students returning to school in Bergenfield, Dumont and New Milford next week can look forward to new academic programs, greeting new personnel and using new facilities as the 2007-08 academic year gets off the ground.

Bergenfield

Schools Superintendent Dr. Michael Kuchar said that there are going to be many new changes in the district in the upcoming school year.

At Bergenfield High School, a ninth grade Success Academy will be implemented. "The academy is designed to increase the percentage of freshmen attaining high academic standards," Kuchar said.

The new project is also designed to help smooth the transition between eighth grade and ninth grade.

In another development, the Bergenfield Alternative High School which opened this year, will move into the now-unused St. Mary's School in Dumont in September.

"This will dovetail with our shared services with the New Milford and Dumont schools to open a middle school and high school academy for students with autism in September 2008," he said.

Kuchar said an alternative middle school will also open at South Presbyterian Church during the new school year.

"Teachers of alternative school programs were trained during the summer on project based learning techniques to provide more hands on learning in the alternative programs," he said.

The Tri-Valley Academy will expand as well to "meet the needs of more children, and also save taxpayers the cost of out-of-district tuition," Kuchar said.

In all seven of the district's schools and at all grade levels, the district has integrated state of the art technologies into instruction that will enable every student to be actively engaged in learning.

Classes will be equipped with Smartboards, eight mobile laptop carts, and high-speed Internet access in all facilities.

"Technology can and will, level the playing field for all students, and especially for students with special needs," Kuchar said.

On a more traditional note, the district has added a new K-5 language arts textbook series.

And, at Lincoln School, the district will open a new state-of-the-art "cybrary" or computer driven library.

"We look to have cybraries in all seven schools in the very near future," the superintendent said.

Addressing the district's facilities Kuchar stressed that the three Rs - repairs, renovations and replacements - have been under way at the schools.

"There has been an intense focus on improving the interior and exterior of all school facilities, ensuring safe and healthy learning environments for all staff and students," he said.

"From roofs to windows, class-rooms to lockers, lighting to flooring and landscaping to sports fields.

With regard to sports fields, Kuchar said the high school stadium has been repaired.

Other improvements include a new parking lot at Lincoln School and an initiative to change all outdated lighting fixtures throughout the district.

The school district is also collaborating with the borough to refurbish the high school track.

"We have also joined forces with the Bergenfield Police Department to apply for a U.S. Department of Justice Secure our Schools grant to add cameras and other safety equipment to all seven schools," the superintendent said.

As the result of staff retirements, the district has also hired 21 new teachers.

Dumont

With a new school year set to begin, Dumont school officials are focusing in a big way on security issues within the district.

Schools Superintendent Dr. James Montesano said a joint committee of district and the police department personnel did an "entire review" of the district's security needs.

"We utilized information provided by New Jersey Homeland Security and the state Department of Education, along with the expertise of law enforcement, to complete a security review of all of the district's schools," he said.

Montesano said that, as a result of the review, district has acquired and will be installing 109 video cameras - 55 outside and 54 inside the five schools.

"There will also be a live television feed into Dumont police headquarters," Montesano said.

Montesano then said procedures for visitors have also been addressed.

"We are now installing a software system that will require every visitor to scan in a form of identification that will verify their identity and will match their identification with the National Sexual Predator Database," he said.

Visitors will then be given a printed identification badge.

"And all Dumont school employees will be wearing photo identification badges," he said.

Montesano said that both staff and students will carry identifica-
tion photo cards. All exterior doors will be locked before and after school, and the boys and girls laboratories will also be locked and can only be opened by using the card to swipe the door to get in," he said.

The district will also be implementing a Reverse 9-1-1 system "that will contact parents in the event of a school-based emergency," Montesano said.

"This is a big thing for us." In terms of curriculum, Montesano said the district is implementing a new preschool inclusion program, as well as a kindergarten inclusion program.

"This will enable us to bring more special-education students into a regular educational environment," he said. "It's a relatively unique program."

Montesano added that the kindergarten program is part of a shared service arrangement with Bergen County Special Services. At the high school, Montesano said new courses will include Advanced Placement Government, AP Chemistry, and a sign language course.

As to facilities, Montesano said the last round of construction should be completed this fall at Grant and Lincoln schools where a large gymnasium and media center are being added to each building.

There are 17 new teachers in the district, and a new principal at Grant School.

Monica Crapis comes to the district from Bergen County Special Services where she was principal of the Brownstone School. She replaces Kevin Donohue, who retired.

Montesano said the 17 new teachers were also the result of retirements.

And with regard to enrollment, Montesano said that for the first time in more than 20 years, there will be more than 900 students at Dumont High School.

New Milford
Still riding high after national exposure on the WB 11 television program "Schooled," district officials are taking advantage of $60,000 in funding provided by the Office Max Corp. a sponsor of the show.

New Milford High School Principal Eric Sheninger said that, as a result of the program, the high school now has "an entirely new computer lab" equipped with 26 new computer laptops and two Smartboards.

"There is also a mobile Smartbook system with laptop and projector," he said.

Sheninger also said that two seldom used rooms in the high school are now being converted into state-of-the-art classrooms.

"C-110 will become a large-group instruction room with seating for 49 students," he said, "while C-109 will become a brand new fine arts room."

Sheninger said C-109 also has a new floor after the April flood destroyed the previous wooden floor.

"The high school will also acquire two 50-inch plasma televisions, one for the AV room and the other for the school's entrance," he said.

The school is also acquiring three classrooms worth of desks and chairs. plus an entire classroom replete with graphing calculators, for the math department, Schools Superintendent Bert Ammerman said, all thanks to Office Max funding.

"It would have taken us three years to acquire this material if we planned for it," he said.

As for curriculum, Ammerman said both the high school and David E. Owens Middle School will be introducing Italian as part of a revamped language program.

Under the program, sixth-grade students will receive eight weeks of Italian and eight weeks of Spanish.

"Then in the seventh and eighth grades, they will have a choice of which language to take," he said, adding that instruction in whatever language they chose will take place five times a week.

Ammerman then said that a computer application class has been designed for the freshman class.

"This will accomplish two needs," he said. "First, this will be a practical arts course that the state requires for graduation, and then we will integrate this course across the entire curriculum."

Ammerman said that every academic department will take part in the course.

"We will be combining the theory with the practical," he said.

In another curriculum area, Ammerman said that the science program has been adjusted with all incoming freshman required to take biology, followed by chemistry in their second year and physics in the third.

At the middle school, students will now receive one period of math - pre-algebra or algebra - and another math period based on their individual abilities, Ammerman said.

In language arts, students will receive 40 minutes of instruction in basic language skills, such as spelling and vocabulary, and an additional 40 minutes in what is being called "communications."

"Ammerman said the communications instruction will be divided into four units for students.

The first marking period will be devoted to study skills; the second will focus on writing; the third will consist of a literature unit; and the fourth will have students engage in public speaking.

Ammerman said that these skills are based on state testing and will provide students with better preparation.

At Berkley and B.F. Gibbs schools, a new inter-articulation program involving the teachers and principals of both schools is being implemented.

"Teachers from one school will visit with teachers from the other," he said.

As an example, Ammerman explained that second-grade teachers from the Gibbs school will visit with second-grade teachers from

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Berkley.

"There will be a lot of dialogue between the two schools," he said.

"Teachers will talk to teachers, and both building principals will also visit each other's schools and observe and train teachers," he said.

Ammeman said that the goal of the program is for each school to have "the same objectives as well as the same delivery of instruction."

A five-year maintenance program for all of the district's schools is going into effect this year.

"Our principals are putting together their recommendations to the board of education, and will present them to the school board when they tour all of the school buildings Oct 8," Ammerman said.

"There needs to be constant upkeep and maintenance of what you have," he said.

The superintendent said that one major goal of the program is to have one-fifth of all of the district's classrooms painted each year.

In terms of new staff, Ammerman said 25 new teachers will be starting in the district next week.

As of July 1, the high school has a new assistant principal, Louis Manuppelli; and the Gibbs school welcomes Scott Davies as its new principal.

Transfiguration Academy

A new science curriculum awaits returning students at Transfiguration Academy.

The school is working in conjunction with the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken to create a program titled "Engineering Our Future."

The curriculum will focus on developing problem-solving and creative skills from kindergarten on up.

Students will accomplish that by applying what they learn to projects using sophisticated computer software, like computer-aided design (CAD).

The school has already changed the name of its Science Fair to Engineering Fair.

Technology is on the fast track at the school's two campuses - New Milford and Bergenfield - and there are plans to upgrade the school's Internet servers and network.

Administrators also said there are plans to replace older computers with newer models and bring in more Smartboards.

The school is also starting a new Pre-K 2+ program at the Bergenfield campus that will feature an early-childhood learning center, a computer lab and outdoor play area.

That program is designed for young children who are mature enough to enter a pre-K program but miss the October cutoff for kindergarten admission most schools use.

This "cybrary" - the classroom library of the 21st century - at Lincoln School in Bergenfield is the first of its kind in the district and will be up and running on the first day of school.
Summer break means no work for students, but not so for these workmen putting in flooring for a new multi-purpose room at Washington School in Bergenfield that will be ready for use when the 2007-08 school year begins next week.
Summer work at Grant School in Dumont includes a new gymnasium and all-purpose room that is also expected to ready for the school’s reopening next week.
Repairs have been made to the Bergenfield High School stadium that was in need of attention for some time.
Room C-109, a new fine arts room at New Milford High School, is replete with a new floor.

Finishing touches are being put on Room C-110, a large-group instruction room at New Milford High School. The new room will have state-of-the-art technology and accommodate 49 students at one time.

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