

Coventry planning on virtual classes at CHS

Pilot program will afford opportunities to participate in online classes

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COVENTRY — Coventry High School will begin its Virtual High School (VHS) pilot program in September to provide students with other curriculum opportunities.

Assistant Principal for Student Services Lynn Burke explained that the first year of this program will be a test run.

It will allow seniors the chance to take courses that may not be available otherwise.

Burke said that the VHS will also be able to offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes such as AP Biology and

AP Psychology.

Because of a decrease in enrollment from 18 to six students in the AP biology class this year, having the VHS allows the students an opportunity to still enroll in this class even though it was cut from the face-to-face classroom.

"Coventry has been behind on this," said School Committee Chairwoman Katherine Patenaude. "I had looked into virtual high school months ago because there's been a push from the Department of Education to look into virtual curriculum — especially in AP classes, when you don't get a full enrollment, you should have another opportunity for

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Burke explained that the virtual courses offered will be tied into a student's regular school day.

Students enrolled will gather in the library's media center daily to participate in the 90-minute online class, under the supervision of another teacher. These virtual courses will take place during one of the normally scheduled class periods.

She said that two teachers from Coventry high school will be teaching the VHS; one for AP biology and one in AP psychology.

Patenaude said that the teachers will be receiving professional development during the summer to learn how to teach the virtual courses. Teachers from the VHS are given requirements in order to keep the students up-to-date on their coursework.

Requirements include those stipulating that teachers must respond to student's questions within 24 hours, that a student's progress is monitored, that parents have access to the student's courses, and that student grades must be posted every two weeks.

Burke said that currently 26 seniors have applied to the pilot program. These students are also given the opportunity to enroll in elective courses such as Chinese, German, Russian, Computer Science, Engineering, Video Gaming and Pre-Veterinary medicine.

She said that the cost for the VHS

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is minimal. She explained that updated computers have to be purchased, but that is "something which we need anyways."

"Mr. Erinakes and Mr. Convery are extremely supportive on all aspects and they are behind this," she said of the school administration's stance on the venture. "We're excited to give opportunities to kids that mirror what they would do in college and in the work force. Online learning is not for everybody but it's an opportunity for the students."

Patenaude explained that many other school districts have been participating in the virtual high school for a while.

She said that in the future, she thinks the Department of Education will put regulations in requiring that cities and towns offer virtual learning.

"This is our future, if you don't want kids to fall through the cracks you need computers, and take formative assessments to see where the kids' education is," she said. "From my point of view I think it's the only way we will be getting kids not to fall through the cracks."