

Coventry School Committee

Capstone on block at CHS

Proficiency-based graduation could depend on portfolio

JEREMIAH RYAN

kceditor@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Students from Mrs. Viccione's and Mrs. Hackett's classes at Tiogue Elementary showed off their skills using the district-issued Chromebooks before members of the Coventry School Committee meeting got down to official business, viewing a presentation on proficiency-based graduation requirement (PBGR) regulations by Coventry High Principal Mike Hobin and a voting on a revision to the district by-laws. Members also discussed a FY14 financial audit and later in the evening heard about health code violations found in district cafeterias and an update on all-day kindergarten and RIDE grants from district Superintendent Dr. Mike Almeida.

At the meeting's commencement, though, Committee Chair Kathy Patenaude lauded the Feinstein Middle School presentation of *Beauty and the Beast*. She was joined in her praise by all of the other committee members before the meeting moved into its business agenda.

"It was incredible," Patenaude began. "I want to publicly thank Lori LeBrun, Kristen LaChance, and Kristen St. Sauveur. The production was just amazing. I can't thank them for spending I don't know how many Saturdays since October with those students," she praised before repeating, "the production was just amazing."

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Capstone being replaced at CHS?

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Jim Pierson added that students did a great job with set designs, costumes, and behind the scenes work.

"I had a hard time coming to the realization that these were middle school students," he said.

Ann Dickson, who in her praise revealed that she was an usher at Trinity Repertory in Providence, praised the number of students participating.

"It was almost an all-school production," she said. "It was a joy to see."

"It was a great way for the winter to end," Vice Chair Dave Florio said to laughter. "It lifted everyone in the auditorium."

Hobin explained the different options for PBGR after Tiogue students and Principal Louise Seitsinger showed what was happening at the lakeside school. He discussed Capstone projects and portfolios completed in order to graduate from Coventry High and the different experiences students have throughout high school on their way to graduation.

"We really wanted to strengthen our college- and career-readiness," Hobin offered. "We want students to be able to answer the question, what are you going to be doing after high school?" he added, "because that's more important than their time in high school."

Hobin explained the process undergone by teams from Coventry to explore what other systems were doing, and what they found.

"We were really going over the top compared to what other districts were doing," he said of what the district discovered. He then explained further efforts to explain how the three systems utilized in Coventry had their pros and cons weighed.

Capstone projects, portfolios, and comprehensive course assessments were all dissected, Hobin explained. As a result, the Capstone program was discontinued, while the portfolio process was streamlined and an exhibition was built in.

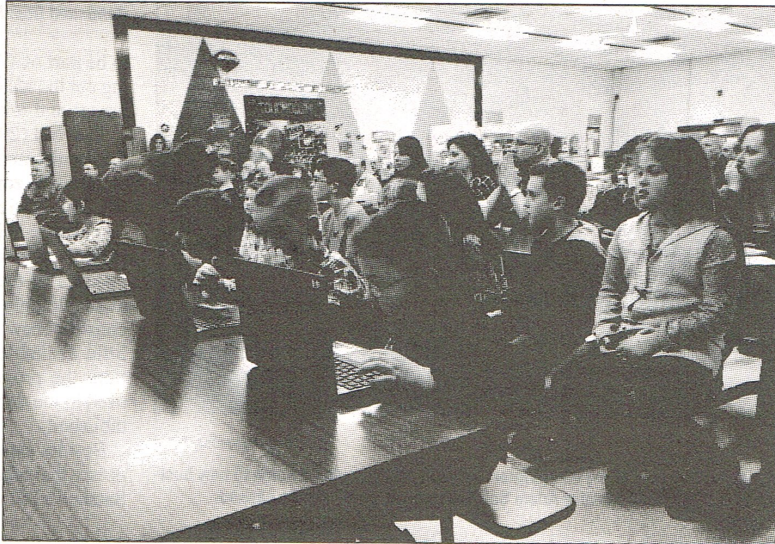
"That is in the regulations," Hobin said of the presentation of the portfolio. "I can't get away from that."

Common comprehensive course assessments — common tasks, midterms, and finals — are also being utilized, with alignment to Common Core State Standards. Also, the Aspen gradebook identifies proficient pieces, Hobin explained, and creates a PBGR transcript in Aspen.

"All of us — students, teachers, administrators, and parents — can now track what a kid has and doesn't have," he said. "And that is a major plus for parents."

Portfolios are judged on nine NEASC learner expectations, from reading and writing to community and career exploration and independent learning.

When it came to independent learning, Hobin was ready to depart from traditional models, explaining his belief that outside activities — like an Eagle Scout project, or participation on a dance or drill team — could be utilized to meet learner expectations and not just activities and work per-



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Tiogue Elementary first-graders work through math exercises on Chromebooks will their fourth-grade computer buddies look on at last night's Coventry School Committee meeting at Tiogue.

formed in school.

While there is still some work to be done, Hobin seemed optimistic that the school and district were heading in the right direction to help students become college- and career-ready without exhausting district resources.

"I feel like the Class of '15 and '16 are in great shape," he said, ultimately telling Almeida that it could be presented to the school committee for a vote by the start of the 2015-16 school year.

"Obviously this is big," Patenaude told Hobin. "As a school committee member I have to trust this presentation and where you're coming from. I have no problem — I think it's for the best, and I like the idea that you're coming up with something different. I don't think it's any less; it's just different."

Committee member Donna Kalunian also praised the change in philosophy. She especially liked the idea of presenting a portfolio, since its presentation helps develop and display skills students will need after graduation.

The elimination of the Capstone also clears off a half-year class, making room for another elective on students' schedules, Hobin explained to answer a question posed by Dickson. To answer another question, about cost, he explained that the only long-term costs to be accounted for were associated with after-school presentations in the future, but in the shorter-term there could be costs associated with summer work to prepare the new system.

"We're getting into the budget season now," Dickson explained, "and if there are any costs we will need to know about them."

Prior to Hobin's presentation, Tiogue first-graders led by Susan Hackett and Chris Viccione and their fourth-grade computer buddies got to work showing how they were using technology in the classroom.

From Chromebooks to the Hour of Code done earlier this year in Coventry's schools, the district has implemented technology into the curriculum. To help solidify students' ability to remember basic math facts, the students showed a program called Reflex Math.

"It looks like it's all fun but it's rooted in purpose," Viccione explained.

Students then utilized the Chromebooks to show how they maximized their learning of math facts before moving on to a demonstration of how they learn to write code, the latter utilizing an Angry Birds theme to make a useful lesson more fun than work.

Viccione and Hackett facilitated the presentation, and by the time school committee members were walking around to see the various programs students were engaged in, the interest in the 21st-century learning was palpable.

Fourth-graders also showed how they use the Chromebooks for science using a program called Circuit Builder.

"To have them actually interacting with the program is great," said Tiogue Principal Louise Seitsinger before thanking the students and ending their portion of the program and beginning a presentation herself on what was going on at Tiogue, from standardized testing to school-wide initiatives.

Almeida said after Hobin's PBGR presentation that audits of FY 2014 were complete on the town and school side and would be sent via courier delivery to school committee members sometime this week and could be discussed at a future meeting.

The committee then voted to adopt the revision of the school committee bylaws unanimously, 5-0.

As the Daily Times went to press, Director of the Coventry Regional Career & Technical Center Lori Ferguson was addressing violations of the health code in district cafeterias and Almeida's report was on deck.