

COVENTRY

Hopkins Hill school looks to implement AM program

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COVENTRY — Hopkins Hill Elementary may soon become the home of a new before-school morning program, according to Principal Kathy Tancrelle, who presented the Coventry School Committee with a proposal last week to begin the preliminary steps in implementation.

Tancrelle said that somewhere between 45 and 46 percent of the students at Hopkins Hill are eligible for free/reduced lunch, which indicates

there are a lot of working families in the community. Many parents at the school have a significant need for before-school daycare services, given that Hopkins Hill is one of the later schools in the district beginning each morning at 9 a.m.

"Many parents have to be well on their way to work before that," Tancrelle said. "And that's one additional transition those children have to make."

In the past there was a YMCA before-school program that was well-used by families in the district, the

principal explained, but parents have been expressing a need for a similar program to come back to Coventry.

"We know the funding is tight so the program would have to pay for itself," said Tancrelle. "We were thinking of using our teachers and TAs to staff the program and pay them the Academy rate."

As a Title I school, Hopkins Hill students are offered special programs before and after school which teachers currently staff and are compensated for through the academy program. Tancrelle suggested the be-

fore-school program would be similar, and the money parents pay to use the service would go back to pay the teachers for their time.

"Basically we would do something before school and only on days when school is in session, with a drop-off at 7:15 and by 8:45 children are either going to breakfast or busses are dropping students off. It wouldn't be as structured as a Title Academy, but it would still have a learning base where they might play math or literacy games or teachers can check homework. Many of these

children are on their own in the morning so to have someone to make sure they're organized for the day is valuable."

Tancrelle conducted a brief, informal survey with faculty members at the school to see if teachers would be interested. There are currently five teachers and two TAs willing to be part of the program. The district would need roughly \$975 per week. To make the program self-sufficient, they would need about 34 families at

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\$30 per week or 40 families at \$25 per week.

"The next step is to survey families to see who would be interested," said Tancelle. "The families do take advantage of the title academics and they're usually full."

Tancelle indicated there is a

strong need from parents in the community for this type of service.

"A lot of it is because parents need to ease that burden of sending their child to daycare five days a week," she explained. "I think this will really benefit not only students but some of the families we have who need support."

Coventry School Committee Vice Chairperson David Florio said he believes in the effectiveness of before

and after-school programs, having been a participant before as a volunteer.

"I'm fully in favor of this," he said at a school committee meeting last Thursday. "Twenty-five to \$50 a week is a bargain compared to what parents pay elsewhere, and even to have the students not be home alone. For a lot of children the school is their extended family and they feel more comfortable there than they are

at home."

There are still some kinks to be worked out, like whether a school nurse will have to be on duty before school, but the committee gave the go-ahead to begin formally surveying families. Tancelle added if the program works at Hopkins Hill it might be worth bringing to other schools in the district.

"I think this is a great idea for your school," said committee chair-

person Katherine Patenaude. "If you can make it work it makes a lot of sense."

"I think this is a great starting point," said Coventry Superintendent Craig Levis. "The focus of this is on benefitting families and students."

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