County and JSRCC to expand pre-college classes

By Jim Ridolfi
for The Mechanicsville Local

Hanover County Public Schools will partner with J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College to offer county students a chance to exit high school with an Associate’s college degree.

The College Academy program also has the potential to save parents of those college-bound students thousands of dollars.

Hanover currently offers Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Limited Dual Enrollment opportunities for its students, but the new College Academy is looking for an increase in interested students.

Campuses are planned at Lee-Davis High School and Patrick Henry High School and each is expected to attract about 100 students. All Hanover students are eligible for the program.

“Atlee and Hanover students would not be left out of the mix,” Michael Gill, assistant superintendent of instructional leadership, said. “Atlee [High School] students who are interested and want to take advantage of this opportunity would take classes at Lee-Davis. Hanover High students would travel to Patrick Henry every other day.”

School Board member Norman Sulser, Cold Harbor District, said the academy fills a desperate need in Hanover County. “Only about one-fourth of the students taking Dual Enrollment or Advanced Placement are receiving college credit for their work,” he said.

With a recently passed state law that mandates all school districts offer similar programs, Gill said the timeline for Hanover is aggressive and anticipates student recruitment efforts to begin in Fall 2015.

JSRCC executive vice president Genene LeRosen said the college is partnered with programs in Henrico and Goochland counties.

LeRosen said students are approached in eighth grade regarding the program and guidance is provided as to which courses to take.

Teachers who participate in the program are required to have Master’s degrees.

Sulser said the program is overdue in Hanover County, which has offered one academic course for college credit in past years.

Sulser has pointed to considerable savings that could be enjoyed by parents who enroll their kids in the program.

“The Dual Enrollment (DE) — Advance College Academy (ACA) with Reynolds College would have a fee of approximately $85 per course hour times 60 hours which is approximately $5,000.”

He added, “This compares favorably versus the cost of the first two years of four-year college/ university such as Virginia Tech of $48,000 (tuition, room and board) or a financial savings of $43,000 to the student and parent.”

LeRosen and Gill both agreed the program fills an important void in Hanover County and also complies with House Bill 1184.

“When I came on board in July, one of the things I quickly learned was that the expansion for Dual Enrollment opportunities was something that was of interest and needed in Hanover County,” Gill said.

Sulser said he is happy with his persistent efforts to offer expanded Dual Enrollment classes are close to becoming a reality.

“I anticipate that this proposal by Dr. Gill will be approved by the entire School Board. It is such a win-win for the students, parents and School Board,” Sulser said.

He described the new program in seasonal terms. “It’s the best Christmas present we can give to students and parents of Hanover County.”

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