

Students Receive Another Option

Fine Arts Academy To Launch Next Fall

By EMILY SHARRER

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HARRISONBURG — A Fine arts academy in Harrisonburg City Schools is a go for the 2013-14 school year, according to organizer J. R. Snow, fine arts coordinator for city schools.

Ninth- and 10th- graders will be the first batch of students eligible to join the academy, which provides a tailored course load for students interested in the arts.

The academy is set up like the division's existing science, technology, engineering and math academies, which began at Skyline and Thomas Harrison middle schools and Harrisonburg High School this year. They create a path for students interested in those subjects, often referred to collectively as STEM subjects.

After months of planning, Snow said, it's exciting to see the academy move one step closer to a starting date. Planning began this spring and a tentative proposal for the academy was first presented to the Harrisonburg City School Board at the beginning of October, Snow said.

"It has been a wonderful process with enough time to really develop the kind of program we're interested in providing," Snow said. "I think it is just exciting that we can kind of progress out of the vision stage and into the concrete reality stage of the program."

Anyone interested in learning more about the academy, which eventually would be offered at all three levels in the K-12 division — elementary, middle and high school — is invited to three information sessions: Jan. 10 at Harrisonburg High School, Jan. 14 at Skyline Middle School or Jan. 15 at Thomas Harrison Middle School. Each session begins at 7 p.m.

"The sessions are open to anybody who would want to hear [about the academy]," Snow said. "[We will] explain to those families what kind of education their students are going to be getting if they're interested."

Academy students would continue to attend classes at their regular school but their curriculum, with a focus on various disciplines within the arts, would be different than that of their peers.

At each grade level, the academy would be a little bit different.

At the elementary level, Snow said, students would be offered classes and a program outside regular class time. The tentative plan is for the division to partner with the Explore More Discovery Museum in downtown Harrisonburg to create a community fine arts center.

At the middle school level, the fine arts curriculum would be modeled after the STEM academy: Students would have a special block of time devoted to fine arts curriculum, which Snow said would introduce concepts of collaborative and community learning.

At the high school level, the curriculum is more in-depth. Students would be asked to choose one or two “strands” to follow from such areas as creative writing, drama, visual art, dance and either instrumental or choral music.

Students would take a mix of electives and academy-specific classes that Snow said would be interdisciplinary and experimental. The academy classes would have a different focus each year, either on history, concepts or culture.

Specifics about the cost of the academy are forthcoming, according to Snow.

Contact Emily Sharrer at 5746286 or esharrer@dnronline.com