

Alternative School reports on move

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

“Advocacy with accountability,” said Holyoke school board president Dan Kafka. He was describing Holyoke Alternative High School after director Clark Ginapp reported on the school’s progress during the Jan. 19 school board meeting.

Supt. Bret Miles said they’ve seen the alternative school program start to take shape this second year, and he’s seen an incredible sense of accountability.

Budget considerations found the alternative school moving from its independent site at 430 E. Denver St. to the northeast corner of Holyoke High School in late November.

Ginapp said the students have been amazingly cooperative, and the move has worked out fine.

Reporting from a recent alternative school parent committee meeting, Ginapp said they’re appreciative there is an alternative school.

“I didn’t know how important it was until I started working over there,” said Ginapp. “I hope it can be sustainable.”

With 13-15 students this year, Ginapp noted he started a weekly culinary arts class. At their new location in HHS, they have access to a stove and oven, which makes the class even better.

This semester, Ginapp started a speech class. He acknowledged the problem is attendance. When a class is taught, it has to be set at a certain time, so students have to be there.

“Ninety percent of the problem with my kids is getting to class at a certain time,” said the director. “They have so many other things pulling at them to keep them from school.”

Students are asked to call Ginapp if they’re absent and to be honest with him. If they’re under age 16, their parents are to call too.

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At Alternative HS, Ginapp said he's tried to not be as heavy-handed. "I believe in the individual's right to choose and to understand their choices make a difference as to where they're going."

Armed with student transcripts from HHS counselor Summer Maloney, Ginapp tracks daily student progress in an effort to help students graduate on time. He completes a print-out of what each student does each day.

Minimum lesson goal is seven lessons per day. That is comparable to the traditional HHS day which involves seven class periods plus the ILT period.

Students work online for the most part, but also take classes such as choir, art, relationships and English as a Second Language (ESL) at HHS.

Ginapp targets credits required for graduation, and students receive daily updates detailing their progress. "We have grades—they're serious," said Ginapp. "It's not 'cake' school."

Samples were shared of the detailed student progress report, as well as the lesson goal report which showed the student accomplishment as compared to the minimum lesson goal of seven per day.

"I love Alternative High," said Ginapp, thanking the board for the opportunity to serve as its director. "Please come visit," he added.

Editor's Note: Three additional stories from the Jan. 19 Board of Education meeting may be found elsewhere in this edition of The Holyoke Enterprise.

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