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Planting the SEEDS of education

MHS principal discusses grant-funded program with MAPS board

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MANISTEE — A new program, completely funded by grant money, will be putting down roots at Manistee High School after Thanksgiving.

The Manistee Area Public Schools Board of Education learned from MHS principal Andy Huber that the SEEDS program, which was formerly housed at CASMAN Academy, would be finding a new home.

Huber told the board members they may be familiar with the program through the community garden plots the SEEDS students have been built in the community.

“Really, that’s kind of what, in a nutshell, SEEDS is all about,” he said. “It’s roots, it’s ecologically based, it’s to promote a local connection with the environment and stewardship.

“And also, for us, it’s an opportunity to have an after-school program for kids who typically don’t have things to do after school. If you’re not in sports or a direct club at MHS, there’s really not a whole lot for the kids to do. So, this is a great opportunity for kids to actually generate ideas of things they’d like to do and if they get a few kids to be interested in it, SEEDS is there to support it.”

Huber told the board that Kevin Summers will be the SEEDS after-school program site coordinator at MHS, and he will be at the school full time. He formerly served at CASMAN, and Huber said some of the current programs at that school will remain in place.

SEEDS will be supporting extended after-school tutoring, enhancing the summer school programs and working to extend some of the programs already in place at the school. In addition, Huber said Summers will facilitate the new programs the students decide they would like to have in place by reaching out to the community and finding professional instructors.

In northern Michigan, the SEEDS program is coordinated out of Traverse City, and there are currently several schools that participate, including Bear Lake and Brethren. One of the things Huber said he’s encouraged by is the sustainability of the program because there are still three and a half years left of grant funding.

“It’s not just something that’s going to come into the schools and sounds great and you get it going and all the sudden it’s not there next year,” he added. “We’ve got an opportunity to really see this grow in the next few years.”

Though he wasn’t certain, Huber said he believed there may also be an opportunity to reapply for the grant if the program has exhibited some success.

“When you go back to the new (high school) building being built, we always talked a lot about having

community programming there long after the school day ended," Huber recalled, adding he believed this was a great opportunity for that to take place without placing the burden on the district.

Another benefit Huber cited was having one more person available to the students full-time, to work with students who might be struggling academically or looking for a way to get involved after school.

"He'll be there to help make those connections during the school day," Huber said, "and then make connections with the community after school."

Huber said "the dream" would also be to get MHS staff members involved to help facilitate some of the programming the students come up with. One example he used was the recent interest in an environmental club shown by some of the Advanced Placement Environmental Science students.

However, it's been difficult for teacher Kevin Postma to have the time and resources to have this in place. Through SEEDS, Huber said Postma may be able to draw support from the community to make that a reality.

SEEDS essentially offers MHS an opportunity to extend programming, Huber said, adding the intention is not to duplicate. He used the wood shop program as an example of this, stating those students could be asked to design and build raised beds for a community garden.

"It's a way for the kids to really be involved in creating some after-school activities that are totally for their interests," Huber said, "and not something we just created."

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