

It's back to school for 1,150 kids on Monday

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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PW-S summer program draws a crowd of students interested in creative classes

It's back to school Monday for the more than 1,150 elementary and middle school students enrolled in the Port Washington-Saukville Summer School program.

"Enrollment is higher than normal with registrations still coming in," said Thomas Jefferson Middle School Principal Arlan Galarowicz, who oversees the summer program.

But it's not business as usual at the school during the six-week summer session that runs mornings from June 25 through July 27. Even traditional classes like reading and math are a little more laid back, and many of the offerings are designed to make learning fun.

For instance, courses such as engineering and design, digital photography, fishing and gardening fill up quickly. The Kitchen Capers cooking class, nature science and swimming, just to name a few, are also popular offerings.

"The smiles on the faces of children engaged in learning during the summer are just incredible," Galarowicz said. "I wish I could bottle those smiles and use some during the regular school year."

With about two-thirds of the Port Washington-Saukville School District's elementary and middle school students enrolled in summer classes, going to school in June and July has become the thing to do, but that's not the case in other districts, Galarowicz said.

"We're not a typical public school system, and this isn't a typical summer program," he said.

The district owes its robust summer session, which is so large it requires a staff of about 100 teachers and other staff members, to a long history of offering both remedial and enrichment programs outside of the regular school year and a continued commitment to the summer program, Galarowicz said.

"Summer school illustrates this district's focus on education," he said. "By offering a full complement of both remedial and enrichment courses, we are really trying to meet the needs of every student."

The summer session also gives the district the opportunity to experiment with new teaching techniques that can be incorporated into the regular school curriculum if they are successful. For instance, the middle school debuted a computer-based math course designed to better address the individual abilities of students last summer, then added it to the regular school year in fall with great results, Galarowicz said.

Classes at Port Washington High School began Monday, June 20, for the 150 students enrolled in the summer session, Assistant Principal Dave Bernander, who coordinates the

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summer program, said.

The school, which historically only offered remedial summer courses, has worked over the years to add preparatory and enrichment offerings. And instead of six-week sessions that can be impossible for working high school students to fit into their schedules, several of the courses take the form of one or two-week seminars.

Among the more popular classes are those that prepare students for advanced placement classes, Bernander said.

“A lot of kids are discovering that it’s really worth it to come in for a week and get a really good jump on courses like AP literature,” he said.

Students can also earn credits in elective courses like art and physical education over the summer to free up their options during the regular school year.

“When I started here, all we offered were remedial classes and kids hated it,” Bernander said. “Now we’re doing it a little differently by offering courses they need and want, and they like it.”