

Back to class for summer starts Monday

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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More than 1,200 students in Port-Saukville district will participate in dozens of enrichment, remedial courses

It's back to school Monday for more than 1,200 students in the Port Washington-Saukville School District for whom going to school in summer is as normal as attending classes during the regular school year.

The five-week kindergarten through eighth-grade summer school program is comprehensive to say the least, offering 65 enrichment courses ranging from math, science and reading to fishing, in-line skating and cooking.

Organized and taught by a 110-person staff at Thomas Jefferson Middle School and Lincoln Elementary School, the summer program also offers a host of special education and remedial classes.

"We've had schools try to replicate our program because there just aren't many like it, not only in the state but in the nation," Middle School Principal Arlan Galarowicz, who oversees the summer program, said.

New offerings this year include Tri-Kids, a course that trains children in second through eighth grades to compete in triathlons, yoga, print-making and News in View, a course that teaches students how to make a news broadcast.

Among the most popular established classes are nature science, engineering, Music in Motion, Spanish, gardening and Managing Middle School, a course that introduces incoming fifth-graders to the middle school routine.

"Math has also become quite popular because of the technology we're using," Galarowicz said.

At Port Washington High School, summer school classes began June 17. About 225 students are taking at least one summer course, Assistant Principal Dave Bernander, who oversees the program, said.

Although high school offerings have traditionally focused on remedial education, the summer program offers a number of preparatory classes for advanced placement courses, as well as introductions to engineering and the DECA marketing and business program.

An increasingly attractive option for students is taking a gym class for credit during the summer to help fulfill their phy-ed requirement.

"That allows students room in their regular school schedule to take another AP (advanced placement) class or music," Bernander said.

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One of the most significant advantages of a comprehensive summer school program is that it gives both educators and students the opportunity to experiment, Galarowicz said.

Two years ago, the middle school tested an individual learning, computer-based math program in summer that was so successful it was used during the school year and laid the groundwork for a technology initiative that will be launched in September.

“We’ve also been able to use summer school classes to boost the confidence and enthusiasm of kids in subjects like math, and if we can do that, we’ve certainly accomplished something,” Galarowicz said. “I had two girls who at the start of summer school said, ‘We hate math.’ Five weeks later, not only had their test scores increased tremendously, they said math was their favorite subject.”

Port-Saukville summer school owes its success, in part, to its more than 40-year history. Started as a small undertaking at a time when districts could afford the up-front costs, it grew steadily into a program that administrators say is the envy of other school systems.

“I remember state officials coming to observe the program because it was such an exemplary summer school model,” said retired administrator Joe Groh, who in 1966 was assigned to run the fledgling program started in one of the buildings that is now part of the high school.

“There was no air conditioning, so it was unbearably hot. But when the middle school, which had air conditioning, opened in 1968, we were able to start adding more enrichment classes, and it just took off.”

By the time he retired in 1993, Groh said, summer school was extremely popular.

“There were a few people who always said it was nothing more than a baby-sitting service,” he said. “Call it what you want. The fact is, kids are coming to school in summer with smiles on their faces and they’re learning instead of sitting in front of the TV.”

A list of summer school bus routes is on page 5C of this week’s Ozaukee Press.