

School Board revamps NOVA

By Barbara Martin
Journal staff

Stevens Point Area Public School District Board members rejected Superintendent David Schuler's recommendation Monday and approved a plan that would keep first-graders out of the NOVA program next year.

Students already enrolled in the self-contained, multiaged NOVA classes at Jackson Environmental Discovery Center will remain in the program. First-graders who would have been accepted next fall into NOVA, which serves students identified as highly gifted and talented, would get out-of-classroom services at their neighborhood schools instead.

The decision against allowing first-graders into NOVA next year leaves school officials in a quandary about how to staff the remaining grades. Typically, NOVA's classes are multiaged with first and second grades together, third and fourth grades together and fifth and sixth grades together.

Next year's second-grade class is projected to have seven students, said Karen Halverson, assistant superintendent for curriculum, learning and student achievement.

Board member Christine Scott said her recommendation, which the board accepted in lieu of Schuler's, came out of the confusion surrounding the district's criteria for getting accepted into the gifted and talented and NOVA programs.

School officials and parents agreed that the district has been inconsistent in deciding who gets into NOVA. Some district materials say students have to test at the 91st percentile or higher on IQ, math and language arts tests to be admitted. Others put the number at the 95th or 98th percentiles.

Schuler's recommendation, which had the support of some NOVA parents, called for leaving NOVA intact next year and allowing first-graders who score in the 95th percentile or higher on IQ, math and language arts tests to be admitted.

He also asked the board to create a task force to study the district's programs for students identified as gifted

HOW THEY VOTED

In a split vote, Stevens Point Area Public School District Board members approved a new plan for the district's gifted and talented program and NOVA.

* Yes: John Martin, Robert Larson, Christine Scott, Elmer Fournier and Mary Thurmaier.

* No: Barbara Ruesch, James Harmon and Trudy Beth Peters.

* Absent: Michael O'Meara.

What they approved

* Restructure NOVA to have programming in home attendance schools.

* Hold NOVA students harmless in the sense that all students may finish program.

* Use Student Support Team referral process for identifying students for gifted/talented services.

* Allow First-grade students for the 2004-05 school year to receive service at their home attendance school.

and talented. The plan the board approved also creates a task force that will study the programs and report its findings to the Curriculum, Learning and Student Achievement Committee in January.

"I feel it was the right recommendation," Scott said.

Scott said she was uncomfortable about allowing first-graders into NOVA next year when there are such inequities in the services provided to gifted and talented students within NOVA and those who remain in their neighborhood schools.

This year, 53 students are enrolled in NOVA and spend the entire school day in classrooms with other gifted and talented students. More than 60 gifted and talented students remain in their neighborhood schools and meet with resource teacher Jean Hayden for out-of-classroom services for 30 minutes to one hour every six days.

Monday's decision followed a series of meetings debating the merits of NOVA versus the limited out-of-classroom services provided to students identified for the program but who choose to remain in their neighborhood schools.

Halverson recommended in February that the district phase out its NOVA program. She called for the district to reallocate the three teachers in the NOVA classrooms to provide more services to gifted and talented students at all of the elementary schools.

That created a firestorm, and NOVA supporters lobbied the district to keep the program and possibly expand it. Schuler said the recommendation that he and Halverson presented to the board Monday took parental concerns into account and allowed time for the task force to study the programs before making changes.

"I really thought our recommendation was well-based," Schuler said.

Schuler said his job now is to implement the board's decision. The task force could be assembled by May, he said.

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* Direct administration to establish a committee that would develop new models of providing gifted/talented services at the elementary level. The committee is to report back to the Curriculum, Learning and Student Achievement Committee by January 2005. All recommendations would be subject to board approval.

* Investigate additional programming, such as leadership camp/weekends, pre-Advanced Placement, district math/science clubs, etc.

Source: Recommendation submitted by board member

Christine Scott and approved by the Stevens Point Area Public School District Board

TO TAKE PART

To participate in the task force to study the Stevens Point Area Public School

District's gifted and talented programs, call Superintendent David Schuler at 345-5444 or send an e-mail to dschuler@wisp.k12.wi.us.