January 6, 2015

Dear Parents and Community Members,

On December 15, 2014, the Pequannock Township Board of Education approved the implementation of a STEM Academy at PTHS for the 2015-2016 school year. This action allows the administration ample time to have everything ready for students entering the program in September, 2015. Discussions relative to instituting the program began very early in September, 2014 and were somewhat prompted by the installation of fully equipped STEM classrooms in the Summer of 2014. In addition, students showed an increased interest in Robotics and other Engineering related courses already offered at the school. The high school administration proposed the STEM Academy initiative to the Interim Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent and was encouraged to create exploratory committees with broad based membership on the secondary level to study its feasibility. Two committees emerged—one dealing with the Academy itself and one that would review the high school schedule as it related to the implementation of the Academy and also to review other related issues and concerns that had been observed since the district instituted the block schedule. These committees considered the pros and cons of this initiative and also reached out to other high performing districts to determine what their high school schedules looked like. They also reviewed the academies presently in existence in the county and surrounding counties.

In late November/early December, the high school principal reported back on the work of the two committees to the Board’s Curriculum, Personnel and Finance Committees. Mr. Charleston reported that the Academy Committees had proposed an outline of the coursework for Academy students from freshmen year through their senior year. In addition, they had defined the curricular and personnel needs and determined that it was doable for September, 2015. The committee on scheduling explored many options but realized early on that the block schedule did not meet the curricular needs of the Academy as well as the needs of all of our students. Hence, the 8 period day was proposed with an additional period for unit lunch. The faculty as well as the student leaders on the executive council, which is composed of students representatives from multiple grade levels, were in favor of the new schedule. The benefit of the 8 period schedule is one all students can enjoy in that they can access more academic/elective classes during the school day. It will also allow the administration to better balance class size and there will no longer be classes of less than five students.

The creation of the STEM Academy will allow our students access to a high quality learning environment that inspires them to identify, create, and solve real world problems, while meeting the demanding academic needs of STEM in their home school district. It enhances PTHS’s profile with colleges and universities and it allows PTHS to offer unique and challenging courses to its students that are not offered throughout the state. STEM courses will also be accessible to the students not enrolled in the Academy but interested in one or more aspects of STEM. The emphasis in these courses will be on problem solving and critical thinking skills. STEM Academy students will also be able to create portfolios of their work which they can use as an artifact in the college application process. Students can enter the program as freshmen or sophomores as the ninth grade course will be available to all entering freshmen desiring to participate. It also allows us to partner with the STEM Business Community in our area as we begin to identify the locations for the Senior Experiences for each of our Academy students. We will begin to reach out to STEM related businesses to create an advisory committee for our Academy so that it continues to be anchored in real world issues and situations.
Concerns about the shortened class period does not mean that students will have less instructional time. Students will be engaged in classes for all eight periods of the day. Science classes will have a scheduled lab period and AP Math and AP English classes will be scheduled on either side of the unit lunch to allow for additional time if needed. The quality of instruction by our teachers will continue to be at the high standard that they have always maintained.

In addition, it is our intention to provide the students, parents and the community with periodic updates on the progress of the implementation of the STEM Academy as we finalize the high school offerings and electives and the details of the schedule. Lastly, we remain committed to offering a high quality education to all of our students. We will continue to review all of the courses offered at the high school and to make the changes necessary to ensure that everyone’s needs are served. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 973-616-6040, Dr. Winning or Mr. Charleston at 973-616-6000.

Sincerely,

Maria Nuccetelli

Maria Nuccetelli, Ed.D.
Interim Superintendent