

Pilot program launching at Springfield Middle School

By Cheri Reeves
Robertson County Times

The Robertson County School Board has approved an after school program entitled Aspirnaut to make its debut this year at Springfield Middle School with hopes of it being implemented at other county schools in the future.

The after-school program will be made available to 30 Springfield Middle School students who are interested in learning more about the subjects that make up the acronym for S.T.E.M. — science, technology, engineering and math.

Aspirnaut is developed and conducted by Vanderbilt University students, faculty and staff.

School Board member Geraldine Farmer said the program is expected to commence in September.

"The students at Springfield Middle School will have to apply," Farmer said. "This will be a field test. "If it works at Springfield Middle, we're hoping to move it into other schools."

Stephanie Zeiger, a research assistant professor at Vanderbilt University and an associate director of a STEM outreach program, asked School Board members to participate in an experiment during her presentation at the July 25 school board meeting.

Each of the board members were given baking soda in a plastic bag and told to add a phenol red solution to the baking soda. A spoonful of anhydrous calcium chloride was added to the mixture.

Some of the bags of baking soda turned orange or red. The temperature of substance changed several times during the experiment.



Robertson County School Board Chairman Stoney Crockett observes the chemical reaction in his bagged experiment at a school board meeting. CHERI REEVES/ROBERTSON COUNTY TIMES



Geraldine Farmer, seated next to Allan Heard, notices different color changes in her bag. CHERI REEVES/ROBERTSON COUNTY TIMES

Zeiger had board members observe the changes. She then explained how similar hands-on experiments could be implemented in Robertson County Schools if the Aspirnaut program were adopted.

Farmer said if the pilot program is successful at SMS, she would like to see it offered at other schools in Robertson County.

"The program is available from kindergarten through high school," Farmer said. "I would espe-

cially like to see it offered to kindergartners."

The success of the pro-

gram will depend on the principal and faculty of the schools that participate, according to Farmer.

"They have to be genuinely interested in adopting it to make it work," she said.

While the first four weeks of the pilot program are offered by Vanderbilt at no cost, if it is implemented in the future, the cost for an afterschool program involving 30 students is \$167 per student for a whole school year or \$4.76 a student per week.

"We're hoping out of the schools' material budgets or through fundraising, the schools will be interested enough in the program to fund it," Farmer said.

Farmer said another unique aspect of Aspirnaut is the availability local students will have with personnel from Vanderbilt University.

"The students will have the technology capabilities to talk with Vanderbilt professors, medical doctors, pharmacists, whatever profession a particular lab prepares the student for," she said.

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