

Tonawanda News

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It's academic

By Jessica Bagley

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Tonawanda News — TOWN OF TONAWANDA — High school students in the Ken-Ton district have a new opportunity to get a taste of hands-on, real-world work in school this year.

That's thanks to the New York State Education Department's approval of district plans to create three new Career and Technical Education academies — computer networking and technology, pre-engineering and virtual finance and business.

"We are very excited about it," Superintendent Mark Monandaro said. "At least four years ago we were beginning to realize that multiple pathways is the way to go, especially in the changing world."

The classes offer students a hands-on chance to try something new and become prepared for whatever they may choose to do after graduation, when they will receive CTE-endorsed diplomas.

Over 100 students are currently enrolled in an academy and the district is still working on getting approval for an additional program, Information Technology.

Jim Rowe, who teaches a class as part of the computer networking and technology academy at Kenmore West, said he thinks the students will benefit from being broken up into different classes. The students in his classes are recommended by their middle school teachers for being skilled in math and science.

"I'm hoping to get into more high-end projects that we normally couldn't get into," Rowe said. "We can give high achievers extra time."

The class is beginning with a program called Auto Desk Professional, which allows users to create 3D models and then create them using a 3D printer in the classroom. Classes also focus on robotics and CNC computing.

"You can get in there and drastically change things, and we want you to be creative with things," Rowe told a student Friday. "We will give you some objects, but a creative designer or engineer comes up with things, too."

Freshman Jordan Summers is excited about the opportunity.

"It will provide me with good tools for things I might want to do — something with computers," Summers said.

Summers also pointed out that the class conveniently fills his art requirement, a class he usually doesn't enjoy.

But Rowe also said the class is helpful for students who may decide technology is not for them.

“Figuring out what to do is not easy for a kid,” Rowe said. “And this might help them do that.”

If technology is not a students' forte, they can also chose to take a virtual enterprise class, like the one taught by Wendy Cox at Kenmore East. Most of those kids are interested in starting up their own business someday — either right after high school or after going to college.

“One of my students is already running their own bounce house business,” Cox said.

Cox's class will focus on honing in the students' skills and interests and will later help them create their own business plans. Cheesy Chick Food Truck owner and Ken-East grad Alexis Andrzejak will be visiting the class at the end of the month to talk to the students about her path to success.

“The students will also be doing community service,” Cox said. “It won't be too much curriculum or notes. It's all hands on.”

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