

Hendricks Family Foundation grant will help get Janesville theater arts academy started

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JANESVILLE

The Parker High School Theater Arts Academy will get off the ground with a significant monetary contribution from the Hendricks Family Foundation.

The Janesville School Board voted Tuesday to accept a grant from the foundation. The estimated value of the grant will range from \$286,500 to \$355,250, and the amount depends on enrollment numbers, Janesville School District Superintendent Steve Pophal told the board.

The grant will be used to pay for a part-time program coordinator during the 2020-21 planning year, and it will cover the program's staff costs during the program's first two years, the 2021-22 and the 2022-23 school years.

“The reason the money is a variable (amount) is because we can’t predict exactly how many kids are going to enroll,” Pophal said. “The reason that this is such a great gift—beyond its generosity—is that it’s not often we’re afforded the luxury of a deep dive in to carefully plan.”

In addition, any time a school starts a new program, it can be difficult to reach “critical mass” for enrollment.

“Sometimes, really good classes or really good programs never really get up off the ground because they don’t have enough enrollment,” Pophal said. “For the first two years of the program, we’re not going to have to worry about it.”

By the third year, the district should know if the program can stand on its own feet, Pophal said.

Parker High School has one of the premier musical theater programs in the state, Pophal said in a previous interview, so adding a theater arts program seemed like a good fit.

Students in the academy will take math, English and other standard courses in the mornings.

Academy classes will take place in the afternoons and will include such courses as acting, dance, musical theory, voice lessons and technical aspects of theater such as lighting, sound and set building.

The four-year academy will be designed for students who aspire to professional careers in the performing arts, Pophal said in a previous interview.

The program is expected to draw in students from other school districts. For the current school year, an student who open enrolls in another district brings with them \$7,771 in state funding, according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

For the 2020-21 school year, that amount will increase to an estimated \$8,125, according to the DPI.

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