

New Bedford Public Schools Acceleration Academy maximizes middle schoolers' academic momentum

Innovative academy during winter and spring breaks provide enhanced classes in ELA, Math, Science and enrichment activities

During this vacation week, a group of 75 students from NBPS' three middle schools are engaged in a fast-paced schedule "equivalent to an additional month of learning in this one week!" For that reason it is fittingly called the Acceleration Academy, which is being held at New Bedford High School for the first time.

New Bedford Public Schools is only one of five districts across Massachusetts to offer the program sponsored by the Department of Elementary Secondary Education (DESE), which provides students additional instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) during the February winter break and Math and Science skills during the April spring break. Enrichment activities include swimming, theatre and other fine arts.

"This is an excellent example of New Bedford Public Schools' intense focus on increasing academic rigor and quality enrichment experiences," said Superintendent Thomas Anderson. "We thank DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley for selecting NBPS and we appreciate the remarkable group of award-winning teachers who were chosen to teach and lead this academy."

Acceleration Academy teachers are recipients of the Sontag Prize in Education, which "recognizes and celebrates outstanding educators for their teaching excellence." Awarded by DESE, the prize is named for the late Dr. Frederick E.

Sontag, Professor of Philosophy, Pomona College. As awardees, the teachers attended professional development at Harvard University in preparation to teach the Acceleration Academy. Awardees include New Bedford Public Schools teachers Denise Ashworth, Robin Calvani, Kimberly Fraine, Ted Geller, Heidi Lima, Suzanna Oliveira, Bethany Santos, Ellen Trott, and Ana Velez. Teachers from outside districts who were also recognized and are teaching in the NBPS Acceleration Academy include Laura Etkind, Sarah Moller and Julia Perłowski. Educators from across the country were considered for the winter and spring sessions.

NBPS Department of Strategic Initiatives & Partnerships is the district's conduit for new and enhanced programming, noted Jennifer Ferland, its executive director. She acknowledged NBPS community partners' role in boosting students' interest and excitement. "We are so appreciative of the Lynch Foundation for donating \$5,000 worth of prizes, including gift cards, wireless speakers and Chromebooks, which will be awarded to students in the Academy's sessions during the winter and spring breaks," she said.

In order to join the pilot program, parents of students recommended by their teachers, were notified in January of the opportunity to apply. Emphasizing the concentrated learning and small class size of 10-12 students, as well as the fun-filled enrichment activities, the Academy experience has been described "like an espresso shot – with an extra dose of ELA practice... ELA skills will be accelerated!"

Students accepted into the Acceleration Academy receive breakfast, lunch and transportation.

The Academy's winter session wraps up on Friday, February 21, with student presentations of learning, a certificate ceremony, and a celebratory performance by the drama & arts students.

The next Acceleration Academy is scheduled for spring break, April 20-24, 2020, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. For more information, parents may contact their middle school student's principal's office at Keith, Normandin or Roosevelt Middle Schools.