

After-School Program Popular At Central

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BY KIT HUFFMAN

Central Elementary Principal Ryan Barber gave an enthusiastic report about his school's new after-school program, funded by a federal 21st Century grant (\$600,000 over three years). "It's going gangbusters," he told the Rockbridge County School Board recently.

About 250 students, which is more than half the student body, attend the program each afternoon Monday through Thursday, with one hour of academics followed by an hour of enrichment. Students also have a snack. The program involves many "wonderful partners," as well as teaching staff, Barber said.

Students may sign up for two different enrichment activities per eight-week session, carrying out each activity twice a week. As many as 18 different community partners offer activities, including Project Horizon, offering a Young Peacemakers Club; the YMCA, offering "Rainbows and Rhythms," with Rainbows representing healthy-food choices and Rhythms standing for physical activity; Renegade Art Glass, offering ornament and figurine making, with pieces later fired at the studio; Rockbridge Recycling; and Boxerwood, offering nature activities. Other classes include choral, photography, hand chimes, chess, art, jewelry making, Zumba exercise dancing, hip-hop dance and tumbling.

Ryan said he was proud of the effort displayed by teachers, cafeteria workers and bus drivers, all of whom signed up for the extra work. With so many students enrolled, five buses leave Central every day at 5:15 p.m., he said.

Barber said that so many students have enrolled that he'd like to see 22 activity choices offered for the next session. He also noted that the after-school program for Maury River Middle School students was also being held at Central this year, due to construction at MRMS. "It's an intensive use of the building," he finished.

Superintendent John Reynolds noted that teachers and staff are all compensated for their work by the grant.

School Board Chairwoman Laura Hoofnagle said the program sounded "fantastic," and Albert Lewis was impressed by the high rate of participation. "It's a fantastic thing we're blessed to have it," concluded Hoofnagle.