

Press Release 6.4.13 ---- *Contact for questions: Kirk Beitler, Principal, RHS, 895-6616 ext. 2306*

New College Prep Venture for Raymond High School

Ellen Small, Raymond School Superintendent, and Kirk Beitler, RHS Principal, announced today an exciting new venture for PSAT and SAT prep at RHS to be conducted by Academic Approach ("AA") (<http://www.academicapproach.com/>).

AA will be conducting the PSAT and SAT Boot Camp at RHS starting next fall. They will build upon the excellent job done over the past four years by Debbie Harmon and Sue Spinney, parents of students in the Raymond schools.

Small finds Academic Approach attractive for RHS because they are recognized nationally for their proven curriculum and data based programs. She cites "their approach which is skill based; there are no tricks or gimmicks to improving scores on the tests." Small said that AA will engender greater college awareness in the high school. She is delighted that they will operate at no cost to the School District. AA has generously offered a discounted rate to RHS, allowing for minimal fees charged to the students. Any shortfall to cover AA's costs will be provided by the Reach High Scholars Program, a nonprofit corporation that encourages Raymond students to reach high in their educational pursuits.

Academic Approach

AA is headquartered in Chicago with offices in New York and Boston. The company provides PSAT, SAT and ACT preparation in classrooms, on-line and through individual tutoring sessions. Their clients include public schools, charter schools and private day and boarding schools, and they work with students from a wide range of economic backgrounds.

Cary O'Brien, Northeast Regional Director of Academic Approach, explained that they "teach beyond the test" and provide tools that bridge the gap between high school and college curricula. "By focusing on college readiness skills, we help students improve their level of achievement and transfer the skills they learn in test prep to their classroom courses.

AA's goal is to work closely with parents, teachers and entire school systems in an effort to address gaps in the educational sequence, thus improving scores on standardized tests and successful performance in the classroom. They believe that the number one correlating factor to test performance is grade point average; in other words, effective test preparation simply means teaching the concepts, content and skills necessary for success in the classroom. O'Brien said "we see ourselves as allies to all teachers engaged in the serious academic enrichment of young minds."

AA is rethinking the role of test preparation within education. In their view, for any model of test preparation to be a credible form of education, it must accomplish three objectives:

- Provide in-depth, sound academic enrichment;
- Support and enhance the good work teachers perform every day in the classroom; and
- Reach out to all students, not merely the most-advantaged.

O'Brien said that they are "attracted to RHS because of the various initiatives and college admission successes of the Reach High Scholars Program. These developments are relatively unique for a small high school." RHS will be Academic Approach's only public high school client in New Hampshire. Their only other client in the state is Phillips Exeter Academy. AA hopes to expand the successful program at RHS to other similarly sized high schools in New Hampshire and elsewhere.

Importance of Preparation

Beitler points out that "the SAT tests are common-denominator measurements of all applicants to U.S. colleges and universities. For RHS students, these tests are a way to show that they are as good as the next guy but the next guy frequently has prepared with some combination of online study, a classroom course or private tutoring of 20 weeks or more." The cost of those programs can range from \$1,200 to well over \$5,000. The new RHS Boot Camp will provide 30 hours of classes for just \$250, with financial aid available that can reduce the cost to zero.

The Classes

Karen Bennett, Director of AA, will supervise the project in Raymond. The classes will start with three sessions in October with PSAT prep for sophomores and juniors and three refresher classes for seniors taking the SAT I in the fall.

After Thanksgiving, an SAT I course for Juniors will begin, with a diagnostic test and two class sessions, to be followed by nine sessions from January to March. The juniors will be expected to take the SAT I test twice during the spring of 2014.

All classes will be on Saturday mornings, starting at 8:30 and ending by 11:00. Typically, there will be two one-hour classes.

Bennett emphasizes that the AA tutors who will be conducting the classes "are warm, supportive, teaching professionals who make classroom learning enriching, engaging and enjoyable." AA's philosophy is that "tests are standardized; however, students are not. No two students share the same academic strengths, learning style or personality." Hence, AA puts a priority on customized teaching plans for each class as well as providing individualized study plans for each student through their data driven assessments. They prepare detailed analysis and reports on students' needs that allow leveling instruction and scaffolded lesson plans for each class.

On-line Program

Academic Approach will make their on-line program available at no cost to all Middle and High School students for use during the summer and 2013-2014 school year. This program is particularly valuable for improving vocabulary skills.

Student Incentives

The Reach High Scholars Program is offering \$100 awards for best-combined scores over 2000 (2400 is a perfect score); improvement in best-combined scores of more than 360 points above the score achieved on the first official test; and a best-combined score of at least 2300.