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Ash-West announces nonprofit ed foundation

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ASHBURNHAM -- Officials in the Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School District expressed pride and excitement Tuesday as they announced the formation of a nonprofit educational foundation to supplement academic programs in the district.

Superintendent of Schools Michael Zapantis made the announcement at the School Committee's meeting at Overlook Elementary School.

Zapantis said the foundation, which will create an endowment to issue grants to deserving teachers and students, will be governed by an independent board of directors.

He stressed that the foundation will not be called upon to supplant any shortages in the district's operating budget.

"The goal is to attract the community and businesses to be more involved in the schools," Zapantis said.

Westminster resident and local businessman Ronald Hurd, one of the foundation's founding members, said the foundation "won't focus on big-money projects," but smaller projects like field trips, special materials for teachers or classroom activities.

"We're committed to being able to issue some mini-grants as soon as we get started in September," Hurd said.

He added that the economic recession makes the foundation "more vital to the district than anytime in the past."

Zapantis said the district may lose about \$232,000 in state education aid next fiscal year, on top of a possible \$400,000 reduction in transportation aid.

Hurd said about 50 or 60 school districts in the state have education foundations.

Westminster resident Jen Shenk, a member of the PTA at Westminster Elementary School, also played a role in organizing the foundation.

"I'm just excited to put my energy and enthusiasm behind something like this," Shenk said.

School Committee Chairman David Christianson expressed high hopes for the program.

"I'm thrilled when I hear words like 'foundation,' things that have some long-term life to them," Christianson said.

In other business, Zapantis announced three forums to inform residents on an upcoming Proposition 2 1/2 override vote on June 16. The first, on Tuesday, will take place at Stevens Memorial Library in Ashburnham. The second will be held June 8 at Oakmont Regional High School,

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and the third is June 11 at Forbush Memorial Library in Westminster. All three forums begin at 6:30 p.m.

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