

New group plans to offer education grants

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A new source of grant money will be available to Ashburnham and Westminster schools with the opening of a fund-raising foundation aimed at helping teachers and students.

The Ashburnham-Westminster Foundation for Academic Excellence is a private, non-profit organization run by volunteers from the community. Members spent the summer drafting bylaws and filing paperwork to make the foundation official in time for the new school year.

"We hope to help with at least 10 to 20 grants and wish-list items for the teachers in all of the schools," said Foundation President Ronald Hurd.

Hurd updated members of the Ashburnham-Westminster School Committee about the foundation's status earlier this week.

Michael Zapantis, Superintendent of Schools, reached out to community members in May to look into forming a local education foundation.

"The concept here is to supplement the operating budget of the school, not to supplant anything" said Zapantis.

Though the foundation will partner closely with schools, Hurd said it was important to note that it is a self-governed organization, independent from the school system.

The foundation is set to announce itself through a mailing to all Ashburnham and Westminster teachers, residents and Oakmont Regional High School alumni, in the next couple of weeks.

A Web site should be up and running in a couple weeks.

Hurd hopes the publicity will prompt people who care about education to donate.

Hurd said teachers who are interested will be able to contact the foundation directly, and apply for grants. Foundation members will review requests for approval.

Hurd, the father of four Oakmont Regional High School graduates, said a "keen educational bent" has always existed in his family. He is excited about the prospect of bringing extras to the schools not covered in the school budget.

For example, Hurd said the foundation could pay for a composer to come in and speak to elementary school students learning music.

So far, the foundation has received a \$2,000 matching gift from Norfolk and Dedham Insurance, and a \$2,000 anonymous donation.

"We have sufficient funds to cover all start-up expenses, so 100 percent of any contributions to the foundation will be used for the intended purpose to help teachers and students," said Hurd.

In November, the foundation plans to hold a formal opening celebration, to thank those who have contributed, and make the public more aware of its existence. The date and time have not been finalized.

For more information, or to donate, contact Ronald Hurd at (978) 874-2350.