

'Author' adventure



Marc Brown, author of children's books, talks to Eagle Elementary students about reading, writing and illustrating books.



Eagle Elementary students ask author and illustrator Marc Brown questions about his books, which include the "Arthur

Adventure" series. Brown's visit was paid for by the school's PTA.

Writer teaches students the basics

NATIONALLY KNOWN illustrator and children's author Marc Brown recently visited Eagle Elementary to teach students how they can nose ahead of the competition.

Author of the "Arthur Adventure" series, featuring Arthur the Aardvark and other characters, Brown offered his secrets to success at the

all-school assembly Nov. 8. One of those included encouraging students to read.

Massachusetts natives, Brown and his wife, Laurie, are co-authors of several books. He has written 65 books in all. In the "Arthur Adventure" series, he writes about a new baby sister, bringing a puppy into

the house, his amazement at being chosen for the school spelling bee, and how he handles his friend's teasing when he gets glasses.

He has also written several books using dinosaurs as illustrations, including a guide to good health, another helping families deal with divorce and another which offers children safety tips.

Brown's visit was sponsored by the school's PTA.

In addition to the visit, school principal Sue Johnson and media specialist Carole Kersten arranged to have students buy Brown's books. Each student was also allowed to have one autographed while he visited.

District approves plans for renovation of Gill

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington school officials have authorized design plans for building expansion and renovations at Gill Elementary.

But they have not yet decided how the job, which is estimated to cost between \$2.8 million and \$3.2 million, will be done.

"This may seem awkward" after talking about district's financial constraints, Superintendent Michael Flanagan said, "but we're talking about a building that's so substandard."

A two-phase project would give the school board some flexibility in financial planning — something they may prefer due to recent budget constraints — but would cost \$100,000 more than doing the project in a single phase.

School officials promised parents earlier this year they would do something with the 35-year-old Gill building after not moving any students to the new Hillside Elementary this fall. The building remains overcrowded and in need of general renovations, Flanagan said.

He recently invited 56 superintendents to a meeting there to show that there are problems in districts like Farmington, which are considered wealthy.

Board member Cathleen Webb, also a Gill parent, said the "renovations have been sorely needed. It's just falling apart." She said Tuesday, she wanted to move ahead on approving the overall plans, though other board members said they preferred to wait until Nov. 20.

PLANS CALL for an addition of six classrooms, which would give the school a 500-student capacity. With the addition, it would have 20 regular classrooms, two kindergarten rooms, a learning center, a teacher lounge and planning room, and a resource room. The project would also add a new gymnasium, move the media center/library into the former gym, and convert the former media center into a cafeteria. The former cafeteria would then become an art room.

Renovation to the building would include new carpeting and ceilings, updated lighting and electrical, some cabinetry and updated fire/emergency and sound systems. New windows would also be installed and the building cabled for future high technology growth, said Judy Miller of the architectural firm of Greiner Inc.

Greiner is the same architect that worked on Hillside, the expanded Farmington High School media center, and several million dollars in other projects throughout the district. The company was retained Tuesday to do the design plans for Gill.

Trustee James Abernethy, a professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological University, called the proposal a "good plan" which is closely modeled on the district's new Hillside Elementary. "I can just see it humming," he added.

Flanagan said the district had earmarked \$2 million for the Gill renovations, but that much hinged on how the school board decided to handle the district's recent loss of \$5.8 million due to state recapture. That will be decided over the next several weeks.

School safety study committee continues transportation review

By Casey Hans
staff writer

The head of the Farmington school board safety committee pledged to continue reviewing concerns about the district's bus service but said transportation policies would remain in place unless a majority voted for a change.

Trustee Jack Cotton's comments came after a number of angry parents from the Green Hill Commons and Independence Commons subdivisions came to a Nov. 6 school board meeting, saying they were frustrated by increased traffic and growth which has created safety hazards in their neighborhood.

"We will continue to study it," Cotton said, adding that he wanted to sit down again with transportation officials and review the matter. "We promise nothing but will give it our best shot."

He told the parents they would likely have an answer around Jan. 1. Any change to transportation policies would have to be discussed by the entire board, he added.

THE BOARD received a number of letters this year, with parents complaining about traffic safety issues and requesting additional bus stops, different bus stops and

changes to the board's policy on how far children walk to school and to stops. Parents have attended two previous meetings of the Safety Committee to reiterate their concerns.

The district currently spends about \$4.7 million a year on transportation, and has added 35 buses to its fleet during the past eight years to handle growth and safety issues, board president Susan Rennels said.

Despite parent frustration this year and complaints about being treated rudely by school employees, superintendent Michael Flanagan said such issues are handled each year, normally by the school's transportation department. "We can't speak to every conversation that's gone on," he said. "There probably is a shred of truth when people say they are treated disrespectfully."

"I want you to know there are thousands of polite responses. This (transportation concerns) has had more attention than I've even seen it given. And that's good."

Rennels agreed the hilly terrain in some subdivision, lack of sidewalks and increased traffic through the Farmington area have caused problems. But, she told parents, the district is not required by law to provide bus service.

"The school district is under no obligation to bus anybody," she said. "Under state law, it is the parents' responsibility to get their children to and from school."

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