



Vince Gerasole of CBS News interviews BHS incubator class teacher, Hagop Soulakian, during a recent feature story on the innovative class.



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stand the difference between what I can do and what is beyond me. In this case, I knew I could convene a meeting of key individuals who would be integral to moving this idea from concept to reality. As soon as I returned from breakfast that morning, I emailed several staff members who are experts in developing curricular programs. In addition, we asked leaders from the Barrington 220 Educational Foundation to join us, as their involvement in this vision would be essential to its success. They all responded immediately, arriving in my office for a 6:30 a.m. meeting that same week. Time was of the essence; to start a course in time for the 2013-14 school year would require critical planning in just three short months.

It was all hands on deck. Karl and Michael presented their vision, representatives of the Barrington 220 Educational Foundation generously agreed to consort with us, and I asked my staff to “contemplate the opportunity.” They had 40 minutes to decide if we could accept the challenge. Was it even feasible?

Thankfully, essential leaders like Assistant Superintendent Cindy Jaskowiak, BHS Principal Steve McWilliams, Library-Media Director LeeAnn Taylor, and Director of Secondary Curriculum Kelly Hansen were in that room. When I returned 40 minutes later, they confirmed their commitment: They were “all in.” I responded with Captain Jean-Luc Picard’s famous line from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: “My good friends, make it so.”

There are many others who also have contributed, both within our staff and across the community, too many to mention in this short article. Mentors, coaches, business leaders, teachers, parents, students, local media – all collaborating to create a program for the ages. Classroom teacher Hagop Soulakian, supported by all these partners as well as resources from the Barrington 220 Educational Foundation, has created a classroom environment unlike any other.

Since its inception only seven months ago, more than 50 schools from throughout Chicago and across the United States have visited and or expressed interest in the incubator curriculum. Many local reporters have done feature stories on the unique program, often noting the next great product, the successor to Facebook or another social phenomenon could be born in a class just like this.

A Place to Start

A CUP OF COFFEE, A PIECE OF TOAST, AND A PROGRAM FOR THE AGES.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I get a lot of email messages; many from parents, some from staff, others from companies wanting to do business with the school district, notices from state and federal agencies, even a few pleas from students during wintry weather advocating for a snow day.

Occasionally, I get one that makes an impact on our school district, improving the opportunities we can provide for students. In the early fall of 2012, I received just such an email.

The inquiry came from two Barrington 220 residents, Karl Fruecht and Michael Miles. They asked if I would join them for breakfast to discuss an idea that might benefit the school district. The message didn’t disclose many details, but the time for a cup of coffee and a piece of toast would be minimal. My curiosity was piqued.

We met on a Wednesday morning in October 2012 at Egg Harbor. They began with their personal stories. They are businessmen, having started or revived dozens of companies over the past 20-plus years. I have had little interaction with entrepreneurs in my career, but these

two men definitely fit that definition. They explained they thought our high school’s business curriculum could be updated. Specifically, they felt an entrepreneurial program at BHS would be a great addition to the high school and to the community. Students can generate great ideas, they said, and they wanted to partner with Barrington 220 to create an authentic business incubator within the high school that would help launch local enterprise.

Karl and Michael clearly had vast knowledge of what kids would need to know in the start-up/business domain. They also possessed numerous contacts and connections that would prove invaluable in finding developers of content as well as mentors and coaches for our students. What they did not know was how to design a high school course. What they could not have known was that our staff also believed the high school’s business curriculum needed an overhaul. Fortuitously, in recent years we have been able to recruit some amazing talent that would be able to support them in creating this new program. The stars were visibly aligning.

As a superintendent for the last seven years, I under-



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Dr. Yong Zhao, the renowned author and global futurist who visited Barrington 220 in 2012, recently viewed a presentation on the BHS business incubator. Dr. Zhao travels the world, consulting with Fortune 500 companies and school districts, encouraging them to foster a culture of ingenuity and discovery. He believes innovation and imagination must be embedded into our educational system to equip students for the balance of this century. Zhao said the BHS business incubator "is an excellent addition to Barrington's quest for a world-class education that prepares all students to become globally competent, creative, and entrepreneurial citizens."

Sometimes, an email followed by a simple breakfast conversation can yield truly amazing opportunities for our school district. What began as the brainchild of two local entrepreneurs has resulted in a program that quickly became a model for other partnerships. Thanks to the dedication of our staff – who took the challenge and ran with it – the BHS business incubator program is poised to serve the Barrington 220 community for many years to come. 

(Story continued next page)

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From left, in back: BHS Principal Steve McWilliams, Library-Media Director LeeAnn Taylor, and Director of Secondary Curriculum Kelly Hansen with Superintendent Tom Leonard.

Dr. Tom Leonard Steps Down as Superintendent

Dr. Tom Leonard is leaving the Barrington 220 School District after seven years as its superintendent and six prior years as principal of Barrington High School. He will become superintendent of the Eanes Independent School District in Austin, Texas, effective July 1. Board of Education President Brian Battle said, "We will miss Tom's affable and approachable style of leadership, but we wish him well in this exciting career change."

Under Leonard's leadership, there are many milestones to celebrate from his tenure: high-achieving students, staff and schools; a new Early Learning Center; innovative programs, curricula and technologies; unparalleled partnership with stakeholders; reasonable class sizes; a strategic plan with lofty strides toward the next decade; successive years of fiscal responsibility; and the maximum bond rating from Standard & Poor's.

In announcing his departure, Leonard said, "I never would have predicted this kind of move at this stage in my career. As with most life changes, the opportunity was completely unexpected. Things are great here in Barrington – a dedicated Board of Education, talented students, a marvelous staff, a supportive community, solid finances, and new and innovative technologies. What could be better?"

Then came the proverbial offer that was too good to refuse. Eanes, like Barrington 220, is one of the nation's highest-performing pre-K through 12th grade public school systems. Similar to Barrington 220, Eanes' 8,000 students all graduate from the prestigious Westlake High School (think of *Friday Night Lights* football) in the scenic suburbs of Austin.

"After 33 years as an educator in Illinois, if I am going to leave here and resume my career in the Texas Hill Country, Eanes is the place and this is the time," Leonard said. "It should be no surprise Barrington 220's status and a leader of Dr. Leonard's caliber caught the attention of a similarly successful school district," Battle said. The Board of Education's goal is to name Leonard's successor as the next superintendent before the end of this school year.