

## School Board Approves Three New High School Courses

By LARISSA LYTWIN

The Board of Education unanimously approved three new courses currently being piloted at Newtown High School at its last meeting on November 16.

"Applied Science Research," founded by biology teacher Frank LaBanca, brings the college internship experience to the high school level.

The course offers students at all academic levels in science the opportunity to engage in a yearlong independent research project under the mentorship of a school science instructor and field scientists.

"There are a wealth of resources here in Newtown for these kinds of partnerships," Mr. LaBanca noted. "Newtown is located near some ideal places, including Fairfield, New Haven, and Danbury. There are places that can offer some excellent possibilities for our students."

Mr. LaBanca is currently piloting the program with 15 students.

One student, he said, is

studying the environmental implications of last winter's oil spill at Canaan House in Fairfield Hills.

"She is working with Chris Sullivan of the state Department of Environmental Protection [DEP] on it," Mr. LaBanca said.

The cost of the program, for about 15 students, is about \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Mr. LaBanca assured that many industries are "eager" for the opportunity to partner with schools, and many offer equipment for a nominal fee, or even gratis.

Vice Chair Lisa Schwartz commented on a recent news story of a similar program in a neighboring school district.

"This is truly a wonderful opportunity for students," she said. "It also can allow students to give back to the community in some way, as well as providing some really useful, hands-on experience."

While board member David Nanavaty made clear that he would always be supportive of innovative new programs, he

expressed concern over the availability of teachers, as well as the cost of the course.

"During our last budget cycle, we had students who wanted to register for courses that weren't available because [of a lack of staff]," he said. "Now, we are at that time again, and we don't know what exactly might lie ahead."

Though the course was unanimously approved, Mr. Nanavaty said he did so with reservation, with concern to future, potential budgetary impact.

The board also approved two additional courses, both of which would not potentially require additional funding or staffing.

"Math and Science Connections" is a course aimed at college preparatory-level sophomores and will be taught by both a math and science teacher. The course will provide conceptual instruction through real-life, hands-on activities designed to strengthen reasoning and processing organizational skills.

Both the math and science curriculum committees recommended the acceptance of the course.

"Integrated Mathematics 4A" is designed to fill a need for seniors who have not met the graduation standards, as well as for those students at the basic math level who are expecting to go on to college.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Alice Jackson assured that the course would be one of many options, including technology education classes and other math courses, students could take to fulfill their math requirements.

The course will have a heavy emphasis on problem solving, as well as address the latest developments in the content and format of the SAT math section. It will also serve as a refresher for college placement exams and first-year math courses, Ms. Jackson said.

All three courses are expected to begin accepting formal enrollment beginning in the 2005-06 school year.