

KHS Business Department will add INCubator next year

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

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The Kenston High School Business Department offers eight classes that prepare aspiring entrepreneurs for the future.

Next year, the department will offer the INCubator course, in which students will learn to create and fully develop their own product or service. The district is seeking community partners to fill a variety of roles to work with, advise and mentor students in the INCubator course.

The Business Department has three business teachers, Jeff Kepreos, Patrick Murphy and department chair Robert Tripi. Their courses are popular electives among students, and “very comprehensive for a high school level,” Mr. Tripi said.

Business curriculum at Kenston begins with a survey course, Introduction to Business, which is offered to all grade levels but typically taken by younger students, Mr. Tripi said.

Course options then branch off for students in grades 10 through 12. International Business is a popular course in which students learn business concepts and apply them to international markets.

“We also offer Personal Finance and Investments,” Mr. Tripi said. “That’s extremely popular for high school students – they tend to like money.”

Financial literacy is now a state requirement for high school students and is introduced in another course at Kenston, but, as an elective, this course delves deeper, and emphasizes long-term investing and strategies, he said.

Business Law is another popular course that includes a mock trial, he said. Accounting I and Accounting II are for students who plan to major in business in college.

Applied Business Strategies is a capstone course for high-achieving seniors planning on majoring in business as well.

“That course is very unique at a high school level,” Mr. Tripi said. “They don’t have a textbook. Instead, we use a college-level database and do business case studies. They also partner with a company in the community and will do problem-based learning, where they solve a problem, an issue or direction for that company.”

Next year, the department will replace the Business Management class with INCubator – also known as INCubatoredu – an authentic entrepreneurship experience for students to develop their own product or service start-up, Mr. Tripi said.

Julianna DiMarco, Kenston, Class of 2017, said she took all of the business classes that were offered except for accounting. Once in college, she applied what she learned in Kenston’s business classes, including business-minded thinking, she said.

“I think that I learned this through the classroom environment of class discussions, presentations and group work,” she said. “It really set me up well when I went to college because that’s very similar to the learning environment there.”

Ms. DiMarco said she was always interested in business, but the classes she took at Kenston gave context to what she had seen growing up in a family that owns a small business. At Miami University, she felt prepared, and came to appreciate the classes she took at Kenston, she said.

“There was a lot of terminology that came back up in my courses, and projects that were nearly identical to ones I had done in high school,” she said.

In next year’s INCubator course, students will work in teams of four to create their own LLC, developing a product or service that can bring the group profit.

Through development of the course, Mr. Kepreos and Mr. Murphy will take students through different steps of learning about how to begin a business, Principal Tom Gabram said.

Students will learn all of the components that are needed to start a business – from the beginning to forming an LLC legally.

From there, students “can hopefully receive some type of support and investment from outside businesses within our own community,” Mr. Gabram said.

Aspects of the course that enhance instruction will involve local partnerships, and the business department is working to develop those with the outside business community as they transition into the first year of the INCubator course.

Local partners may take roles as coaches, mentors or business advisors.

Classroom coaches are experts in their respective business fields who will team-teach a mini-lesson with the teacher to enhance a topic, Mr. Gabram said. Coaches will be given a lesson plan, presentation and other materials, and will be prepared by the teacher before lesson delivery.

The beauty of the course is that students gain expertise and instruction from members of the business community which is supported by teachers, Mr. Tripi said.

“They’re not just talking about starting a business. They are starting a business” that they can potentially earn money from, Mr. Tripi said. That their business can go beyond the course is powerful for students, he said.

“I’m always looking at, what’s innovative out there?” Mr. Gabram said. “What can we bring to Kenston High School that we don’t have yet? We’re always looking outside our walls to see what’s out there. How can we make the experience, the journey, much better for students grades nine through 12?”

The district’s innovative courses, such as the INCubator course and Bomber Media, give students opportunities for hands-on, personalized learning, and give teachers opportunities to meet students’ needs, Mr. Gabram said.

Mr. Gabram said that personalized learning is appreciated by students.

“It shows that the teacher is reaching out and understanding how I learn best, and not just a one-size-fits-all,” Mr. Gabram said.

Each team of four students will also be assigned a business professional to serve as its mentor throughout the year. The mentor will help the team apply to its business what is being taught in the classroom, supporting the team and providing strategic guidance and wisdom.

The student team may meet with its mentor weekly in the classroom or outside of the traditional school day, depending on the mentor's availability.

Business advisors will become potential investors in students' products.

At the end of the nine-week course, the business department will hold and promote a "pitch night" – similar to a Shark Tank model – where business advisors will hear students' pitches about their small business ideas about a product or service, offer critical and constructive feedback, and potentially invest.

Students of existing INCubator courses have created successful products that continue for years and to this day, Mr. Gabram said.

One example is Community Butler, which connects community members in Greater Chicago with various services offered by students, including same-day snow removal, spring cleaning packages and moving.

The INCubator course will feature nine units: ideation, customer discovery, customer connections, finances, build your Minimum Viable Product, legal and Minimum Viable Product experimentation, promotion and "pitch your story."

Local businesses interested in becoming coaches, mentors or business advisors for INCubator students may find an interest form at docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJFEfvBgVFji3MIYRX9uujELjk3WWM84txyxRL9hJ9h-Uij6A/viewform.