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FRAMINGHAM TAB

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From left, Keefe Technical Vocational School senior Chris Rubio prepares chocolate bread pudding with creme anglaise and whipped cream, one of the desserts at the Keefe Restaurant. Keefe Technical Vocational School Health Careers Training program class. Keefe Technical Vocational School principal James Lynch knows the school. He was formerly a lead carpentry teacher then vocational coordinator.

Changing with the TIMES

By focusing on trade skills that are needed in today's world, Keefe Tech has made itself both relevant and adaptable to a changing workplace. Page 12



At Keefe Technical Vocational School's newest program, Early Childhood Education and Teaching, Lawaunda Hatchett and Halle Siegal practice bathing an infant.

Maintaining its mission

Keefe Tech has been a mainstay in a changing community

By John Hilliard
STAFF WRITER

Times are changing for the Joseph P. Keefe Technical School as officials search for a new administrator, implement new vocational programs and face greater pressure to quantify the achievement of its students.

"Basically, we think we have a great school here," said Principal James Lynch. "We have high expectations for (students and) we want them to be proficient."

Founded in 1973, Keefe Tech currently operates on a roughly \$16 million budget and offers 14 different vocational programs — including fields as diverse as automotive technology, culinary arts and plumbing — plus a freshman-level overview that introduces students to the different trades.

Keefe Tech School Committee Vice Chairman Nelson Goldin said the school reacts to the needs of the future workers they train, and tries to keep teaching methods and technology current with business standards.

"We teach differently, but the role of the school is preparing vocational and technical students for the outside world," said Goldin, who also noted, "We cannot run a world without the skills we teach."

The school — which draws its students and funding from five member towns - Framingham, Natick, Ashland, Hopkinton and Holliston — has launched the Keefe Tech Scholars program, which lets high-achieving students participate in field trips and other programs.

The school won DOE approval last year for a new early child-

hood education program and Keefe is eyeing a pre-engineering curriculum, too, he said. The school can add programs if student enrollments support it.

"As the needs of this county changes in terms of employment, we will change with it," Lynch said. "We continue to be a terrific option for education in the south Middlesex district."

The freshman year actually equals the academic class time of traditional schools, said Lynch, and Keefe offers college preparatory courses as well. The state Department of Education requires vocational schools devote at least 40 percent of class time to work training, so Keefe has to balance the demands to train qualified, skilled workers and match academic success of other schools.

"We're trying to serve two masters at once," said Lynch.

One equalizer has been the state's MCAS exam, which required vocational institutions to prepare students with the same academic rigor as their peers in traditional schools.

Keefe works to keep educational requirements in line with the state colleges and universities.

"As they change, we change," he said.

But post-secondary education is not a luxury — many employers say workers need that level of training in fields such as computer-intensive auto maintenance. Officials encourage students to get professional certification in their trades, as well.

"In almost every one of our vocational programs, there are national certifications we push our students to achieve," said

Lynch.

In Keefe's class of 2007, about 40 percent of the 166 graduates enrolled in two- or four-year colleges and universities, said Lynch. The majority left to go to work or pursue other options, including the military.

"They have the option of going right to the job, or the option of attending a two- or four-year college," said Lynch.

Keefe also organizes a co-op program that places students with good grades and solid performance in their trades into real-world jobs with local employers for a semester. About 50 seniors last year participated, and many started work at those same companies after graduation, said Lynch.

"They do pretty well," said Goldin, "because they have a skill not everyone has."

The school also faces increasing state pressure to quantify the vocational success of its students. Lynch said the DOE is likely to require the class of 2010 or 2011 to take an exam for a certificate of occupational proficiency — an exam trade school officials have dubbed the "vocational MCAS," he said.

The exam, not expected to be a graduation requirement, would become a measurement of how effective a trade school's vocational programs are in training young workers, he said.

Other changes will include the retirement of Superintendent-Director Peter Dewar on June 30, after working for nearly 30 years at the vocational school, the last four as its top administrator.

School Committee Chairman William Gaine said the applications for the superintendent job are due by Dec. 7, and following a review by the search panel and public interviews of the finalists, the School Committee will make its pick for the superintendent-director during the week of March 24. The new top official is expected to start July 1.

Lynch himself is new to the principal's post, after being named to the job earlier this year by Dewar. Lynch replaced longtime Principal Karl Lord.

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Fast facts about Keefe Tech

Since 1973, the Joseph P. Keefe Technical School has offered vocational training to students from Framingham, Natick, Ashland, Holliston and Hopkinton. The school now offers 15 vocational programs for students across Keefe's five-town district.

Year established: 1973	Teachers: 82
Team name: "Unicorns"	Graduation rate ('05-'06):
Students ('06-'07): 712	82.10%

Race of students ('06-'07), Percent of district

African American.....6.7	Native Hawaiian, Pacific
Asian0.6	Islander0
Hispanic.....39.5	Multi-Race,
Native American0.3	Non-Hispanic.....1
White.....52	

Plans of High School Graduates (2005-06)

Plan, Percent of district

4-Year Private College5	Work44
4-Year Public College.....7	Military2
2-Year Private College2	Other0
2-Year Public College.....27	Unknown5
Other Post-Secondary.....9	

SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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