

# Enterprise

Park Rapids ▶▶▶

EDUCATION

## Virtual academy receives state approval

The Park Rapids Area Virtual Academy received accreditation from the Minnesota Department of Education on May 28, director Jill Stevenson told the school board on June 21.

Written By: [Robin D. Fish](#) | 8:30 am, Jun. 30, 2021



Park Rapids Area High School (Enterprise file photo)

The Park Rapids School Board learned Monday, June 21 that the Park Rapids Area Virtual Academy (PRAVA) has been approved by the Minnesota Department of Education.

PRAVA director Jill Stevenson, who also serves as the district's interim curriculum coordinator, reported about both the first year of the virtual academy and the status of the schools' curriculum and instruction.

# State approved

Stevenson said the MDE approved the virtual academy on May 28, the last day of its first year of operation. Serving grades 6 to 12, PRAVA received two official school numbers: 0309-01-380 for the middle school and 0309-01-360 for the high school.

She said course descriptions will be posted on an MDE website so that people statewide can learn what the academy has to offer.

“PRAVA will be listed among the close to 40 other virtual schools in the state,” said Stevenson, adding that they will offer 130 class credits from 55 different courses.

Stevenson reminded the school board about the difference between distance learning, which is a short-term arrangement during a temporary school closure, and the virtual academy, which delivers all of its instruction through technology.

She said PRAVA has the potential to retain students who have moved out of the school district, serve families that homeschool their children and accommodate students trying to balance school with part-time jobs.

Among the 32 PRAVA students last year, Stevenson noted, were two part-time homeschoolers, nine high school students working part-time jobs, four participating in afterschool activities, and four playing in the band.

There were 11 girls and 21 boys in the program, she reported; 10 middle school students and 22 high school students, all from 26 families. Among them were a seventh grader who earned an academic award and a 10th grader who won an academic letter.

PRAVA’s middle school students earned a total of 60 credits last year, Stevenson said, and the high schoolers earned 113.

Stevenson discussed how the teachers and staff worked together to ensure that PRAVA courses aligned with state standards. Courses included core offerings in English, math, social studies, science and physical education, as well as electives in all these subject areas as well as health, business, art, music and Spanish.

She shared comments from some of the academy’s 13 teachers as well as students and parents. One teacher was quoted saying they loved watching students have “those ‘aha’ moments when they understand the content,” while a parent was grateful to see their son happy with school and earning credits toward graduation.

Meanwhile, one student said, “I liked that I didn’t have to do my work at a certain time. This allowed me to have three part-time jobs.” Another student appreciated being able to set their own schedule, saying, “I had to learn self-motivation, time management and more responsibility. These will all really help me in the future.”

Currently, Stevenson said, PRAVA is working with the Alternative Learning Center to support students’ summer credit recovery, contacting families with prospective students for next year and finalizing course descriptions and their alignment with state and national standards.

Next steps include setting up a student information system, student handbook and staff course descriptions for PRAVA.

Stevenson projected that within three years, PRAVA will be able to offer enough credits for students to graduate from Park Rapids Area High School taking only online courses taught by local teachers.

## **Curriculum and instruction**

Switching hats to her role as curriculum coordinator, Stevenson reported how Century School spent down the funds remaining from its Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy grant.

Purchases included books for distance learners, classroom libraries, students’ birthdays and a summer book giveaway; bilingual books and books relating to themes of cultural diversity and social-emotional learning (SEL); and kids’ magazine subscriptions, such as Highlights for Children and National Geographic.

Stevenson also identified SEL books chosen by staff for 2021-22 school year, including “I Promise” by LeBron James, “What Should Danny Do?” by Ganit and Adir Levy, “Jungle Dancer” by Cynthia Leitich Smith, “Thank You, Omu” by Oge Mora, “The Couch Potato” by Jory John and Pete Oswald, “The Invisible String” by Patrice Karst, “After the Fall” by Dan Santat, “I Am One” by Susan Yerde and “I Have Ants in My Pants!” by Julia Cook.

A planned visit by Hmong-American author Kao Kalia Yang was postponed in 2019 when schools were closed, and the grant funding to support it was put on hold. Stevenson said it has been rescheduled for the upcoming school year.

Stevenson wrapped up with a discussion of plans for the elementary literacy leaders to meet monthly, preparing next year’s World’s Best Workforce and Reads Well by Third Grade plans, and professional development opportunities for next year.

