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Special guests visit unique program between Friends Academy, Hayden-McFadden School

NEW BEDFORD --- Celebration and appreciation were in the air recently at the Hayden-McFadden School where 90 percent of the teachers are voluntarily participating in a novel professional development program.

The program is being provided by an old friend of New Bedford: Friends Academy in North Dartmouth, according to a news release.

The Center for Education Innovation (CEI) at Friends Academy, with more than \$675,000 of support from philanthropists Kate and Al Merck, is delivering state of the art professional development to teachers, who have volunteered to participate after school, the release said.

On April 9, Hayden-McFadden Principal Suzanne Madden hosted the Mercks along with Sen. Mark C.W. Montigny and New Bedford School Superintendent Mary Louise Francis. They visited during one of the regular teacher professional development sessions led by CEI Executive Director Katherine Gaudet.

Speaking to close to 50 teachers, Al Merck said, "Being associated with you and with the Academy and with Katherine Gaudet is a privilege for my wife and me. I say that because I know what kind of work you are going to do and where you are going. It's an exciting voyage."

This past January, CEI launched the professional development program at Hayden-McFadden, which has been labeled a "Level 4", or underperforming, school by the state.

According to the news release, the program aims to increase student achievement through a multi-faceted approach that includes staff professional development with the WIDE World Program developed at the Harvard Graduate School of Education; student use of Lexia Reading and Symphony Math software programs; and laptops for teachers who learn to use them to "Teach for Understanding."

WIDE World's "Teaching for Understanding" model is focused on student-centered learning, the release said. The student becomes the center of the learning process by moving the teacher from behind the desk to behind the child, to support his/her individual learning needs. Teachers use technology to keep track of their students, and to engage them in learning activities.

"WIDE World classrooms are engaging, analytical, and dynamic," said Gaudet, also in the news release. "Students use higher order thinking skills and truly understand, not just memorize, the subject matter. I believe, because I've seen it happen, that this approach has the power to completely transform a school."

Montigny also addressed the teachers. "I think the greater mission of community that Friends was founded on long ago has perhaps never been better expressed than with this program, and so I am very, very proud to be here," he said in the release.

CEI is currently in the process of a major fundraising campaign so that the program can be brought to all New Bedford elementary schools within four years. More information is available at www.ceifriendsacademy.org.

<http://www.southcoasttoday.com/article/20120428/EDU02/120429832>

