

Golden Schools Foundation (GSF) sat down recently with Bridget Jones, Principal of Bell Middle School, to discuss the ongoing success of the iSTEM program and how the program has grown over the four years since it began.

GSF: Thanks for your time, Principal Jones. Congratulations on the continued success of the iSTEM program. This year marks the first year 6<sup>th</sup> graders were included in the iSTEM program. How's that going?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Thank you. We are very proud of our iSTEM program and how successful it has become. Our 6<sup>th</sup> grader class is the biggest group to enter the program with 85 students.

GSF: Of those 85 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, how many intend to continue on with iSTEM in 7<sup>th</sup> grade?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Right now, we have 69 students of the current 6<sup>th</sup> grade class that will continue on with iSTEM in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. But that won't be the total number of 7<sup>th</sup> graders in the program next year. We are still finalizing all the acceptance letters from our incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders from our other area schools.

GSF: Do those iSTEM 6<sup>th</sup> Graders need to re-apply to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade program? Or once they are accepted in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they are guaranteed a spot through 8<sup>th</sup> grade?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Yes and No. To clarify, if a student is accepted into the iSTEM program as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, they do not need to re-apply as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader or 8<sup>th</sup> grader if they wish to continue in the program. However, no one is guaranteed a place in the program. Each student accepted into the program signs a contract to maintain specific academic and student standards in order to remain in the program. If those standards are not maintained, then the student will become ineligible. But anyone can apply into the program during any of their time here at Bell.

GSF: But if there are currently 69 iSTEM students from the current class of 85 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, does that mean that there are only 16 available spots open to incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders coming from the elementary schools? And any other student could only apply if someone drops out of the program to make space available?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Oh, no. We have not placed a limit on the number of students we will accept into the program. In fact, in addition to the 69 current 6<sup>th</sup> graders continuing, we have received nearly 217 applications from incoming 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

GSF: That is a considerable increase from previous years.

PRINCIPAL JONES: Yes. As much as we'd be willing to plan for all of them, we know that a few have also applied to our Honors program and will have to decide between them. And many of the candidates have also applied to other schools, so we anticipate a few students will drop off which is fairly common.

GSF: Well, you say you'd be willing to accommodate for all the applicants, but what is the realistic limit or maximum students that will be allowed in the program?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Well, all of them. I mean, as many of them that applied and want in, we will plan to make room and accommodate them. Right now, we have two sections [classes] of STEM in 7<sup>th</sup> Grade heading into 8<sup>th</sup>. With this current number of incoming 7<sup>th</sup> Grade applicants, we would need to open

that up to 6 or 7 sections if all of those students agree to attend. Given that some of those students will opt-out as I mentioned, we are expecting to increase the program to 5 sections with about 27-30 students in each section.

GSF: What you're saying is that there is no limit to the number of students you can accept into the program then?

PRINCIPAL JONES: For now, no. Ideally, I want equal access to all students that are interested in STEM. This is such an incredible program, that if more of our incoming students want to participate in it, then we will do what we need to do to make it happen. We have five elementary schools that still have 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and they all deserve an opportunity to participate in the iSTEM program once they get here as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader.

GSF: Then parents of current 5<sup>th</sup> graders don't need to panic if they didn't choose in to Bell and the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade iSTEM program for next year?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Absolutely not. There is no need to panic. We will make room for all the students that want to be a part of iSTEM as 6<sup>th</sup> graders or at any of the grade levels.

GSF: Have there been current Bell students, non-STEM students, who have applied to iSTEM for the first time this year?

PRINCIPAL JONES: Actually, yes! We have 4 or 5 new applicants for 8<sup>th</sup> Grade iSTEM. These would be Bell students that hadn't considered STEM before. But for various reasons, they want to give it a try now.

GSF: You will make room for those students?

PRINCIPAL JONES: We will make room for those students. Our plan is to grow the program to accommodate the need of the students. Although we recognize that not all of our students are STEM students. We still have a very strong Honors program, as well as, a strong general curriculum program. So iSTEM is just one offering for students that adds to the overall educational experience at Bell.

GSF: Principal Jones. Thank you so much for your time to explain this. This has been insightful and very beneficial for our Golden community of parents and students alike.

PRINCIPAL JONES: Well, I appreciate you're meeting with me to learn more about Bell and our iSTEM program.

If you have more questions about the STEM program or any other program at Bell Middle School, please contact Principal Jones at [bjones@jeffco.k12.co.us](mailto:bjones@jeffco.k12.co.us).