

Danbury Board of Ed approves hockey co-op – *from The News Times*

By Eileen FitzGerald Staff Writer

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DANBURY - Eleven-year-old Eric Stoeckle sat in the first row of the Board of Education meeting and cheered.

The board voted unanimously Wednesday night to allow Danbury High to join with one or more area schools so city students can play on a varsity hockey team.

Participation costs would come from donations and not from the school district during the initial two-year commitment.

"I'm going to get to keep playing hockey," said Eric, a fifth-grader at Hayestown Avenue School who has played hockey for six years. "I'm a good skater and I can hit pretty hard."

Danbury High started a hockey club team in 2003 that ran for two years before injuries and money issues put a stop to it.

Danbury schools Athletic Director Chip Salvestrini and Assistant Principal Michael Clarke presented their proposal to the school board Wednesday.

"There are two others schools whose numbers are hurting and our numbers are going up," Salvestrini told the board. "The difference between when we started the club and now is that then we had just a few good players. Now we have a nucleus of kids who have been playing hockey in the ice rink for four or five years."

Under this plan, Danbury High would provide players and share expenses for an existing host team.

Danbury officials have been talking informally with Bethel, which has a hockey team, about a co-op for a couple of years, but only became serious about pursuing a co-op in recent months.

Right now, Brookfield and Bethel have a co-op.

Danbury would share in the \$42,000 cost to run the team, made up of students from two or three schools, and the host team would arrange the transportation, officials and coaches. The hockey season runs from Thanksgiving through the beginning of March.

Salvestrini said he'd expect to provide six to seven students from Danbury for the team that could include a total of 22 players.

"We won't wear the Danbury High School colors under a co-op or tri-op," Salvestrini said. "The bottom line is that we are building a program, the kids are going to play and they will play in a varsity setting."

Salvestrini was frank with the board and said that if and when Danbury's players' interest exceeds a certain number, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference guidelines would require the team to stand on its own. It would start with a varsity team, add a junior varsity and eventually a girls' team as warranted.

"The co-op is a great starting point but our goal is to go on our own," he said.

A varsity team would cost about \$55,000 in a few years, which would require the school district to help fund it.

Board member Joseph Scozzafava urged his colleagues to approve the request.

"We have a premier ice rink," he said. "Let's give it a chance. Right at the present, it doesn't cost us a dime."

Ninth-grader Kyle Powers, who has played for four years on a travel team, was thrilled with the vote. He didn't mind that he would play with another team for a couple of years starting next winter.

"It means a lot. I love the sport," Kyle said. "I just want to play right now."

Contact Eileen FitzGerald at eileenf@newstimes.com or at (203) 731-3333