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Schools hope to hire grants expert by end of May

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ANDOVER - With budget troubles in recent years, the schools have had a tough time keeping the educational programs they have in place - let alone starting new ones.

That could change next year as the Andover Coalition for Education becomes a reality. The nonprofit foundation, first conceptualized three years ago by School Committee members Arthur Barber and Anthony James, has raised \$50,000 for the schools to hire a grants coordinator. They hope the coordinator will bring in money for new, innovative courses and curriculum initiatives.

"This is the kind of thing that separates average districts from great districts," Barber said.

The School Department began advertising for a grants coordinator late last month and hopes to have someone on board by the end of May, Barber said. The coalition will continue to raise money to fund additional programs as well.

"It's really got the potential within a couple of years to raise a significant amount of money," James said.

The coalition and grant writer will only raise money for pilot programs in the schools - not to fund the school operating budget.

"That is not the thrust of what we're trying to do," acting Executive Director Tina Girdwood said.

Barber, James and Girdwood modeled the coalition on similar organizations in Newton, Wellesley, Lexington, Brookline, Winchester and other communities. Some districts have had such foundations for as many as 20 years.

"This is one of the exciting programs that should have come down the pike a long time ago but didn't," Barber said.

Coalition supporters raised money for the grants coordinator by calling friends and associates and asking for donations. Since they were able to raise so much money relatively easily, they have high hopes for their future fundraising efforts.

"It gives us a lot of encouragement," James said.

The coalition will host a kickoff reception May 21 at the Addison Gallery of American Art on the campus of Phillips Academy.