Students say ‘Hola’ to speaking Spanish

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Ann Arbor third-graders are saying “hola!” this fall to new lessons that teach them the basics of Spanish language and encourage them to speak it.

The Ann Arbor Languages Partnership between The Ann Arbor Public Schools and the Teacher Education Program at the University of Michigan was implemented this fall in all 21 elementary school media centers.

Around the district, it’s known as World Language.

U-M students, generally working in teams of two, serve as apprentice teachers under the supervision of Ann Arbor elementary media specialists. Third-graders visit the media centers twice each week for half-hour classes.

“I think it’s going really well. The kids are really excited,” said Shelagh Fehrenbach, a U-M student who is teaching Spanish at King Elementary School. “They’re using (Spanish) it in other places (around the school) too.”

Fehrenbach and Marly Van Huis are co-teaching the class and both also work at King as student teachers this year. This double effort “is nice because we really get to know the students,” said Van Huis.

The program is expected to expand to include fourth- and fifth-graders in 2010-11, dovetailing into language offerings at the middle school. If the partnership proceeds as planned,

See Language, page 2

U-M apprentice teacher Marly Van Huis teaches Spanish at King Elementary.

Students at Ann Arbor Open @ Mack share their Spanish lessons during a recent class in the school’s media center. Third-graders at 21 schools around the district – and fourth-graders in this blended class – are learning Spanish this year as part of a World Language initiative with the University of Michigan.

See Building, page 4

Budget sessions scheduled

School officials are hosting information sessions in January, where discussion and budget cut suggestions will be encouraged. Meetings begin at 6:30 p.m. and will be:

• Thursday, Jan. 7 at Huron High School, 2727 Fuller Road.
• Tuesday, Jan. 12 at Skyline High School, 2552 N. Maple Road.
• Thursday, Jan. 14 at Scarlett Middle School, 3300 Lorraine.
• Tuesday, Jan. 19 at Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Blvd.

Visit us online: aaps.k12.mi.us or at news.a2schools.org.

More stories and information can be found online at news.a2schools.org
Exceptional Education

Language, from page 1

officials are hopeful that more languages can be added in the future.

King Principal Kevin Karr said parents often ask about foreign lan-
guage offerings for elementary students.

“I think it hits the need of
what parents want,” he said.

“arly the teaching is going
well – they’ve got a good style.
The kids are very engaged.”

An Ann Arbor Public
Schools online community
survey in March 2008 asked
parents’ opinion of a World
Language program in the
district. Eighty-five percent
said they would strongly
favor it and the top languages
preferred among those respond-
ing were Spanish, Chinese
and French. Some 12 percent
responding said their children
did not attend the district and
468 of those said they would
be attracted to the district if
elementary school language
classes were offered.

Ann O’Keefe, media
specialist at King, said the
World Language program has
added another dimension to the
school. “It offers us a world of
shared culture,” she said. “This
is one more aspect of it. It gives
us a lot to celebrate.”

At Haisley Elementary,
media specialist Kristen Stoops
said students in her center love
it. “I see their enthusiasm when
they’re here. They’re engaged
and interested,” she said.

Tana Ebaugh is a University
of Michigan research associ-
ate and lead trainer for the
program. She visits classes
and observes apprentice teaching
styles. On this day, she is at
Ann Arbor Open @ Mack,
where a blended class of third-
and fourth-graders are learning
to discuss their birthdays. No
English is spoken during the
half-hour class – only Spanish.

“It’s very different for them,”
Ebaugh said, noting that stu-
dents are learning by listening
and participating.

Kit Flynn, media specialist
at Ann Arbor Open said
her school has a number of
Spanish-speaking students
for which the program serves
another purpose. “It gives them
a coaching role,” she said. “It
gives them a time to shine.”

Since Ann Arbor Open en-
compases grades kindergarten
through eight and has blended-
grade classes, she said the use
of Spanish is spreading quickly
around the building.

“Lots of teachers have
embraced it, putting Spanish
signage in their classroom,”
she said. “I hear a lot of mixed
English and Spanish (being
spoken) around the building.”

Throughout the district,
el-
lementary media specialists are
adding more Spanish-language
books to their collections.
Flynn estimates she now has
upwards of 200 such books in
the Ann Arbor Open collection.

Lee Ann Dickinson-Kelley,
Ann Arbor schools administra-
tor for elementary education,
said she is pleased with how
program has taken off around
the district in just a few weeks.

“It’s exceeding our expecta-
tions right now,” she said.

Dickinson-Kelley said
although each school is unique
and each instructional team can
approach the material differ-
ently, there are standard lesson
plans. “We wanted to have the
unique environment, but have
a common high standard of
learning,” she said.

Maria Coolican, project
director for the partnership
on behalf of U-M’s School of
Education, said the university is
committed to the project.

“We are in full recruitment
mode (for apprentice teach-
ers) for next year,” she said.

There will be 90 openings for
people to instruct as the pro-
gram moves into grades three
through five.

Dickinson-Kelley called
the World Language program
a high priority and said it is a
“bulls-eye to the district’s long-
term Strategic Plan.” She said
an elementary language option
is key as the district moves
toward stricter state high school
graduation requirements that
include language.

“We want all of our kids to
be multilingual,” she added.

“It’s an essential tool – a skill
they will need to have.”

Workshop offered for parents

The Ann Arbor Parent Advisory Committee for
Special Education is presenting a free workshop
for parents, staff and caregivers on Thursday, Dec.
3.

“Helping Your Child Get Along in the World:
Strategies for Social Success” will be presented
from 7-9 p.m. at the Skyline High School audi-
torium, 2552 N. Maple Road.

Featured will be Judith Coudouvian, a psychiat-
ric nurse practitioner at the University of Michigan
Department of Psychiatry’s Division of Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry.

For more information about this workshop or
the group, visit http://instruction.aaps.k12.mi.us/
aapc/

Library offers homework help

The Ann Arbor District Library offers free
homework help for Ann Arbor students.

There will be drop-in tutoring in the Downtown
Library Youth Department, 343 South Fifth Ave.
on Tuesday, Dec. 1 from 4-8 p.m. and Wednesdays
Dec. 9 and Dec 16 from 4-8 p.m. Students from
the University of Michigan will be available to
provide help to school-aged children and teens at
no charge. No appointment is necessary. Details:
734-327-8301.

Free online homework help is offered for grades
three through adult. Brainfuse online tutors are
available from 2-11 p.m. daily in the subject areas
of math, English/language arts, science, and social
studies.

There also is a writing lab where student may
submit a paper or resume for critique.

This online service is available in English and
Spanish and requires an Ann Arbor District Library
Card to use the service. Visit aadl.org/homework
or call 734-327-8301.

Vacancy open on school board

The Ann Arbor Public Schools is seeking to fill
a vacancy on the school board. The seat became
open when Helen Gates-Bryant resigned her seat
this month. Application deadline is Thursday, Dec.
3 at 4 p.m.

Details can be found online at http://aaps.k12.
mi.us.
Exceptional Education

Staff in the Spotlight: Kathleen Wright

Fairies and magical learning

Kindergarten lessons tie into couple’s hobby following Ann Arbor’s tiny doors

By Casey Hans
AAPNService

Shhhhh. You’ll wake the fairies in Kathleen Wright’s classroom.

Kindergarteners speak in hushed tones as they build small fairy houses. The project is the culmination of studying habitats – animal, human and fairy – with their teacher who, along with her illustrator husband, Jonathan, shares life in Ann Arbor with the fairies, also known as the little people.

This should not be confused, of course, with “kidpeople,” which is how Kathleen Wright refers to her students at Lakewood Elementary School, which she says “helps build class spirit.”

But, we digress … back to our fairy story.

The Wrights first “discovered” fairy doors in downtown Ann Arbor in 2005, leaving journals in which visitors have written and drawn pictures. And, although the tiny entryways have become a fixture to visitors, to Wright’s students, a recent trip to see the doors was magical.

Parent Christopher Cerda said his daughter, Claire, was so excited that she spent the evening before making her own fairy house. “She just can’t get enough of it,” said Cerda, one of a dozen adults who came on the field trip this month.

Kathleen Wright has a special “in” with the fairies: Her artist-designer husband, Jonathan, is the author of the 2007 “Who’s Behind the Fairy Doors?” and operates Urban-Fairies.com that chronicles the urban doors in Ann Arbor. Together, the two are writing fairies-themed storybooks, and creating an “Urban Fairies Field Journal” as their next projects.

During the recent trip downtown, students ended at Sweetwaters Café where Kathleen Wright filed cupcake holders with miniature cookies, raspberries, the tiniest of treats and plastic thimbles with “fairy lemonade.” This is as much fun for me as for them,” she noted.

Cerda said Wright and the staff’s approach at Lakewood Elementary have inspired him. “It’s a joy to see so many teachers and staff in the district work so hard to make a great experience for the kids,” he said. “It’s heartwarming.”

Kathleen Wright said the fairies and elfin beings have been part of how she keeps learning magical for students. Fairies, leprechauns, unicorns and other fantasy beings have been a fascination since a trip to her family’s homeland of Ireland at the age of 4. Her childhood was spent with the joy of being allowed to explore her thoughts freely, she said.

She and Jonathan married 22 years ago and the first fairy door entered the picture while Kathleen ran a preschool in their home; Jonathan found just the spot for the tiny door which inspired the young students. “They wrote, they created things. It was hugely popular from the get-go,” she said.

Soon, Jonathan created more fairy doors at businesses downtown. He left guest books at each location, inviting visitors to write and draw in them. He used original illustrations and his interpretations for “Who’s Behind the Fairy Doors?”

Kathleen Wright’s life evolved from 15 years of preschool teaching into professional storytelling and to her life in the Ann Arbor classroom. She ties the fairy project into her teaching. Throughout it all, she has had a love of literacy and a general love for words. As she puts it: “The gift of gab – I’ve put it to use.”

Jonathan Wright steeped in the said he was “steeped in the arts.”

As for the fairies? The Wrights stress that they’ve never seen them.

Kathleen and Jonathan Wright

Occupations: Kindergarten teacher at Lakewood Elementary and freelance graphic designer and illustrator, respectively. Both have been part of creating the fairy doors around Ann Arbor and chronicling them in writing and illustrations. Kathleen also is a professional storyteller and does training and workshops for teachers. She has a track on the Ann Arbor Storytellers’ CD Signature Stories.

Education: They attended the University of Michigan together.

Ages: Both are 49.

Residence: The city of Ann Arbor.

Family: Two daughters, Samuelina, 16, and Delaney, 14.

Pets: A rather large Yorkie named Popeye.

Community Service: Much time is devoted to chronicking the fairy doors in books and stories and following the journals that visitors write in and the gifts that are left for the fairies by visitors. Monetary donations left for the fairies are given annually to the Food Gatherers.

Favorite books: Both enjoy picture books. Recent favorites of Kathleen’s have been Kelly Corrigan’s “The Middle Place,” Patrick Taylor’s “Irish Country” series, and “The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society” by Shaffer and Barrows.

Life philosophies: “If you’re gonna do something, do it with gusto.” – Kathleen Wright.

“Imagination is key to the fairies and that should be integrated into one’s life too.” – Jonathan Wright.

Find the fairy doors: http://urban-fairies.com/

More stories and information can be found online at news.a2schools.org
Board this year. Chizek said the Local builder Bob Chizek student building program.

Community leaders oversees the bankers, educators and other ers, real estate professionals, community including build A 25-member board com students lifelong learners. and self-sufficiency and make same: to create an independence curriculum requirements might allowing students to use class credits for required advanced Birko explained the program has his goal is to help his students gain skills and become confident in their abilities.

The house isn’t the product,” explained Birko, who his students call “coach.” “They (the students) are the product. The house is the tool.”

Most days, he has to prod students to wrap up and catch the bus back to school. They have a hard time putting down the hammer, he said. “They all have each others’ backs,” Birko said of the camaraderie that is built into the program. “That’s one of the lessons they learn – to appreciate each other.”

He said new state high school curriculum requirements might change the program – perhaps allowing students to use class credits for required advanced math credits. But the basis for the program will remain the same: to create an independence and self-sufficiency and make students lifelong learners.

A 25-member board comprised of professionals from the community including builders, real estate professionals, bankers, educators and other community leaders oversees the student building program.

Local builder Bob Chizek chairs the nonprofit AASBIP board this year. Chizek said the program is a model partnership. He said the support of the school administration and community dedication has helped to carry it forward. “It’s a marriage between public and private interests,” he said. “It has worked so well. We need to do more of that, partnering in this time of challenged budgets.”

Chizek said board members enjoy their service. “The board is deep – some have served for 30-plus years,” he added. “Part of the payback is that they enjoy helping the next generation.”

Birko said the program has been a godsend for students who don’t learn well in a traditional classroom.

“I tell them if you sit there quietly with your hands folded, you’ll fail this class,” he said. “You must assert yourself. You must participate. You must learn to lead.”

He said each time a house is completed it proves to be another amazing year. “It touches me every time,” he added.

More stories and information can be found online at news.a2schools.org.