

AAPSNews

News, features, profiles and activities in The Ann Arbor Public Schools

Achievement gap discussed Thursday

A meeting this week will review and interpret the district's standardized test scores, discuss the achievement gap among diverse student populations and the consider immediate and long-term solutions. The meeting is April 29 from 7-9 p.m. at Peace Neighborhood Center, 1111 N. Maple Road, Ann Arbor. A presentation will take place first followed by a Q&A session. Details: (734) 994-2200.

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More news and features online at <http://a2schools.org>

Issue No. 13, April 26, 2010

Earth Day: Lawton aims at more recycling

Northside students learn about a more gentle Earth, page 2

From AAPSNews Service

Students in Teri Fraley's fourth-grade classroom at Lawton Elementary School have launched an environmental effort that they hope will translate to better awareness – and more recycling – throughout the school and the district.

Students presented a multi-media introduction for the program to school assemblies this month. The school can earn money for recycling clean chip bags, Lunchables containers, juice containers and candy wrappers. Fraley said the project was a natural extension of the Nature's Recyclers science unit.

"We have joined with Teracycle, MRF, Recycle Ann Arbor and Ann Arbor Schools to make this work," she said. "We have so much trash that can be recycled and we want to see students and teachers think about what they put into the landfill if they put

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Burns Park second-graders plant bean seedlings and seeds in the school's new plot. They will compare the progress of both throughout the spring. The large plot is being coordinated by teachers and parents as an outdoor classroom.

Gardens create outdoor classes

Burns Park, Northside schools get grants to encourage students to plant, harvest

Featured story

From AAPSNews Service

Tucked behind Burns Park Elementary School is a sunny spot that was a playground, but now is filled with activity of a different sort as students, parents and teachers dig in to create the school's first garden project.

Students are working, playing and learning in piles of compost. They are planting seeds, mulching paths and learning about weather and gardening.

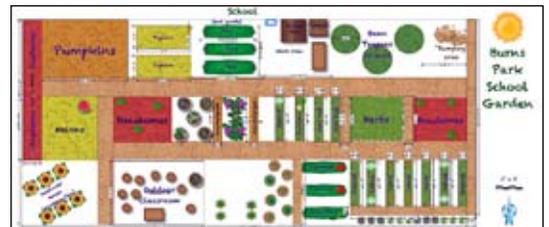
Instructing in the Burns Park School Garden on a sunny spring afternoon are parents Lynda Norton and Emily Hastie as well as Burns Park student teacher Lauren Yoder. They have set up learning stations, with students rotating between digging and moving mulch and compost, planting pea plants and seeds and journaling or painting hand-made signs for garden crops.

The garden plot is 50 feet by 100 feet and was created

See Gardens, page 4

First it's the planning, then the planting

Plans for the Burns Park School Garden were designed by parent and master gardener Lynda Norton, after much input from parents and the school community. There is a place for every grade to plant and learn. The center will eventually feature a garden structure, such an arbor or pergola, upon which grape vines will be trained.



Peer-to-Peer programs raise awareness of depression

From AAPSNews Service

Emily Cepla has fought depression through high school and college. The University of Michigan senior said telling her parents about it was the best thing she did to put her life back on track.

"I thought if I told people, they'd think I was crazy or suicidal," Cepla told students at Roberto Clemente Center at a recent all-school assembly. "After I told my parents, they got me into therapy. It was the best decision of my life."

Cepla shared her story with students as part of the Peer-to-Peer Awareness Campaign, part of the Ann Arbor Public Schools' partnership with the University of Michigan Depression Center.

Cepla told students she treatment over the years with varied success. She said she has now found the right drug to treat her depression and sees a counselor she trusts.

"Only you know if something is wrong," she told students. "Ask for help if you need it. There's nothing to be ashamed of. You deserve to be happy, you deserve to be loved and you deserve to get better."

Polly Gipson, a clinical child

psychologist at the U-M Department of Psychiatry's Child and Adolescent Section also spoke. Gipson said that sometimes depression exhibits itself as irritable behavior and anger. "I know we all have periods of time we might feel sad or down and that's to be expected," she said. "It's when we have it for weeks at a time that we get concerned."

Some signs of adolescent depression include: lack of enjoyment, weight changes, changes in sleep patterns, loss of energy, feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness and problems concentrating. Gipson urged students who have signs of depression to talk with a school staff member, a parent or someone close to them such as an older cousin, sibling or youth minister to get help.

Roberto Clemente junior Richard Johnson III is president of the Student Council and one of several students that helped organize the Peer-to-Peer Awareness Campaign and event. The April 14 event included talks from experts, as well as some student and staff discussion and an impromptu rap poem by two students about "feeling good about yourself."

"I think it's very necessary,"



U-M senior Emily Cepla talks with Roberto Clemente Center students about her life fighting depression as a high school and college student during a Peer-to-Peer depression awareness program. Several high schools hosted similar programs in cooperation with the University of Michigan Depression Center.

Johnson said about the campaign, which educates students so that they can learn to help each other. "I know friends who are depressed and they kind of run away from it. Some of them do things like take drugs to hide from it. By informing people of it, you will help to save lives."

Other Ann Arbor high schools have had activities or are planning programs as well:

- At Stone High School, the "Stressed and Depressed" program was a partnership between the U-M Depression Center, the Stone Youth Advisory Council and the Regional Alliance for Healthy Schools Health Center at Stone. It offered a skit performed by the Youth Advisory

Council students as well as a student interviewing a small panel about adolescent depression.

- Community High's program was part of the school's lunch-and-learn series which spoke about the importance of good sleep habits for mental health.
- Huron High School had a speaker in sophomore health and wellness classes. Part of the program included a depression video made by students.
- Skyline High School plans an event in May to coincide with National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day. Their slogan "Stigma Hurts, Awareness Helps."

Visit www.depressioncenter.org/schools/ for information.



Gerald Kim works on a project in the Angell artroom. At right, with his finished work.

Angell Elementary 1st-grader lauded for artistic talent

From AAPSNews Service

There isn't anything Gerald Kim would rather do than his art.

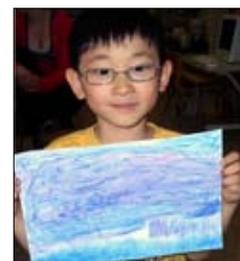
And for good reason. The first-grader at Angell Elementary School was recently chosen as one of 15 elementary-aged students in the state whose work will be featured in exhibits sponsored by the Michigan Art Education Association.

His work was first chosen for the Region 3 exhibit, which includes Ann Arbor. Then his work was chosen for the state-level exhibit, which will take place June 1-25 at the Kendall School of Art and Design in Grand Rapids. His work also will be shown at the

MAEA Conference in the fall in Dearborn, according to the MAEA.

"I was really pleased when Gerald's piece was selected. And to be a first-grader, that's really something," said Babich, who teaches art to all elementary levels at Angell. She said many of her colleagues were surprised to learn that the winning work was done by a first-grader.

She said although the honor is unique for a first-grader, often early elementary students are more pliable and open in their



approach to doing art.

His mom, SooAh Kim, said he was "honored and excited to be chosen."

She said Gerald has shown an interest in

summer Creativity Camp at The Ann Arbor Art Center.

"This is something he'll remember for a long time," Babich said.

(Editor's note: The district received parental permission to write about and identify this student and his achievement.)

Crewing calls rowers to the river

From AAPSNews Service

In his four years of crew, Pioneer senior Jacob Merrell has noticed the sport gaining a foothold in his school and the community.

Merrell, who played middle school football before switching to crew in high school, admits the sport “still isn’t cool to my football buddies” but even they acknowledge its benefits. Merrell says he’s fitter and faster than many former teammates. He’s also landed a full scholarship to join the prestigious crew program at the University of Washington this fall.

“Just as I’ve grown up, it is more accepted,” he said. “We had a guy who normally plays lacrosse who joined the team last fall. He said to me that he has a newfound respect for the sport. He never thought it would be that cool.”

Huron varsity crew coach Tom Kraft has seen a similar trend. “Five years ago, the team wasn’t well known in the school,” he recalls. “It was just sort of a group of kids that rowed. In last five years, we improved pretty rapidly. The last two years we’ve gone to nationals. The recognition is there that we are a quality sport. We have started to attract athletes (from other sports) who might have done something else.”

Both programs are among the strongest in the Midwest. Observers believe the Skyline program that launched last fall will be just as successful. There are more than 170 students competing in crew among the three high schools this spring. The sport is growing so rapid locally that availability to practice on Argo



At left, the Pioneer High School men’s crew team at the Canadian Secondary Schools National Championships in June 2009 in St. Catharines, Ont. Pictured are coxswain Meaghan Kennedy, Lucas Kennedy, Jae Jung, Scott Burdick and Jacob Merrell.



At far lower left, Skyline crew team members huddle during a scrimmage last fall.



Lower right, the Huron High School varsity crew team leaves Saginaw last fall during a 13-mile distance row from Saginaw to Bay City, an important part of fall training. (Photos courtesy of crew coaches and teams.)

Pond is becoming scarce.

Since crew is a no-cut sport, everybody participates at regattas. Rowers race against others with similar experience and skills in novice, junior and varsity classes. And for many, the season runs year-round. Fall is geared toward distance races and indoor winter training on rowing machines provides conditioning for the dynamic spring season.

Both Pioneer and Huron train with one goal: To qualify for national competitions. The Midwest Scholastic Rowing Championship on May 8-9 in Cincinnati, Ohio, determines who goes to national regattas.

Pioneer has qualified at least one four-person boat for the USRowing Youth National Championships each of the last four years. Written on one side of the Pioneer boathouse is a long list of rowers who have gone on

to compete in college.

“We are trying to make highly competitive national competitive teams. That’s our focus in town,” said Pioneer head coach Rich Griffith. “Some of the other teams (in the state) are good but not focused on nationals. We structure our program toward that. It’s not like win-at-all-costs, but we like winning.”

Coming off its most successful season ever last spring, the Pioneers are looking for more. The USRowing nationals are set for June 12-14 in Cincinnati.

The River Rats are working hard to keep up with their cross-town rivals. Only a single point separated them from tying first-place Pioneer at last fall’s American Heritage RiverFall Classic. Huron has qualified three boats for the Scholastic Rowing Association of America Championship Regatta in the past

two years – a Junior Women’s 8, and a Junior Men’s 4, both of which placed fourth in the final last year, and a Junior Women’s 4 two years ago. The Scholastic championships are May 29 in Saratoga, N.Y.

Skyline coach Kit Bennett, a former coach at Pioneer, has seen encouraging signs from his young group that includes just freshmen and sophomores. In the program’s first regatta last fall, Skyline captured bronze medals by the Men’s and Women’s Novice 8s and the Men’s Novice 4s.

Bennett is leaning on a bevy of coaches to help his nearly 40 rowers improve in time for the Midwest regatta. “It’s tough, but we are trucking along and enjoying the process,” he said. *A more detailed story of Ann Arbor’s three crew teams can be found online at <http://news.a2schools.org>.*



After-school sewing teaches skill, world issues at Slauson

Slauson Middle School students have been sewing after school with the help of teacher Carol Mohrlock, paraprofessional Lisa Field and volunteer and retired teacher Suetta King, who have organized the “Little Dresses for Africa” club.

Each Thursday, students met for one hour to sew dresses and discuss social and economic issues of the world’s least developed nations. “The students

were energetic and eager to learn,” said Mohrlock. “They have shared how good it feels to help others while learning a new skill.”

Nonprofit “Little Dresses for Africa” helps send relief to children in Central Africa. Simple dresses made from pillowcases are distributed through orphanages, churches and camps. A goal is to plant in the hearts of little girls that they are worthy.

Several club members have offered to “run the club” during the next school year and have been talking with their friends about joining this club.

Earth Day, from page 1

something in the trash.”

The students’ efforts are part of the Michigan Green Schools certification program where Lawton has reached the “emerald” level. (<http://www.lawmasc.net/greenschools.htm>)

Nadia Esmail, a parent and chairwoman of the Lawton PTO’s Green School initiative, said she is excited about the steps Fraley’s class and the entire school is taking to recycle more. “It’s a great cause,” she said. “Our goal is to get zero waste in the school. We’re focused mainly in the cafeteria at lunch time.”

“We’re hoping to bring the (recycling) idea from home to here and from here to home,” she added. “It’s not just this year. We want to continue and make it the habit of the school and beyond the school.”

The students are taking it one step further working with Terracycle, a New Jersey company that encourages “upcycling” recyclables that can be made into new items such as totes, gym bags, kites and other usable items.

Students first conducted a waste audit then researched op-



tions to reduce, reuse, and recycle their waste. They have become a hub for collecting the “Terracycle” materials that can be shipped back to be made into unique new items. Visit www.terracycle.net/ for a sampling of items, such as pencil cases and totes made from recycled juice and cookie wrappers.

Fraley said students are being encouraged to bring in recyclable items from home, as well. “Think of it like the boxtop collection. It earns money for our school,” she said. She said the school has set a goal for the next level which is top designation: “Evergreen” status.

Northside students hear Earth Day messages of ‘The Rock People’

Ann Arbor photographer Kate Lazuka, illustrator of the book, “The Rock People,” shared her special “people” and their message with students at Northside Elementary as part of the school’s Earth Day celebration on April 22.

Each student visiting Lazuka’s presentation was invited to hold one of her “rock people” so that they could experience them first-hand. Stone characters with names like Pesky, Dip, Grumbles, Radar and Groucho are designed to encourage laughter, but also a gentle approach to living and the Earth, said Lazuka.

“I ask them to hold the stones and look for their faces and feel the energy,” she said. Lazuka collaborated on the book with friend and writer Sue Valiquett.

“It was the Native Americans who first introduced the stones to me. The Native American people believe everything is alive – yes, even the stones,” she told Northside students during her presentation.

Written for both children and adults, the book features a young girl named Nae-Nae who discovers a face on a rock gazing up at her while she collects rocks on the beach. Through a family legend, she learns about the rock people, energies who are here to heal and protect the Earth.

“The Rock People” is available locally at Nicola’s Books in the Westgate Shopping Center, Downtown Home and Garden on South Ashley Street and Crazy Wisdom Bookstore on Main Street. It can also be purchased on the Web page www.therock-people.net, where students can also visit and upload pictures of themselves with their own “rock people” finds and tell their stories. Also on the Web page are educational materials about reduce, reuse recycle and links for kids’ environmental pages.



Gardens, from page 1

when the school underwent renovations and a building addition on the south side, leaving a beautiful, flat area with southern exposure.

The Burns Park community got to work last fall. “There were a few people interested in (creating) a garden,” said Norton, who co-chairs the garden effort with Hastie. “It was perfect timing, a perfect location.”

“I would love to see every school have a garden,” Hastie added.

Some 30 people participated in the planning process; about a dozen have been active in starting the garden. Students planted strawberries and herbs last fall and are planting peas, salad greens and vegetables and learning about weather patterns and healthy eating this spring.

Norton said Burns Park parents

have been generous with donations of money, plants, mulch, trailers and their time to help the project.

Hastie and Norton, PTO president and master gardener, are devoting their time to teaching students the basics of gardening. With input from parents and teachers, Norton developed a plan for the garden. The project has received a grant from the PTO Golden Apple and a recent award from the Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation.

Hastie said teaching about good food and healthy eating is a goal of the garden, which “fosters a love of nature and creates rich educational experiences for years to come,” according to its mission.

Kindergarteners will plan a sunflower “house” in one corner of the garden and first-graders have created bean tepees. Older students are planting corn, lettuce, kohlrabi, broc-

coli, and carrots. “We’ll be able to harvest them in June and make a big salad before you head off to middle school,” Hastie told fifth-graders who were planting lettuce seeds.

Students are invited out twice a week and can volunteer during Thursday lunch hours.

Not only are students learning, but adults are, as well. Although she is a master gardener, Norton said “I’ve never done much vegetable gardening, so I’m learning.” And Hastie has “always wanted to garden, so this is great for me.”

Another Ann Arbor school garden project at Northside Elementary School also was funded this spring through AAPSEF grant. Kindergarten teachers Winnie Chang and Jan Smith said work is getting under way to get compost delivered and start work so that planting can begin the first week of May.

The 20- by 23-foot garden is being organized by an interested group of Northside parents.

They plan to eventually involve the entire school once they get going. The Educational Foundation grant will be used for plants, compost, seeds, trowels and “everything we would need to do this garden,” Chang said.

“We’re also doing some extra planting too, so we can sell some things and help the garden sustain itself,” Smith said.

Chang said a parent is setting up a blog Web page where photos and discussion about the garden can occur. Also special at Northside is a greenhouse that has been on site for many years, allowing them to store plants before they go in the ground. *A more detailed story about these school gardens can be found online at <http://news.a2schools.org>.*