

AAPSNews

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

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Issue No. 23, October 25, 2010

Superintendent Search

What: A series of forums are scheduled the evenings of Monday, Oct. 25 through Wednesday, Oct. 27 to gain public input about the search for a new superintendent for The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Where: At locations throughout the community.

Details online including a link to online survey: <http://a2schools.org/super.search>

Input sought on new superintendent

Process asks for top 10 qualities sought in a school chief

From AAPSNews Service

Several community forums are scheduled this month to offer input to the Ann Arbor Public Schools about what qualities are

desired in a leader as the district begins the search for a new superintendent.

A survey has also been developed asking members of the public to select their top 10 qualities in a superintendent; there also is space for listing additional feedback.

It will be available online until

5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 31 and can be found at <http://a2schools.org/super.search>. The survey will also be available to the public during the scheduled Superintendent Search Community Forums.

The forums are open to

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■ Full list of forums, page 4

Student writers get published

826michigan picks Ann Arbor as centerpiece project for second year

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Ann Arbor students will be in the publishing limelight again this year as the centerpiece project of a 5-year-old nonprofit that aims squarely at literacy and writing for area youth.

826michigan has chosen the Roberto Clemente Center as its major project for



Katie Jones, a former volunteer and current AmeriCorps assistant with Ann Arbor's 826michigan works with students at Roberto Clemente on the program's centerpiece writing project: Fictional Civil War accounts. Last year, Huron High School writing students were the focus.

this school year; volunteers come into the classroom to work with students, help them write and eventually publish a book of the finished work. Last year, the nonprofit writing center published a book of essays from Huron High School students.

Smaller 826michigan writing projects are also under way this year at Scarlett Middle School, Pattengill and Mitchell elementary schools and Community High School. On-site workshops and after-

See 826michigan, page 6

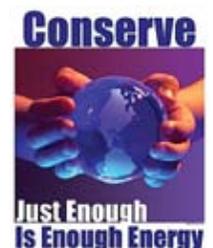
Energy awareness and use the focus of 4-year program

From AAPSNews Service

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has launched a four-year energy-saving initiative called Energy Awareness and Sustainability Education, or EASE.

The program will address energy use in all 33 schools, comprising 3.5 million square feet of facilities. It will target all major utilities, engage staff, students and facility users to conserve energy and work to change attitudes and habits of those who use school buildings. Point persons are being sought at each building to lead the education effort with students, staff and parents.

Creating the new program is one of the goals



See Energy program, page 4

Tappan garden a feast for the senses

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

The garden's a delight for students and teachers at Tappan Middle School. Easily accessible, the Tappan Agrarian Garden often serves as a tool for teaching and has spawned an active after-school club for students.

The garden is a partnership with the nonprofit Agrarian Adventure and other members of the community who have an interest in organic and community gardening.

Elissa Trumbell of the Agrarian Adventure and a volunteer at the Tappan Agrarian Garden helps run the after-school Food and Garden Club that meets weekly. "Hopefully, you'll have someone at your table who has been here before," Trumbell told students during the club's first session, where they were learning about knife safety before cutting up vegetables to make salsa. "We all are showing responsibility while we cook."

Kathy Coppens, a Tappan science teacher is the staff adviser for the club. She said interest in the garden continues to grow.

"We're getting more popular," said Coppens. "We're trying to make as many connections as we can. I love that kids learn that we eat what we grow."

Although the Tappan Food and Garden Club is popular, drawing some 30 students after school, the garden is often used during the school day, as well.

Coppens said many teachers use the garden for lessons including Life Sciences teachers who use the greenhouse and foreign language teachers who help students study the Latin names for herbs and other plants.

They appreciate having the garden so close at hand, with many, like Wendy Raymond, using it as a regular learning tool. Raymond brings her sixth-grade language arts class out to the garden for inspiration. "What does the fence remind you of?" she asks during a recent visit. "Be using your imagination. There are all different colors and textures around so pay attention to everything."

"A lot of you were amazed by that spider. Someone has a feeling of being attacked by sunflowers – write that down."

Students were journaling their sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and feelings as part of the visit. Between journal entries, they also took part in helping in the garden by cleaning sunflower



Students in Wendy Raymond's language arts classes at Tappan Middle School visit the Tappan Agrarian Garden on a recent morning to get inspiration for creating poetry.

seeds and planting and watering lettuce seedlings in the greenhouse.

A student named Sam explained that it's not just a visit, but that the class will have to produce work. "We're doing it so we can write a poem," he said. "My favorite thing in the garden was the mint. I love mint gum."

Classmate Gabe was prepared to write his poem as the class finished its visit. "I like the gardens – I like all of this," he said. "It smells good."

Raymond has been bringing students out to the garden for years. "Since we've started the garden, it's gotten a lot bigger," she said. When the garden was started some seven years ago, students helped to construct it and the greenhouse on site, which serves as a "winter garden" that can be used in colder months by teachers and the community.

A Spanish class recently picked cilantro and basil and an eighth-grade social studies class makes squash soup as part of American History studies, she said. "Everyone finds a way to use it," she added. "It's great for the sixth-graders because they don't even know (the garden) is here." To check out available volunteer opportunities e-mail: volunteer@agrarianadventure.org. For general information e-mail info@agrarianadventure.org or call 734-926-5535.



Tappan Middle School students participate in an after-school Food & Garden Club that has become popular. It is run by volunteers from the Agrarian Adventure and teacher/adviser Kathy Coppens. Here, students chop a tomato and peel garlic to make fresh salsa.



Community High band earns kudos for unique sound

From AAPSNews Service

Sole Transit is making its mark on the local music scene.

And this group of five young Ann Arbor musicians from Community High School has taken one more step this fall, earning top honors at the Neutral Zone's Battle of the Bands, winning a recording contract with the youth-run Orpheum Recording Studio.

Seniors Leif Gearhart-Hall and Kyle Morrison, junior Jordan Siden and sophomores Erez Levin and Dan Sagher are all active in the Community High jazz program, which lends a definite flavor to their musical style, which they describe as funk rock with a mix of other styles tossed in.

On stage, Gearhart-Hall can be found on trumpet, Sagher on bass, Levin on drums ("I've got the best seat in the house," he said.) Morrison on tenor sax and Siden on guitar.

They don't have a vocalist, but are considering trying out a guest singer in the near future. But for now, Gearhart-Hall's strong trumpet acts as a voice for the band. "The horn players can direct the band," Siden explained.

Their experimental approach to their music is what has brought them to where they are today: A close-knit group that knows how to work and play together to get just the right blend of sound.

Levin and Siden started the band in the spring of 2009 after getting together about a year earlier. They played a lot of Beatles and Led Zeppelin and, as they got into more jazz and funk, they decided they needed a horn section.

Sole Transit was born.

"We had all played a lot of different styles, then we got together and started writing together," explained Gearhart-Hall.

This pool of talent spends their daytime hours in classes at Community High School and practices weekly in the basement of Levin's family home. Three of the performers – Levin, Sagher, and Siden – give the bulk of the credit for the band to the Ann Arbor Music Center, where they study their art.

"We owe the success we've had to our instruction there," Levin said.

Some of their overall inspiration includes

the Dirty Brass Band, Led Zeppelin, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. But, each musician has his own preference and each contributes. Levin and Sagher love heavy metal, for example. "We like the heavier side of music," Erez explains.



Dan Sagher, upper left, Kyle Morrison, left, Jordan Siden, below left, and Leif Gearhart-Hall (on trumpet) and Erez Levin (on drums), below, comprise the band Sole Transit, which recently won the Neutral Zone's Battle of the Bands. These photos were taken during Breakin' Curfew last spring youth music extravaganza at the Power Center for the Performing Arts. (Photos courtesy: Morgan Tucker and Gabby George)



More photos of Sole Transit can be found on Facebook and video on youtube at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJT2QNQV/kjk

For a student-written feature about Sole Transit, visit student publication The Communicator online: <http://the-communicator.org/2010/01/sole-transit/>

"It gives us more of a rocking sound."

The band does a lot of original material, but also performs covers, including a version

See Sole Transit, page 4

Energy program, from page 1

in the district's Strategic Plan. The school board approved a contract with Johnson Controls, Inc. in May 2010.

The program should be self-sustaining when the four years are completed, according to Randy Trent, the district's executive director for physical properties.

JCI has guaranteed the district a positive cash flow of \$265,000 over the contract's term. This fall, JCI has done energy audits, reviewing general maintenance and conditions at each building, which will provide a baseline point from which each school can aim to improve energy consumption.

George Roush, a building efficiency engineer for JCI and the on-site energy manager assigned to the Ann Arbor schools, said building visits "have already generated work orders for things to be repaired. We're trying to get ahead of that curve."

Plans include a comprehensive annual check of each building to see how the use of energy has progressed. Energy consumption will be tracked monthly against goals for each building; goals will be adjusted for weather, occupancy and building changes. "We will also go out and spot check throughout the year," Roush said.

Brad Mellor, school district coordinator for this program, said the results of the energy audits have raised some early issues that can be addressed. "Johnson Controls has looked at our buildings in an exhaustive way – it speaks well to the company," he said.

The program is developing a website that will have profiles and a history of each district building and school, a searchable database of information and tips for energy consumption and information for the public. The site will be linked from the district web page.

Roush and other JCI energy experts are supporting the program strategically throughout each year. It is estimated that the program could produce a positive cash flow of \$3 million for the district with full involvement of students, staff and parents.

JCI has done work for the Ann Arbor schools in the past, achieving more than \$13.2 million in energy savings since 1993. The utility budget in 1984 was \$5.4 million and has been reduced to \$5.1 million this year, Trent said.

During the contract, the company also plans to put an energy team at local high schools to learn about the business of energy savings and prepare them for a future in college or work in the field.

Three firms from a total of five bid proposals were interviewed to handle the project for Ann Arbor. The interview committee recommended JCI based on the company's global experience, past success in the district, guaranteed cost savings and student involvement.

Sole Transit, from page 3

of Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" which Levin describes as "louder and more rock and roll (than Cash's version), but funky sounding."

One of their signature sounds is a funk version of the "Sesame Street" theme song, which always draws an enthusiastic crowd reaction.

Two other CHS jazz program students, Will Smith and Paul Smith, have played sax and keyboard, respectively, with the band. The two still occasionally perform with the group.

Sole Transit's first public show was at the 2009 Top of the Park Grass Rootz stage, which showcases local teen talent during the Ann Arbor Summer Festival. They also took part in a block party on the University of Michigan Diag sponsored by local arts group FOKUS. They mostly play at the Neutral Zone's "B-Side" which hosts local talent at the teen center once each month.

"Our first real gig," Gearhart-Hall said, "was Breakin' Curfew," the Neutral Zone's annual student-run spring event hosted at U-M's Power Center for the Performing Arts in partnership with the University Musical Society. They played that in mid-May.

Last summer, they headlined the second

AnnArbor.com concert-on-the-patio series in downtown Ann Arbor. They have been invited to perform on U-M's student-run radio station WCBN on Nov. 3.

Morrison – also known as K-Mo on the band's Facebook page – said they are fortunate to be in Ann Arbor where there are so many resources for musicians.

"When you look at the band's success, you have to factor in where we are," he said. "We have a lot of support locally."

"I don't think we could do this anywhere else," added Gearhart-Hall.

Their name started at "Soule Transit" but was changed along the way to "Sole." They're not really sure how it developed – it just seemed like a good name and it has served them well.

"We're a funk band, but didn't want it to be 's-o-u-l' – we didn't have the chutzpah for that," said Sagher.

What of the future? As Gearhart-Hall and Morrison are seniors, they said a lot depends on what they study and where the go after high school. "I think we're all really ready to make something of the band," Gearhart-Hall said.

"We're all committed to this band," added Siden.

Forums, from page 1

anyone in the community. There is a set of "hosted" forums in which district groups and organizations, along with the Board of Education, will invite their members as well as two general community forums at Huron and Skyline high schools.

Forums are scheduled on the following dates and times:

Monday, Oct. 25

- **6:30 p.m., forum hosted by the Black Parent Student Support Group (BPSSG) and the Ann Arbor branch of the NAACP** at Second Baptist Church of Ann Arbor (www.sbcannarbor.com/), 850 Red Oak Road, Ann Arbor.

- **7 p.m., forum hosted by the Ann Arbor Parent Advisory Committee for Special Education (AAPAC)** at Forsythe Middle School Media Center, 1655 Newport Road, Ann Arbor.

Tuesday, Oct. 26

- **6:30-8 p.m., general community forum** at Skyline High School Commons, 2552 N. Maple Road, Ann Arbor.

- **7 p.m. Ann Arbor Parent Teacher Organization Council (PTOC)** forum at Scarlett Middle School Media Center, 3300 Lorraine St., Ann Arbor.

Wednesday, Oct. 27

- **5:30 p.m., Youth Senate forum at the Ann Arbor District Library Conference Room** (www.aadl.org/), 343 S. Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor.

- **6:30-8 p.m., general community forum** at Huron High School Cafeteria, 2727 Fuller Road, Ann Arbor.

Former Superintendent Todd Roberts left Ann Arbor this month to accept an executive education post in North Carolina and has been replaced by Interim Superintendent Robert Allen, who has served most recently as the district's deputy superintendent for operations.

The school board has hired Ray & Associates, an Iowa professional services firm, to assist with the search for a permanent replacement. A new superintendent is expected to be in place by the end of this school year.

16-year partnership helps Ann Arbor students cope with day-to-day stresses

From AAPSNews Service

The idea is basic: Offer one-on-one help for students who need an extra nudge, a bit of attention or assistance with a family or life crisis. The help can be offered at any point in a child's life, depending on individual need.

This simple concept grew into a class in The University of Michigan Department of Psychology and has helped hundreds of students in The Ann Arbor Public Schools over many years. The Michigan Mentorship Program is entering its 17th year this fall and, although it is smaller and serves fewer schools today than it once did, the program remains popular and still offers a helping hand to Ann Arbor students.

"Kids struggle at all ages," explained Ellen Quart, an Eberwhite Elementary School teacher consultant and U-M Psychology professor who started the program in the mid-1990s. "They can have a family trauma, trouble making friends, and some have severe problems."

She said whether students have a learning disability or are just going through a difficult time due to stress in the family, mentors offer emotional, cognitive, and personal support.

Quart is the director of the Michigan Mentorship Program and teaches the corresponding university course in the Department of Psychology.

Quart said the idea first blossomed here after reviewing an experimental, intervention mentorship program in the Detroit Public Schools. Quart and Scott Paris, formerly of the U-M Psychology Department, decided to try a pilot in Ann Arbor and began it with eight U-M students at Pioneer High School in 1994 where they spent eight hours per week mentoring helping students.

From there, the program took off. "Suddenly, I had hundreds of students who wanted the course," Quart said. "And (Ann Arbor) students experienced gains in attendance, appropriate school behavior and grades."

To enroll in Psychology 305, students must be juniors or seniors in good standing and can be psychology majors, but it is not required. They must, however, have taken some psychology as a prerequisite, Quart said. Students first go through orientation and about such things as family privacy and confidentiality issues, student allergies, dos and don'ts of how to interact in the classroom and how to work one-on-one with students. Then, the U-M students are supported with a weekly seminar that focuses on issues of child development and needs, stress, coping and goal setting.

The class is a graded course and U-M students are ex-



pected to be good role models, attend regularly and on time, do required readings and write a term paper at the end. It is a one-semester course, but Quart said some students elect to come back for an independent study to stay with their mentee longer. U-M students often go on to pursue degrees in medicine, psychology, social work and education.

The college students begin in an AAPS classroom assisting the teacher and working with all of the students. From there, the mentor and teacher can best determine who might benefit from having the mentor's help. Some of the ways they assist might include social and personal skills, helping with homework, offering friendship and discussing careers.

"These mentors are dedicated to the kids," said Quart. "They want to make a difference – they want to help."

Ann Arbor students can apply independently to have a mentor or be recommended through a counselor, teacher or school administrator. The program works with students of all socio-economic backgrounds and ages. "The only commonality is that they have to want a mentor," she said. And teachers, administrators, school psychologists and social workers in the district determine who might best be served.

Quart credits caring and dedicated U-M students as well as individual building coordinators in Ann Arbor for the program's success.

The building coordinators manage the mentoring schedules and are "a very important part of the equation," Quart said. "They are a tremendous resource for the mentors and help them understand how to help."

AAPS staff members Bob Bower and Pam Kirchen have been building coordinators for all 16 years of the program.

Kirchen, a teacher consultant at Community High School, calls the mentors "invested and enthusiastic" and said they work closely with Ann Arbor teachers to address students concerns.

"I am very proud of this program and it truly has become an essential in helping our kids be successful in school," Kirchen said. "It ... serves many students who need this kind of support, and is a wonderful example of how U-M and AAPS can work together in education."

Kirchen said the mentors provide an avenue for teens to practice positive school skills such as planning, organizing, communication, managing stress in a safe and enjoyable way. "We love the mentors. They are actually a wonderful support to us in our support of the student."

Quart said that a mentoring relationship is different than that of child to teacher or child to parent. It is not an authority based relationship, but one of shared experiences, empathy, trust and positive encouragement.

The focus of the program is on building a relationship with students in a way that is understanding and not judgmental.

The Michigan Mentorship Program was larger at one time, serving 150 students in nine Ann Arbor schools with about 50 mentors at its peak. Today, the program is conducted at Mitchell and Angell elementary schools, Scarlet Middle School and Community High School with 20 U-M mentors. Each mentor works with one or two Ann Arbor students.

Despite a now-smaller program, Quart said it remains popular. "I don't even advertise it," she said. "And I stop accepting applications at between 70 and 100 (students.)"

Others interested in the program have tapped Quart's experience. U-M Dearborn officials have used her expertise to set up a similar program there with charter schools in the Dearborn area and the state of Florida has consulted with her on a mentor program to help students who have been incarcerated.

Quart is of the belief that all of us can use a helping hand at some point. "Everyone should have a mentor in his or her life – someone to be their anchor," she said, noting that everyone should have a special person who is not there to judge, but be supportive and interested in them.

For more information about the Michigan Partnership Program program, visit: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/psych/mmentor/mentor.html>

Board approves participation in International Baccalaureate program

The Ann Arbor school board on Oct. 15 approved the district's participation in a countywide International Baccalaureate Program through the Washtenaw Intermediate School District. The college-prep program would follow the Michigan Merit Curriculum, but also have written assessments evaluated by

external IB examiners and focus on a globalizing world; a minimum level of attainment would have to be reached to receive the IB Diploma.

After studying the idea and surveying parents, the WISD has proposed opening such a school in the fall of 2011. Washtenaw International High School would be housed

at the former East Middle School in Ypsilanti serving grades 9-12. It would open in the first year for 150 ninth-graders with seats allocated by district size; Ann Arbor would receive about 35 percent of the planned 600-student total. Teachers would work for participating districts and a steering committee would

oversee policy and budget.

There are currently 33 IB schools in Michigan, with 101 others in the planning process. WISD research notes that 20 percent of students in IB schools were previously not enrolled in public schools, so this program is seen as an opportunity to attract more students.

826michigan, from page 1

school tutoring at 826michigan’s downtown site involve many other local students, said Executive Director Amanda Uhle. “The feeling is one of fun and encouragement,” she explained. “It helps students feel good about being here.”

The Ann Arbor nonprofit, which has just 3 paid staff members and several interns and AmeriCorps-paid assistants, works with an army of 1,400 volunteers that makes the program go, Uhle said.

They work with other kid-friendly local agencies including Ozone House, Avalon House and the Community Action Network and also take part in The Ann Arbor Public School’s Summer Learning Institute, a remedial elementary summer program that teams Ann Arbor teachers with University of Michigan education students.

This fall, students in Terry Carpenter’s U.S. History class at Roberto Clemente are blending learning with creative writing. Students are stretching their imaginations, asking “what if” questions and allowing them to rewrite fictionalized versions of history around the Civil War.

On this day, students started with silent reading time, then moved into collaborative groups to talk about their fictional Civil War accounts and begin their writing. “What if people from America became slaves in Africa? What if the Native Americans had enslaved us? What if the south had won?” Carpenter asked, prodding students to think.

“It’s your story and you make it what you want,” he added. “You can write anything you want, as long as it’s about the Civil War.”

Carpenter said he sees the project as a unique way to engage students. “I want them to be curious about history,” he said. “And this was a way to do it in a social justice and civil rights framework.”

Carpenter first worked with 826michigan when he was a teacher in the Willow Run district and also last year at Roberto Clemente for a Harlem Monologue Project, in which his students wrote and performed one-minute monologues for the entire school.

“I’ve been working with them for years,” said Carpenter who is in his second year teaching at Clemente. “They have a great program.”

826michigan volunteers Renuka Uthappa and Curt Mark as well as Katie Jones, a paid AmeriCorps assistant for 826michigan, visit Clemente weekly to assist in the project.

This is Uthappa’s second year volunteer-



Roberto Clemente teacher Terry Carpenter, above left, meets with students who are discussing their project to create fictional accounts of the Civil War. The project is part of the 826michigan writing collaboration, in which adult volunteers come into the classroom weekly to help with the project. Next spring, 826michigan will work with the class to publish the writing project in a book format, as it did with a Huron High School creative writing class last year.



At left, 826michigan volunteer Renuka Uthappa, center, works with a group of students as they brainstorm ideas for the project.

ing and she also helped with Clemente’s Harlem Monologue Project. “To see the difference between how they prepared to how they eventually put it out on the stage was huge,” she said. Uthappa said she is excited to work at the school again this year.

The 826 movement was started in San Francisco by writer Dave Eggers who named it after the nonprofit’s street address. Locally, writer and author Steven Gillis founded the Ann Arbor chapter.

Mark first got involved with 826michigan in the San Francisco area and volunteered locally when the Ann Arbor storefront opened.

“I was happy to see them come to town,” he said, adding that he was impressed with the whole concept. “It seemed like such an extraordinary thing for a writer to do – to give back to the community.”

Jones first got involved with 826 Michigan because she was an English major. “I wanted an outlet to talk about writing,” she said. She said she has learned as much as she has given.

“I was surprised at just how much I could learn ... and how differently kids learn,” she

added. Jones hopes to someday teach creative writing at the college level.

She was involved with last year’s project at Huron with teacher Quinn Strassel and his Short Readings class, where 90 student essays were published in the “Talking Back, Giving Thanks – and Why It Never Pays to Drink the Haterade” project through 826michigan.

In addition to the local publication, eight of the Huron students were published in a nationally distributed book of the same theme called “Talking Back.”

All wrote about their experiences in education. Strassel called 826michigan “an invaluable resource for me this past year.”

The five-year-old 826michigan operates behind the Liberty Street Robot Supply & Repair shop, which it also runs. Having a unique storefront operation is a model used at 826 chapters use nationwide – it is inviting to the public and helps fund the writing programs, Uhle said.

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