

AAPSNews

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

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K-8 partnership

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Issue No. 32, March 28, 2011

All to feel effects of May 3 county special education millage vote

An OK maintains services, defeat would cause general education dollars to be used

From AAPSNews Service

On May 3, the Washtenaw Intermediate School District will seek a renewal of .9850 of a mill for seven years to support special education services for students in the 10 local Washtenaw County districts that it serves.

Voters first approved the millage in September 2004 and the renewal is proposed to cover the years 2011-17. The millage renewal will bring in \$14 million countywide, of which \$5.8 million would come to the Ann Arbor Public Schools.



Kindergardeners at Bryant Elementary School listen to some storytelling from state Sen. Rebekah Warren as she reads during a special March is Reading Month presentation. For more on this story, turn to page 5. A video of the event can be found online.

“If that money goes away, we will have to find another way to fund it and that’s through the General Fund,” said Ann Arbor Interim Superintendent Robert Allen. He has given presentations explaining the impact of the millage both to the school board and at a March 21 community meeting.

See Millage, page 5

Trustees to consider Schools of Choice option this week

From AAPSNews Service

The Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education is considering a Schools of Choice option for 2011-12 that would open a window for applications from mid-April

through mid-May.

The board received a first reading on the proposed School of Choice program on March 16 and is scheduled for a second reading on this Wednesday, March 30. If approved, the Ann Arbor

Public Schools will open the School of Choice window for Washtenaw County residents between April 15 and May 15.

The limited Schools of Choice enrollment would be

See Choice plan, page 2

District faces \$15-21 million budget shortfall for 2011-12

From AAPSNews Service

Heading into the 2011-12 budget season, the Ann Arbor Public Schools faces a \$15.1 million deficit based on projected funding cuts and increased retirement costs from the state and a \$21 million deficit if a countywide special education millage does not pass in May.

In the coming weeks, Interim Superintendent Robert Allen and his staff will share a draft budget plan that will detail proposed budget reductions. The district is estimating General Fund expenditures of \$195 million for the coming year but expected revenue of only \$180 million.

This is the second year the district has faced a similar financial dilemma, but this year has the added burden of the proposed state use of the K-12 School Aid Fund to fund higher education institutions.

“That’s what’s creating this problem for us in K-12,” Allen said. “We don’t have a local

See Budget, page 4



Ann Arbor Interim Superintendent Robert Allen

Mitchell-Scarlett partnership plans continue for fall start

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Plans for a new K-8 partnership between Mitchell Elementary, Scarlett Middle School and the University of Michigan School of Education are moving ahead, with a number of community committees meeting and staff activities leading up to the change that will take place this fall.

“All of us are very committed to doing it,” said Kathy Scarnecchia, who recently moved into the post of interim administrative liaison for the partnership from her role as principal at Mitchell. “The ideas are flowing like a fountain.”

A balanced calendar option originally proposed the fall will not be implemented for the 2011-12 year. It was tabled for further study and is still being looked at for the future. A recently completed parent survey about the balanced calendar is also being studied and will be reported out in the coming weeks.

Scarnecchia said planning for the K-8 campus is going well. Principals at both schools have met both in groups and one-on-one with teachers to discuss the upcoming change and to determine who is interested in being part of the new campus. “The staff has a good sense of what is

happening,” she said.

“We really, really want to have a (K-8) culture – the same experience for children whatever their age,” she added.

Scarnecchia and Scarlett Principal Gerald Vazquez presented an update to the Board of Education Planning Committee on Thursday, March 24, and are on the agenda this week to present to the board’s Performance Committee.

During this school year, five Mitchell-Scarlett partnership projects have been undertaken between the AAPS staff and members of the U-M School of Education (both staff and interns) including: the Mitchell Mighty Mustangs math project, an ESL literacy professional development, a middle school math assessment and a “managing to teach” unit. U-M has also conducted professional development days on the topic of mentoring at both Mitchell and Scarlett this winter.

Other projects being pursued between U-M interns and AAPS staff include a literacy partnership at Scarlett, a Mitchell Mighty Mustangs Art & Literacy after-school initiative and a Scarlett Middle School Summer ESL and Content Enrichment program that will be conducted in July.

Being planned for the 2011-12

school year are pilot enrichments during school breaks, called inter-sessions, that may be offered to families as early as August, Scarnecchia said. These will give parents a flavor of what types of activities the inter-sessions can offer, she added.

The partnership’s organizing committee surveyed parents Mitchell and Scarlett and at Scarlett’s feeder elementary schools this month to determine public opinion about the balanced calendar option – that would possibly extend the school year.

Those survey results are in, are being analyzed and will be brought back to the school board at a future meeting, Vazquez and Scarnecchia said.

In the online survey which took feedback through March 18, parents were asked a variety of questions, including: the advantages and disadvantages of such a calendar; whether current Mitchell and Scarlett parents would continue to attend school there under a balanced calendar; whether Carpenter, Allen and Pittsfield parents would enroll at Scarlett under a balanced calendar; and their preferences involving an “opt out” choice. The survey also asked whether parents and families would take advantage of inter-sessions during school breaks.

Scarnecchia said the team still considers the balanced calendar important, but that they are committed to beginning the process this fall without it. “It was always the intention to pursue the (balanced) calendar, but with study,” Scarnecchia added. “We’re open to rolling it out at the (school) board’s direction.”

Vazquez and Scarnecchia told members they are encouraged with the planning to date and have been working closely with the Ann Arbor Education Association to allow teachers who wish to opt out for other schools and invite teachers who would like to be part of the new educational approach to apply.

Some of those staffing changes are already under way and an information workshop for teachers drew 25 interested parties to see what is being planned for the fall, Vazquez said.

School Trustee Christine Stead, who chairs the Planning Committee, told staff that it would be important for them to put measurements in place to assess the program.

Interim Deputy Superintendent for Instruction LeeAnn Dickinson-Kelley said those measures were being pursued and would be in place as the program begins.

Choice plan, from page 1

offered for residents living within Washtenaw County outside of the Ann Arbor Public Schools for the 2011-12 school year including the local districts of Chelsea, Dexter, Lincoln, Manchester, Milan, Saline, Whitmore Lake, Willow Run and Ypsilanti.

Upon approval, applications will be available on the district website beginning April 15 and in person at Balas Administration Building, 2555 S. State St. Ann Ar-

bor. No applications will be taken before April 15 or after May 15 and applications would be required to be postmarked during the enrollment window.

Enrollment is proposed to be through a lottery process, not through a first-come-first-served process, officials said. A waiting list would be maintained for the remaining applications and prioritized through a random draw.

The proposal is for kinder-

garten, first and sixth grades with limited seats available for second, third, fourth and fifth grades.

Elementary schools included in the proposal are: Abbot, Bryant, Carpenter, Dicken, Eberwhite, Lakewood, Logan, Northside, Pittsfield and Pattengill.

Middle schools include Clague, Forsythe, Scarlett, Slauson and Tappan.

Rules stress that transportation to-and-from school would be the

responsibility of the participating parent/guardian. If approved, applications will be reviewed for accurate information, which may involve contacting the student’s current school. Student acceptance will be conditional until the Ann Arbor Public Schools receives and reviews all school records.

For information about Schools of Choice, contact the Department of Student Enrollment at 734-994-2249.

FUN, writing and science . . . all after school

Carpenter Elementary finds a learning friend in Leslie Science and Nature Center

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Take one measure of science and mix well with writing. Add a hands-on activity and you have a class full of after-school fun.

It's all part of the Leslie Science and Nature Center After-School Writing Club at Carpenter Elementary School, where students are excited about learning, thanks to a partnership with the center. Up to 20 students participate in the club, which brings students in grades three to five together once each week.

"I enjoy this so much – I just love my kids," said Lauren LaRocca who coordinates the club with Jessie Maxwell. Both are program coordinators for the Leslie Center.

Maxwell said the program has been well received. "It increases their aptitude for science, which is one of their long-term goals," she said.

This is the club's fourth year at Carpenter and Principal Ron Collins said students are invited to participate in the fall through recommendations from teachers who think students will benefit from the writing exercises and science units. Many of the projects blend with the school's curriculum units.

"This enables us to attack science and writing at the same time," Collins said. "It gives them an area of interest that they want to write about. A lot of it carries on afterward."

Collins said his school first got involved with the Leslie Science and Nature Center after experiencing programs at the school funded through the Wolf Family Foundation. (see related story at right.)

At one recent after-school club session, students were pretending to be human versions of water droplets



Students participate weekly in the after-school club at Carpenter run by staff from the Leslie Science and Nature Center. Students learn about science and write about their experiences.

**VIDEO online at
news.a2schools.org**

as they moved from one form of water to another through stations set up in the classroom: rain, clouds, river, glaciers, oceans or lakes, soil, groundwater and plants. Students then had an assignment to write about their experience and shared their findings with classmates.

Part of the lesson included water evaporating into the clouds and how it comes back to Earth. "... And then the clouds picked me up again and I went into the ocean," explained one student in his narrative.

Other Ann Arbor schools also partner with the LSNC in a variety of ways. At Northside Elementary, the center helps with a weekly writing program and does a weekly science program at Pittsfield Elementary. At Wines Elementary, there is an after-school geo-caching club and Burns Park Elementary partners with the center for a Discover Nature Night each April, where students enjoy hands-on activities and live animal presentations.

Wolf Family Foundation programs touch students in 3 Ann Arbor schools

Carpenter Elementary is one of three schools in the district that is touched each year by the Wolf Family Foundation through the Leslie Science and Nature Center's in-school program for students in grades 3-5. Northside and King also benefit from the program thanks to a substantial grant that the family funds each year.

The foundation is based in Ohio, but family members are encouraged to do community service wherever they live – and grants are awarded based on that service. They fund projects all over the world.

In Ann Arbor, parent and retired physical education teacher Jody Linn first became involved with the Leslie Center as a liaison for the Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Education and Recreation Department. Her interest carried over to service on the Leslie Center board, where she subsequently saw the benefit of having the center partner with the school district.

"I thought about my passion – and that's kids," said Linn, about why she got involved and proposed the programs for the Leslie Center.

"I wanted to find a way to create an 'aha' moment. I like the Leslie Science and Nature Center because it's a hands-on learning experience. You involve the teachers, build it into the curriculum and make it interdisciplinary."

Linn said she is pleased to see the center creating a bond with students and teachers and believes the program has raised environmental awareness and built an interest in science.

The programs started with a \$5,000 grant, which has expanded to

about \$10,000 each year. Money is funneled through the Leslie Center and benefits Ann Arbor students directly.

Each year, participating students do a culminating activity that they design as part of the Wolf Family Foundation-funded program. The program has funded such activities as river testing, analyzing the health of rivers and creating rain gardens, among others.

Some of the most recent projects include: designing reusable water bottles and pins to promote water conservation at Carpenter, an annual Earth Day celebration at King Elementary and a river cleanup day at Northside Elementary.

In previous years, Northside made videos for the Millers Creek Film Festival and created books for their reading buddies and Carpenter created "Save our River" T-shirts and planted a native plant garden outside of the school.

"Students get the interactive experience for three years in a row," said Amanda Lodge, education director for the Leslie center who coordinates the programs with Linn. "It builds these connections with their schools."

The program touches 40 classrooms and between 500-600 students each year, and most are involved with the program over multiple years.

Linn said she is happy to continue recommending the program each year, and is always looking for ways to work with the LSNC staff to make them better.

"We're reviewing the program. How do we pay it forward?" she said. "How do we reach out beyond where we are now?"

Budget, from page 1

option. You can't tie K-12 into higher ed. It's a totally different playing field." Allen said colleges and universities have the option of increasing tuition when faced with a deficit – whereas K-12 districts do not.

Under a state budget proposal from Gov. Rick Snyder, Ann Arbor faces a \$700 per pupil hit: a straight \$300 cut to aid, a \$170 funding cut from last year that will not be restored and another \$230 in increased pension costs to the district.

This \$15 million expected deficit for Ann Arbor assumes that the May 3 countywide Special Education millage renewal will be approved by voters (see related story.) If it does not pass, Allen said, the Ann Arbor Public Schools must continue to fund mandated special education services, taking the \$5.8 million from the district's General Fund and pushing the expected budget deficit to \$21 million.

In addition, the district is anticipating an annual expenditure of 8 percent in health benefits over the next three years and a retirement rate increase from 20.66 to 24.46 percent for the 2011-12 year. A portion of state retirement costs are pushed down to local school districts from the state and are not something in the district's control.

They are expected to continue to escalate, Allen said. As more district employees enter the retirement system and employee numbers and salaries are reduced, costs rise. "That's where the imbalance comes in," he explained.

Actions at the local level

Allen shared the stark numbers the district has faced in recent years: The district has cut \$34.4 million since the 2006-07 school year.

Eighty percent of the Ann Arbor district's general operating costs are instruction and support, 10 percent are operation and maintenance, 3 percent are transportation, and the remaining 7 percent

are for central administration and other costs.

Last year, the district cut \$18.6 million from the General Fund budget by restructuring programs and reducing some positions because of state-level retirement incentives which prompted some early retirements. The district moved its bus service to a countywide consortium, placed a cap on health care and negotiated cost reductions with its collective bargaining units. The district also opened up limited schools of choice for out-of-district residents and will continue to offer this in the coming year to gain students and additional per pupil revenue from the state.

"We've consolidated, we've outsourced, we've asked for concessions, we've put caps on health care," Allen said. "We have deliberately tried to keep things away from the classrooms."

But now, he added, "we're looking at everything. As we're required to do more and more cuts, we will have to go deeper and deeper which will end up impacting the quality of education."

Allen said the district would look at multiple ways to attack the 2011-12 deficit:

- **Continue collaborating** with local universities, the Washtenaw Intermediate School District and other area ISDs and local districts on programs and partnerships.

- **Expand private giving** to the school district through donations and grants and through groups such as the AAPS Educational Foundation, school PTOs and booster clubs.

- **Continue to make expense reductions.**

- **Lobby the state** for a change in the way schools are funded. This could involve increasing local control over school funding or changing the funding or retirement costs (controlled at the state level, but partially funded by individual districts.)

- **Focus on increasing student enrollment.** The district now has

2011-12 Ann Arbor Public Schools budget process timeline

January-March 2011 – Revenue and Expenditure projections

Jan. 24-March 18, 2011 – Budget Planning by department and level

Jan. 24-March 18, 2011 – Meeting with bargaining units regarding budget planning

March, 2011 – Input-gathering forums (Staff, Parents, Community)

March 1-25, 2011 – Development of Draft Budget Plan

March, 2011 – Meeting with Instructional Council regarding Draft Budget Plan

April, 2011 – Briefing to Board of Education on Draft Budget Plan

April, 2011 – Meetings with Staff, PTOC, AAPAC, BPSSG

May 11, 2011 – Briefing and approval on Budget Resolution and Notice calling for a Public Hearing

May 19, 2011 – Publish Notice for a Public Hearing

May 25, 2011 – First Briefing & Public Hearing on Proposed Budget

June 11, 2007 – First Briefing of Millage Resolution

June 8, 2011 – Second Briefing and adoption of Millage Resolution; approval of the General Appropriations Act

an estimated 1,274 K-12 students living in the district who attend non-AAPS schools. The district would see an additional \$903,600 in additional revenue with 100 new enrollments. The district will have an expected 190 seats open for the 2011-12 school year in grades kindergarten, first and sixth grade and selected seats in grades two through five (see related story.)

Allen also stressed that each fund in the district has specific uses and that only the district's General Fund can be used for operating expenses including salaries, benefits, utilities, supplies and equipment. Other funds and their restrictions and allowed uses include:

- **Grant Funds** are restricted by the grantor, such as Title I, IDEA, and Career & Tech Ed.

- **Bond Funds** are restricted by the voters to fund capital projects such as construction, technology and bus purchases.

- **Debt Services Fund** is restricted by law to pay debt service on bonds sold by the district.

- **Sinking Fund** is restricted by state law to fund capital projects

including land acquisition and remodeling and repair of current facilities through contracted sources.

- **Special Revenue Funds** are restricted for specific purposes such as food service and the district's Community Education and Recreation Department.

Actions at the state level

In 1994 Michiganders voted on a state funding model for schools – Proposal A – which shifted the responsibility of funding the K-12 system from local property taxes to the state. It also limited a local district's ability to levy local school operating millages.

Last year, when the legislature shifted \$208 million from the School Aid Fund to the General Fund for community colleges it was designed to be a one-time transfer being used under a tight deadline and extreme circumstances, according to officials from Save our Schools, a Lansing-based coalition of education groups.

This year, Snyder has proposed to shift \$900 million from K-12 to universities and colleges.

Millage, from page 1

Allen explained that special education services are mandated by state and federal laws and local school districts are bound also by Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs, which are binding legal documents between a district and families and determined how their children will be educated.

“We look at each individual child and say ‘what is the true need?’” Allen said. “We take what’s in the best interest for the child.”

Money from the millage will be used to continue to reimburse local school districts for special education programs and to help maintain quality services for all students, said WISD Interim Superintendent Richard Leyshock,

“We’re seeking the renewal because the demand for special education continues,” he said. “And, without adequate special education millage, local districts will be required to take increasing dollar amounts from their general operating funds to provide special education programs that are required by state

Ballot language

WASHTENAW INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION MILLAGE RENEWAL PROPOSAL

This proposal will allow the intermediate school district to levy the special education millage previously approved by the electors.

“Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property in Washtenaw Intermediate School District, Michigan, be increased by .9850 mill (\$0.9850 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 7 years, 2011 to 2017, inclusive, to provide funds for the education of students with a disability (the above is a renewal of millage which expired with the 2010 tax levy); the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2011 is approximately \$14,000,000?”

and federal law.”

One in seven – or an average of three students in a classroom – receive some type of special education service. Of the 16,569 students enrolled in the Ann Arbor district, 2,093 students are receiving special education services.

These include 602 students with a specific learning disability, 241 with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 548 who are speech and language impaired and 124 who are emotionally impaired. Others have a cognitive impairment, severe multiple impairment, a visual or hearing impairment, or physical or other health

impairments or are developmentally delayed.

Last year, it cost the Ann Arbor district nearly \$40 million to offer special education instruction and support services including transportation. About \$20 million of that is reimbursed by the county and, of that \$20 million, \$5.8 million is represented in renewal being asked for on the May 3 ballot.

“It’s really an issue of what’s best for the kids,” Allen added. “The earlier you intervene, the less you’ll spend later on. And that person will become a productive member of society.”

More online:

For a video from WISD, visit:
<http://wash.k12.mi.us/movies/SEmillage/semillage.html>

Visit here to download more information about the May 3 millage renewal:
<http://www.wash.k12.mi.us/adminandcommdept/millage.php>

Sen. Warren reads to all-school assembly at Bryant

State Sen. Rebekah Warren visited Bryant Elementary School on March 18 to kick off the school’s March is Reading Month, sharing “Sylvester and the Magic Pebble” and “Click, Clack, Moo” to the delight of early elementary school students who attend Bryant.

Warren said she was pleased to be at the school and said it was one of several stops she planned around her district to encourage young students to read.

“I think Sen. Warren has showed you that it’s very important to read,” Bryant reading teacher Beth Harrington told students following the presentation. “How many of you are going to read every day? It’s very important.”

Warren was given a Bryant



**VIDEO OF SEN. WARREN’S VISIT
online at news.a2schools.org**

t-shirt as a gift, and she left each student with a bookmark that included facts about Michigan and a booklet to take home.

Warren represents the 18th District, which is made up of

the majority of Washtenaw County.

Prior to her work as a state senator, she served as state representative for the 53rd House District for four years.



School Bells

Med students donate books to Haisley

University of Michigan Medical School students representing The Hippo Literary Magazine chose Haisley Elementary School's self-contained special education rooms for a recent donation of new books.

Anna Owczarczyk, a second-year med school student, represented the group by dropping off the new books to Haisley, to "oohs and aahs" of staff and students.

Accepting the books on behalf of Haisley were teachers Jenifer Elliot, Kristi McKenna and Lisa Wells, Principal Mary Anne Jaeger, and two students including one from a special education classroom and another general education fifth-grader who is a mentor.

Jaeger explained that Haisley is a community that embraces the diversity in its student population. The school's buddies mentor program, for example, encourages general education students to work directly with their schoolmates in the self-contained special education rooms.

Owczarczyk said the group was pleased to work with Haisley, as the medical students were specifically focused on helping students with special needs for their project. The group's mission is to serve as a creative outlet for U-M medical students but also to engage the students in service-related activities specifically advocating for childhood literacy. To accomplish their goal for Haisley, they sold candygrams around Valentine's Day, raising about \$200 toward the cause.

"One of the goals we set when we started (The Hippo Literary Magazine) last year was to do more than posting (articles) online," said Owczarczyk.

Jaeger said she was pleasantly surprised to hear from the group and was eager to accept the donation to her school.

The book donation kicked off a variety of activities at Haisley for the week, which also included a



Accepting new books on behalf of Haisley Elementary are teachers Jenifer Elliot, Kristi McKenna and Lisa Wells, Principal Mary Anne Jaeger, and two students including one from a special education classroom and another general education fifth-grader who is a mentor. Also pictured is Anna Owczarczyk, a student in the U-M Medical School who represented the donors.

visit from Pioneer Health Sciences students teaching fourth- and first-graders at an in-school health fair and the school's Disability Awareness Workshop that was hosted later the same week.

Test named Pioneer head football coach

Paul Test has been named as the new varsity football coach at Pioneer High School.

Test has served the past year as defensive coordinator at Skyline High School and coached in the Huron High School program for eight years and was with the Pioneer program in the 1990s when he served as head football coach.

He is also employed by the district, teaching physical education at Thurston Elementary School.

"Paul Test can be best described as a man of character and quality," said Pioneer Athletic Director and Assistant Principal Lorin Cartwright. "He knows how to build relationships with students and their families. I know the players are excited to have Paul leading the program and are ready to give their all for football. It should be exciting to see the program develop over the next few months."

Wines parent wins Nicola's gift card

Elizabeth Hetrich of Ann Arbor is the winner of the first semester gift drawing among new e-mail subscribers to the AAPSNews.

She has won a \$50 gift certificate to Nicola's Books (www.nicolas-books.com). Hetrich has a daughter in kindergarten at Wines Elementary School.

The AAPSNews will have a similar drawing at the end of second semester 2010-11 among new AAPSNews e-mail subscribers. Log onto <http://news.a2schools.org> and click on the "subscribe via e-mail or RSS feed" button to sign up.

Nicola's has recently agreed to be a AAPSNews website partner and donated the gift certificate. The bookstore is located in the Westgate Shopping Center at the corner of Jackson and Maple roads in Ann Arbor.

Huron diving coach earns honors

Brad Huttenga, the men's swim and dive team coach and an English teacher at Huron High School has been named as the Division 1 Diving Coach of the Year by the Michigan Interscholastic Swim Coaches As-

sociation for 2010-11.

The award is given to the coach at each respective state meet, whose divers from the same school score the highest accumulated point total in the state meet competition. According to Huffenga, the award was due, in part, to the success and depth of this year's team, but he specifically credited the strong showing of this year's senior divers.

Skyline earns kudos at regional fair

Skyline High School will have a Grand Award Winner representing the school at the State Science Fair this year. The weekend of March 12-13 was the Southeastern Science Fair at Washtenaw Community College, and Skyline's Health & Medicine Magnet had 60 students enter for the first time.

Lily Zmachinski (Principles of Biomedical Science) received a sixth-place Grand Award and a first-place Science and Society Award. Her area of study was "musicians vs. nonmusicians – a neuro psychological test." Her project received numerous accolades and \$225 in prize money. Next month she takes her project to Lansing to have it judged and if she wins she will go to California for the International Science Fair.

Other winners include: Kaavaya Puttagunta, third place Science and Society \$100; Carmen Flesher, Sustainability Award; Johanna Buchaus, Sustainability Award; Maya Gianchandani, American Meteorological Society Award & Stockholm Junior Water Prize; Aoarsh Ghosh, U-M National Nanotechnology Infrastructure Network Award; Lucas Paschal, U.S. Army Most Outstanding Life Sciences Award; Theo Kuchar, U.S. Army Most Outstanding Life Sciences Award; and Rishika Ramireddy, Honorable Mention Biochemistry/Microbiology Award. Honorable mentions also went to: Kimberly Graziamo, Leigh Yeh, Ben Ehrlich, Alex Kaldjian, Francesca D'Introno and Jessica Eisma.