

AAPSNews

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

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Detailed stories online at news.a2schools.org

School funding

With the recent county millage defeat and continuing school financing discussions at the state level, Ann Arbor school officials are planning information sessions with the community early next year. Superintendent Todd Roberts offers an update on the school funding situation on page 2 of today's edition. Details about upcoming meetings will be published in the Nov. 30 edition of the AAPSNews.

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Learning large

Students invited outdoors for hands-on lessons



Dave Szczygiel squeezes water from peat moss.

Giving support

The AAPS Science and Environmental Education Endowment Fund through The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation is in place to help keep environmental and science programs in Ann Arbor viable long term. To date, the endowment has about \$115,000 and has a goal of raising \$5 million.

Details: The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, 201 S. Main St., Suite 501, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Call: 734-663-0401.



Featured story

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Want to tell Dave Szczygiel to take a hike? He's likely to do just that.

The Ann Arbor district's environmental education consultant can be found most weekdays visiting one of many area parks, wetlands and waterways with students. As he likes to say, "my classroom is out here."

On this day, he dips into his treasure chest of assorted dried fungi, antlers and magazine clippings and calls upon his years of knowledge as a teacher and naturalist to keep the attention of a busload of Lakewood Elementary School fourth-graders.

They were headed for the Waterloo State Recreation Area west of Ann Arbor. "Who knows what FBI stands for?" he queries. In his line of work, it's not a widely known federal agency, but "fungus, bacteria and invertebrates," he tells students.

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has had an Environmental Educa-

tion program since 1959, founded by William B. Stapp with the help of Maxine Smith Miles, according to information from the district.

The Ann Arbor program took off with the dedication of Stapp who wrote lessons plans for every grade level, said teacher Bill Browning who succeeded Stapp to run the program in 1968. Browning explained that Michigan was one of the leading states when environmental education first came on the scene and Ann Arbor's K-12 program was the first of its kind in the country.

"It was very well received, even though it wasn't inclusive of all classes," Browning recalled. "The real secret of the success of this program is they got it into the curriculum as an accepted part."

After Browning retired, Szczygiel moved into the post. He is a biology major who found education the best route to take for a guy who grew up around nature and worked summers as a naturalist for the YMCA. "If you don't

See *Environmental Education*, page 3



Fourth-graders from Ann Arbor's Lakewood Elementary School taste some yellow birch bark during a recent field trip to the Waterloo State Recreation Area. The visit was part of the school district's Environmental Education program that has been a staple in the curriculum since 1959. Students in grades kindergarten through six take part.

Input encouraged in budget sessions

Dear Readers,

I want to thank the many staff, student and community members who took the time during the recent millage election to become more knowledgeable about education funding in our district and in the state.

It is important that everyone stays engaged in the conversation about school funding as we work to address budget issues we face in The Ann Arbor Public Schools over the next few months. I believe that it is also imperative to make sure our voices continue to be heard in Lansing when it comes to providing adequate funding for education in our state.



At this point we are still waiting to hear from Lansing what our actual per pupil funding will be for this current school year. As you recall, AAPS was looking at a \$525 per pupil loss in funding (approximately \$8.7 million) this year. The state House then put forward a plan to restore \$117 per pupil and half of the 20j funds (which is about \$116 per pupil for AAPS) that were cut.

If the state Senate approves the House plan we would lose \$292 per pupil in funding (approximately \$4.8 million) for this school year. The governor has said that she will sign the House plan if approved by the Senate. At this point the Senate seems unlikely to support the House plan.

I expect that we will have a better idea of what our funding will be by Friday (Nov. 20) when the full funding proration order is supposed to go into effect.

The next steps in our budget process will take careful and thoughtful planning that will include input from parents, staff and the AAPS community. We are faced with some difficult, but not insurmountable, challenges and decisions.

We will host a series of meetings in December for staff and in January for parents and the community where we will discuss our financial situation and present options for reducing costs and enhancing revenues. During these meetings we will gather feedback about possible options in order to complete our draft budget plan for 2010-11 in February.

We also need to address the reduction in state funding this school year. Over the coming weeks we will take steps to address the loss in funding for the current fiscal year. Our goal in addressing the loss of funding for this school year is to reduce costs through means that will be least disruptive to our students and educational programs. We will discuss our options for cost reduction this year at a study session with the Board of Education on Dec. 3.

I know that we will continue working together collaboratively to ensure that our students receive an outstanding education despite the challenges we face. I look forward to working with you in the coming months.

*Todd Roberts, Superintendent
The Ann Arbor Public Schools*

Staff in the Spotlight : Gary Graff

Gary Graff

Occupation: Technology education teacher at Scarlett Middle School for 34 years. He also taught for 25 years as an adjunct professor at Eastern Michigan University.

Education: Bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial education from Eastern Michigan University.

Residence: Chelsea.

Age: 57.

Family: Married to Sandi for 35 years. Two sons: Dan and Dave.

Pets: A cat Neemy and fond memories of a Labrador retriever named Sunny.

Hobbies: Hands-on projects, camping, coaching, baseball and Civil War history. He also enjoys travel, scuba diving and fishing.

Community service: Active at the First United Methodist Church in Chelsea and stays involved with student programs and activities at Scarlett Middle School.



Scarlett teacher Gary Graff works with a few of his many students in his technology education classroom.

Veteran teacher loves Scarlett

**By Casey Hans
AAPSNew Service**

Gary Graff's 34 years in The Ann Arbor Public Schools can be focused in one place: Scarlett Middle School where he has worked since it opened.

Graff was first offered a temporary job and after a few weeks, he came aboard fulltime. "I decided this was the place for me," said Graff, 57, talking recently between first and third hours in his Technology Education classroom. "We are one, big family. It's just kind of a natural fit."

He estimates he has had about 15,000 children attend his classes at Scarlett over his years teaching. He points to a handsaw. "I tell the students, every (student) hand has touched that," he said.

In his early years as a teacher, he taught traditional industrial arts. A program that once encouraged only boys to take what was called "shop" today encourages students with an interest in computer-aided design or engineering to sign up. Graff said his classes are pretty evenly divided between boys and girls today.

"It's a balance between the old and the new," he explained.

He takes the science curriculum and matches his classes to it: Sixth-graders focus on earth sciences, seventh-graders on life sciences and eighth-graders on physical sciences.

And the kids seem to embrace it. An extra-curricular Engineering Club recently attracted 27 students to sign up for the after-school session in one recent week.

Ellen Daniel, a teacher at Scarlett and former Ann Arbor school board member, said

her children have enjoyed Graff's classes over the years. "He does so many things so well that it is difficult to know where to begin," she said. "An hour spent with Gary is observation of a Master Teacher at work."

Daniel noted that he is "thoughtful and reflective" and is always looking for ways to improve in the classroom. "I know that I am a better teacher for having his example and support," she added, noting that Graff was selected as the Scarlett Teacher of the Year last year.

Graff has a definite passion for his profession. "I wanted to be in the classroom. It's my chosen work – I love what I do," he said. And, he credits his chosen teaching area to a great drafting instructor in high school who "taught me it was more than bending metal and busting boards," he said.

He shares his love of education with his wife of 35 years, Sandi, who is a second-grade teacher in Manchester. The two grew up in Saline where they knew each other as youngsters and became high school sweethearts before marrying and raising two sons. In their early years, the family lived in both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti before building a home and settling in Chelsea.

During his years at Scarlett, Graff has been an assistant coach and coordinated the school yearbook for a time. He still attends school events to support the Scarlett kids.

Graff said today's students are better behaved than many in year's past. "The school district gets the credit," he said. "Things like the anti-bullying program; they have kids come together and work in teams. The behavior has been much improved."

Partnership focuses on depression, suicide risks

From AAPSNews Service

A partnership in its third year between The Ann Arbor Public Schools and the University of Michigan Health System is raising awareness of depression and the risk for suicide in children.

More than 350 Ann Arbor staff members have been trained to spot anxiety and depression and keep it from escalating into a problem.

"We're not asking teachers to become mental health professionals. We want them to be able to talk to a student or colleague if they see a problem," explained Trish Meyer, program manager for outreach and education at the U-M Depression Center who also is a parent in The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

The partnership is not funded by public money, but by private donations, Meyer said. Community donations as well as fundraisers and several memorial funds provided seed money for the program.

In two years, most Ann Arbor secondary principals and middle school staff as well as some central office staff have gone through training and, this year, training has begun for high school staff. Ann Arbor schools Administrator for Secondary Education Joyce Hunter stressed that the district intends for the program to be self-sustaining in district.

Most train with SafeTALK (suicide alertness for everyone; Tell, Ask, Listen, Keep Safe), which helps participants challenge attitudes about depression, recognizing when someone is having a problem, engaging them in discussion, listening to them and then connecting them with a trained professional. Some have gone a step further and trained in suicide intervention. Twenty four Ann

Depression and Anxiety in Youth and Adolescents

When: 7-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 17.

Where: Ann Arbor District Library, 343 S. Fifth Ave., Ann Arbor.

Presenter: Dr. Kate Fitzgerald, assistant professor, University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry Child and Adolescent Anxiety Program.

Sponsors: The U-M Depression Center and with The Ann Arbor District Library.

Arbor school employees have received additional training through ASIST, or applied suicide intervention training skills. Of those, 10 can now train other staff members in SafeTALK.



Julieanne Muir

One of those is Northside Elementary School social worker Julieanne Muir, who is a trainer for both safeTALK and ASIST sessions. She said she became interested as someone who deals with such things professionally and also as someone who has been touched personally. She said today's economic climate is causing even more concern.

"I'm seeing more families and children that are stressed," she said. "And staff are dealing with the same issues."

She said training sessions always show how widespread the problem is. "In every single training there has been a staff member or multiple staff

members who have been impacted by suicide or depression," she said. "It's there. It impacts people at every single (school) level."

Depression is a chronic medical condition that is often misunderstood, Meyer said. The average age where clinical depression and bipolar disorder is first seen is between the ages of 15 and 24; recognizing and managing depression early can help prevent tragedies in schools and elsewhere, she said.

Anne Kramer, a research associate and clinical social worker with the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry also works with the Ann Arbor program and said schools are the logical place to reach young people since they spend so much time there.

She notes that 20 percent of students in their late teens have experienced depression at some point in their lives.

"If left untreated, symptoms can become worse, episodes can be closer together," she said, adding that some can escalate into the suicidal realm.

Kramer said there are a number of coping strategies that can be taught to those with depression including teaching ways to live a healthier lifestyle and other treatments including therapy and medication.

She said anecdotal evidence from school staff show that the partnership between Ann Arbor and U-M is doing its job and raising awareness. "And that's encouraging," she added.

Muir suggests parents and staff follow their instincts in recognizing a problem. "Trust your judgment that you know and understand your children and students well," she said. Talk with pediatricians and professionals in the schools. "Drawing on those relationships are important."

Environmental Education, from page 1

know about things around you, you can't take care of it," Szczygiel says, speaking about the importance of the program. "This puts a value on it."

Out in the woods, Szczygiel tells students to tread lightly, watch and listen. After one student discovers a tiny spring peeper under some leaves, he encourages them some more. "There's more than peepers here," he says. "Pay attention to what's in the trees. If you're quiet, you'll hear things."

Fourth-grade teacher Shaugn Kalnaraups' class is on this trip. She takes delight in the annual outings. "The trips are in synch with what they're learning in the classroom," she said. "It extends their learning outdoors."

Kate, a fourth-grader in Kalnaraups' class, said her favorite part of the day was when the students jumped up and down in the bog area and

watched the ground move. Classmate Annie said she "learned a lot about the tulip tree. It's now my favorite tree. The leaves are an awkward shape and they're really pretty. It's really massive."

Small groups of students are escorted around the park with Szczygiel and a team of volunteers who play a critical role. Regulars such as Jane Levy, a retired teacher who now is a beekeeper, and Tom Jameson, spend many days each year taking students on hikes. Jameson said he helps with field trips three to four days each week.

Whether it's first-graders learning about winter animals at Kensington Metropark or third-graders studying pond habitats, every student in grades kindergarten through six – about 400 classrooms – get a hands-on environmental lesson during the school year. He takes them to gravel pits, water-treatment facilities and into just about every park

around the area. Fifth-graders get the thrill of a "winter survival" session where they build fires and cook their own hot lunch.

"A lot of people thought it (environmental education) was a fad," he adds. "It's not a fad and it really makes a difference. Every day, students say to me that 'this is the best thing I've ever done'."

Browning said he thinks environmental education has staying power, because it speaks to everyone. "We live in such a technology age," he said. "The environmental education program is pretty good at helping you understand that, despite the technology, there's a real world out there."

Casey Hans edits this newsletter for The Ann Arbor Public Schools. Contact her via e-mail at hansc@aaps.k12.mi.us or by calling 734-994-2090 ext. 51228.

School Bells

81 honored at dinner

Eighty one Ann Arbor high school students were honored Nov 7 at the annual Freedom Fund Dinner, sponsored by the Ann Arbor chapter of the NAACP. African-American students who have earned at least a 3.2 grade point average in school are honored. Keynote speaker was Washtenaw County Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton. Honorees included:

Community High School:

First-year scholar Chelsea Evans-Warren; *second-year scholars* Max Bowen, Emily Milligan, Tamara Parks and Samantha Thomas.

Huron High School: *First-year scholars* Camyle Allen, Christiana Allen-Pipkin, Sariya Bryanch, Allante' Burnell, Blaire Crockett, Tyler Davis, Sharzay Fields, Je-Juan French, LaMicah Hughbanks, Kamaria Lee, Maya Long, Fatou Ndaw, Cynthia Ofili, Chinyere Onimo, Lindsey Whitlock, Dallas Williams; *second-year scholars* Brittany Cole, Gamuchirayi Dingwiza, Awah Ditah, Yonica Dupree, Marysa Hill, Jeremy Jackson and Imani Watkins; *third-year scholars* Whitney Foster, Ralph Green, Noelle Kahunguba, Devon Micou and Bre' Anna Simpson.

Pioneer High School: *First-year scholars* Malachi Bowerbank, Jazmine Cooper, DeLaynna Corley, Tobias Kpadenou, Kirby Lee, Ashli Marable, Jessica Obidike, Justin Pendleton, Daniesha Scott, Kyle Snedecor, Ana Vereen; *second-year scholars* William Anderson, Triesha Arnold, Tiffany Cole, Bradie Connor, Chloe Corley, Dominique Corley, Sabrina Gay, Gregory Goss II, Megan Graham, Mani Herring, Victoria Lloyd, Kailen McKay, Kaitlyn Mills, Davonte Powell, Jordan Robertson, Angelica Shipman, Crystal Smith, Willie Smith, Jr., Joshua Weiland and Aaron Wilson; *third-year scholars* Alyssa Goss, Ugochukwu Uche, Ayona Vanhorn-Lee, Christina Wade, Devin Webster and Brandis Yarrington.

Skyline High School: *First-year scholars* Senait Dafa, Hafsa Farah, Jeremy Jagers, Kelsy Lee, Jasper Lindsay, Noah Miller, Jonathan Muriu, Chaune' Rael-Whitsitt, Ibrahim Saed and Paige Wint.

Stone High School: *First-year scholar* Brittany Hayes.

Images around the schools



Tappan 6th-graders learn love of language from U-M lineman

David Moosman, starting senior offensive lineman from the University of Michigan football team visited the sixth-grade team of Victoria Power (pictured with him above), James Corbett, Maria Erickson and Patricia Hueter at Tappan Middle School's media center on Nov. 2.

An English major at U-M, Moosman spoke about his love of reading and writing and told students that his mother inspired his field of study. Moosman read Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" for students. "Every year I introduce the Poetry Genre with Robert Frost's poem and connect with the kids in conversation about the "new" road they will be traveling on starting middle school," Power said.



Pioneer advanced placement students get real life writing experience

In what is normally a literature driven course, Don Packard's Advanced Placement English students at Pioneer High School took a break from "The Scarlett Letter" to visit with Brad Hedeman from Zingerman's online.

Hedeman, who is responsible for the online content for Zingerman's Mail Order business, came to Pioneer Nov. 5 to talk about how he writes and the process he employs when writing about food.

Students were then given a chance to write their own product descriptions of chocolate bacon that is sold at the store and through Zingerman's mail order. The "winning" product description will replace the existing copy on the Zingerman's Web site. Look for it in weeks to come.

Zingerman's Mail Order is part of The Zingerman's Community of Businesses in Ann Arbor. Visit www.zingermans.com.

Skyline swimmers help in the classroom, raise money for breast cancer research

RIGHT: Members of the Skyline High School Women's Swimming Team spent their day off recently reading to the Young 5s and kindergarten classes at Abbot Elementary. They were welcomed by teachers Sarah Bradley and Carol DeKeyser and their students. The partnership went swimmingly: The students athletes have been invited back after the Young 5s have completed the stories they are now writing.



LEFT: The second Skyline-Pioneer Swim-for-the Cure took place recently. Each year the athletes spend the week prior to the swim meet learning about breast cancer and sharing their experiences with the disease. This year, the team honored Pioneer High School senior Hannah Maxbauer's mother, Jan Maxbauer, who is being treated for breast cancer. Here, Skyline and Pioneer swimmers mingle during the competition.

photo by Eva Leissou