

AAPSNews

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

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Budget sessions scheduled

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

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

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Students say 'Hola' to speaking Spanish

Featured story

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

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

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

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

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

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

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

students,” said Van Huis.

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

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



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

Building trades program teaches skills, leadership

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

There's a beehive of building activity on Ann Arbor's east side.

A team of Huron High School students is busy framing roof trusses on a new, two-story house. This afternoon, another team from Pioneer High School will be on site working just as hard, all to complete the next student-built house as part of the Ann Arbor Student Building Industry Program, offered by The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

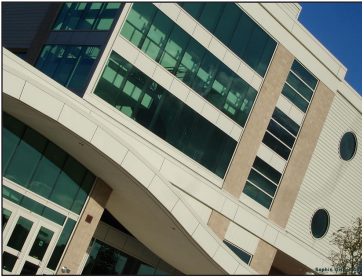
It's the newest project for the 40-year-old AASBIP. The students are building the 2,200-square-foot house on a site on Earl Shaffer Court – named after the program's founder and former director of technical education.

The turnkey house will feature granite countertops, an



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Exceptional Education



A view of Skyline High School as seen through the lens of parent and local artist Sophie Grillet.

School Bells

Workshop offered for parents

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

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

Featured will be Judith Coucouvanis, a psychiatric nurse practitioner at the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry’s Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

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

Library offers homework help

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

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

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

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

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

Vacancy open on school board

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

Details can be found online at <http://aaps.k12.mi.us>.

Language, from page 1

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

King Principal Kevin Karr said parents touring his school often ask about foreign language offerings for elementary students.

“I think it hits the need of what parents want,” he said. “I think it’s been great so far. Clearly the teaching is going well – they’ve got a good style. The kids are very engaged.”

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

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

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

Tana Ebaugh is a University of Michigan research associate and lead trainer for the program. She visits classes and observes apprentice teaching styles. On this day, she is at Ann Arbor Open @ Mack, where a blended class of third- and fourth-graders are learning to discuss their birthdays. No English is spoken during the half-hour class – only Spanish. “It’s very different for them,” Ebaugh said, noting that students are learning by listening and participating.

Kit Flynn, media specialist at Ann Arbor Open said



Brittany Schwikert, a Spanish major from the University of Michigan, works with students at Ann Arbor Open @ Mack during a World Language lesson in the media center. Below, King Elementary School third-graders ask questions during their Spanish lessons.



her school has a number of Spanish-speaking students for which the program serves another purpose. “It gives them a coaching role,” she said. “It gives them a time to shine.”

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

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

Throughout the district, elementary media specialists are adding more Spanish-language books to their collections.

Flynn estimates she now has upwards of 200 such books in the Ann Arbor Open collection.

Lee Ann Dickinson-Kelley, Ann Arbor schools administrator for elementary education, said she is pleased with how program has taken off around the district in just a few weeks. “It’s exceeding our expectations right now,” she said.

Dickinson-Kelley said although each school is unique

and each instructional team can approach the material differently, there are standard lesson plans. “We wanted to have the unique environment, but have a common high standard of learning,” she said

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

“We are in full recruitment mode (for apprentice teachers) for next year,” she said. There will be 90 openings for people to instruct as the program moves into grades three through five.

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

“We want all of our kids to be multilingual,” she added. “It’s an essential tool – a skill they will need to have.”

Staff in the Spotlight : Kathleen Wright

Fairies and magical learning

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

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

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

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

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

But, we digress ... back to our fairy story.

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

Parent Christopher Cerda said his daughter, Claire, was so excited that she spent the evening before making her own fairy house. “She just can't get enough of it,” said



Kindergarteners work on fairy habitats in their classroom.



Students, visit fairy doors.

Illustration by Jonathan Wright from “Who's Behind the Fairy Doors?”

can't seeeee meeee!

Cerda, one of a dozen adults who came on the field trip this month.

Kathleen Wright has a special “in” with the fairies: Her artist-designer husband, Jonathan, is the author of the 2007 “Who's Behind the Fairy Doors?” and operates Urban-Fairies.com that chronicles the urban doors in Ann Arbor. Together, the

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

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

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

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

Kathleen Wright's life evolved from 15 years of preschool teaching into professional storytelling and to her life in the Ann Arbor classroom. She ties the fairy project into her teaching.

Throughout it all, she has had a love of literacy and a general love for words. As she puts it: “The gift of gab – I've put it to use.”

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

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



Kathleen and Jonathan Wright

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

Education: They attended the University of Michigan together.

Ages: Both are 49.

Residence: The city of Ann Arbor.

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

Pets: A rather large Yorkie named Popeye.

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

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

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

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

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

Building, from page 1

alarm system and a maintenance-free exterior as well as a finished basement, 3½ baths and landscaping.

Huron High School senior Travis Adkins said he does not intend to pursue a trades career, but that the program gives him skills and knowledge as a future homeowner.

"If you build your own house, or you move into a house, you'll be able to fix it," said Adkins, who has done roofing work with his uncles in Ohio. "This is one of the most amazing classes ever. You come here and just get to work."

The class has four team leaders who shift every two months so that each student gets a chance at managing at the site.

John Birko, program instructor for the past four years, said his goal is to help his students gain skills and become confident in their abilities.

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

Most days, he has to prod students to wrap up and catch the bus back to school. They have a hard time putting down the hammer, he said.

"They all have each others' backs," Birko said of the camaraderie that is built into the program. "That's one of the lessons they learn – to appreciate each other."

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

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

Local builder Bob Chizek chairs the nonprofit AASBIP board this year. Chizek said the



Students from Huron High School work on the student build project at the Sumerset neighborhood, framing roof trusses. This is the 40th year of the program in The Ann Arbor Public Schools.



Alumni sought

■ A spring alumni reunion for former students of the Ann Arbor building program is being organized. E-mail alumni@aastudentbuilding.com or call 734-665-4681.

■ Visit the Ann Arbor Student Building Industry Program online at www.aastudentbuilding.com/

Instructor John Birko at the entry to the Sumerset neighborhood, where students construct new homes.

program is a model partnership. He said the support of the school administration and community dedication has helped to carry it forward. "It's a marriage between public and private interests," he said. "It has worked so well. We need to do more of that, partnering in this time of challenged budgets."

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

helping the next generation."

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

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

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

Money raised for scholarships

From AAPSNews Service

Organizers Ann Arbor's 40-year-old student building program have mobilized so that student scholarships and annual building projects may continue.

About 70 professionals from the Ann Arbor community have brought in about 20 percent of their \$125,000 four-year fundraising goal in cash donations or pledges in the past year.

Expenses for building sites, materials and memorial scholarships have been funded by private cash and in-kind donations, said board members. Over 40 years, \$100,000 in scholarships have been given out to about 1,000 students.

"It's a very successful program," said AASBIP scholarship chairman Tom McMullen of the McMullen Company. "This scholarship is a necessity to keep the program going."

McMullen said the nonprofit program made enough money to be sustainable until the past few years when the housing market tumbled and housing prices dipped.

The AASBIP has built one house for each year of its existence and has been a solid training ground for the building trades industry, said Joyce Hunter, administrator for secondary education for The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

The current building site is part of a multiple-lot neighborhood called Sumerset, where 11 sites were purchased; students are building on the fifth site this year. Each time a student-built house is sold, proceeds have helped to pay for land as well as three, four-year scholarships for students, Hunter said.

McMullen noted that because the program only accepts about 25 to 30 students each year, they have a good chance at getting a scholarship. "We really get some exceptional students," he added.

Scholarships are named after the program's founders: Henry S. Landau, \$1,500 per year; Earl Shaffer, \$1,000 per year; and James Weldon, \$1,000 per year. Landau was a local builder, Shaffer ran the district's vocational education program and Weldon was a local banker. Students attend the college of their choice.

McMullen noted that it's important to keep the program viable so that it doesn't lose momentum. He said the undraising effort is holding its own.

"We're not hitting the jackpot, but we're not being shut out," he said. "Our team members are picking up a lot of steam."

Hunter said the program under the direction of teacher John Birko continues to be unique. "You can see the pride of the students," she said. "His approach is very student-centered. He teaches them more than building skills."

Scholarship details: 734-996-0100.