

AAPSNews

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

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Around the world

Eighth and ninth-graders from Ann Arbor traveled to Hikone, Japan this fall as part of a special sister city exchange. See story on page 2.

Issue No. 5, January 4, 2010

Meetings, survey offer a chance for public input

Budget meetings are scheduled around the Ann Arbor community this month, where members of the public will be asked to consider proposed budget cuts and offer their own suggestions.

A survey also has been put on the district's Web page asking for similar feedback as the district aims to cut \$20 million from the 2010-11 fiscal budget that begins July 1, 2010.

Officials are working on proposed budget reductions and must adopt a balanced district budget by the end of June.

During the two-hour budget sessions, participants will break into discussion groups to consider options and discuss other suggestions. Meetings are scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m.:

■ Thursday, Jan. 7 – Huron High School cafeteria, 2727 Fuller Road.

■ Tuesday, Jan. 12 – Skyline High School commons, 2552 N. Maple Road.

■ Thursday, Jan. 14 – Scarlett Middle School cafeteria, 3300 Lorraine St.

■ Tuesday, Jan. 19 – Pioneer High School cafeteria, 601 W. Stadium Blvd.

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For updates on the budget process and background information visit online: <http://a2schools.org> and click on the blue “District Budget” box on the right side of the page.

Included on the page is up-to-date budget and financial information as well as the survey which asks for input on the budget process and solicits ideas and suggestions on how to reduce school operation costs. Also on the site is a “User Friendly Guide to the Budget” as a reference.

Featured story

Volunteers lend a hand in classrooms and other areas around district

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Volunteers are important to The Ann Arbor Public Schools and each one is as unique as the life experience they bring to the district.

Some are retirees who have time to devote, others are parents who want to spend time in their children's learning environment and still others are residents who simply enjoy the classroom.

Take Simona Cucuiet, volunteering for the second year at Huron High School's media center. Cucuiet is a former high school teacher and economist from Romania who last year spent 240 hours volunteering

Simona Cucuiet, below, a volunteer at Huron High School's media center, often works at the front circulation desk where she assists students and staff. This is Cucuiet's second year volunteering; she also substitute teaches at the high school. The Romanian native moved to the Ann Arbor area with her husband.



Lois Zimmerman, above, volunteers her time at the Dickson Elementary School kindergarten classroom of Sally Steward, where Zimmerman has spent time for the past four years. The retired elementary school teacher says she enjoys working one-on-one with young students helping them with their lessons. She also volunteers around the community as a clown.

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Student delegates embrace culture and customs of Japan

From AAPSNews Service

Octopus sushi, a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and sleeping on futons were all part of a student cultural experience in Hikone, Japan this fall.

Nine middle school and three high school students from Ann Arbor were part of the 16th student delegation to visit Ann Arbor's Japanese sister city of Hikone.

According to project coordinator Larry Dishman, the role of the delegates is to bring good will to the people of Hikone, as the two communities celebrated the 40th anniversary of the sister city relationship.

"This is something you will remember for many, many years, if not for a lifetime," Dishman told students who reported back on their experiences and shared their favorite (and not-so-favorite) times from the trip at a debriefing and potluck dinner in December.

Chinonye Uche, a Slauson Middle School student, shared her experience communicating with her host family. "It was hard talking to them in Japanese," she said. "They tried to speak English to accommodate me. We used a computer to translate."

Aviva Gordon from Clague Middle School said her family had a translator and that her host mom was an English teacher, which helped. "I loved all the food," she added. "But the most powerful day was the day we went to Hiroshima" where the students were immersed in the country's history of World War II, she said. When the group left to



return to the United States, the eighth-grader said, "I didn't feel like I was coming home, I felt like I was leaving home."

Anne Marie Borders, a Logan Elementary School teacher, was one of two project directors, a task she shared with Tonya Dildy, a teacher at Angell Elementary School. Both traveled to Japan on prior trips. Borders did a Web page for students where photos of the trip were posted along with their memories.

She agreed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was the most memorable part of the trip. "Hiroshima was hard," she said. "It was hard for all of us. The only thing standing (within two kilometers from the blast) is that dome from one building."

Some 239 students have traveled to Japan with the exchange over the years, Dishman said. "These groups of kids are from different middle schools and form a group unto themselves," he said. "It kind of brings Ann Arbor together."

Dishman has been the Hikone program coordinator since 1996 but has worked with the program in various capacities since 1990. He has served as coordinator for 10 of the program's 13 trips. "It's sort of a labor of love," he said. "This changes kids' lives, this program. They all remember this experience. It's nice to touch a kid's life in such a fashion. We should find ways to do it more often."

Eighth- and ninth-grade students visit Hikone every other year; this year's trip was special to celebrate the sister city anniversary.

Dishman said students must have a minimum 3.0 grade point average and their family must be willing to pay a user fee for the student to travel. Each student ambassador was required to raise \$600 for this special delegation trip.

Ann Arbor middle school students will begin receiving information about the next Hikone exchange trip in early February at school, Dishman said. After signing up, students spend the summer prior to travel becoming immersed in Japanese culture and language preparing for the fall trip.

This year's Ann Arbor delegation spent one week in Hikone with Japanese host families where they attended local junior high schools. They then visited Hiroshima, Miyajima and Kyoto and delivered 1,000 handmade origami paper cranes to the statue of Sadako in the Hiroshima Peace Park.

In October, a delegation of 14 junior high school students from Hikone visited Ann Arbor. It was the 31st time the Japanese city sent a delegation to Ann Arbor.

Staff in the Spotlight: Larry Dishman

Ann Arbor's Hikone Exchange coordinator encourages a worldly view

From AAPSNews Service

The adage that "life happens while you are making plans" could best explain Larry Dishman's career path.

In pursuing multiple college degrees in linguistics and working toward a goal of teaching, he took a job working as an umpire for The Ann Arbor Public Schools Recreation Department. That led to a part-time job and, eventually, a full-time career

coordinating team sports for the district's Rec & Ed Department which he said has "helped me to touch a lot of lives. I'm glad I ended up here," said Dishman who has been in his post since 1974.

Contacts through his job helped him arrange a series of exhibition games in Michigan for the NSK Global-sponsored Japanese Women's National Championship fast-pitch softball team in the 1980s. He was also

one of the architects and chief programmers for the Arborough Games, an exchange program with Peterborough, Ontario, Canada and was part of a German internship exchange with Ann Arbor's German sister city.

Those, in turn, led him to become involved with the Hikone-Ann Arbor Educational Exchange Program which helps middle school students visit Japan and also arranges host families when Japanese student

delegations visit Ann Arbor.

Dishman now coordinates this exchange program in the Ann Arbor district that has sent dozens of young Ann Arbor students to Japan. Through the program, he has been able to encourage a love of Japanese culture and language.

"I've tried to expand their knowledge of world languages," he said. "The idea is to let them

See Dishman, next page

Sing out: 44 earn spot in state honors choir

From AAPSNews Service

Forty-four Ann Arbor secondary students have qualified to participate in the Michigan Student Vocal Music Association Junior High/Middle School State Honors Choir and will perform on Jan. 23 in Grand Rapids as part of the three-day Michigan Music Conference.

According to Cherry Westerman, choir teacher at Slauson Middle School, this is the largest group from Ann Arbor in 25 years to participate in this state honor.

"It's a big deal," said Westerman. "This is just ecstatically wonderful and bigger than usual. A lot of this is because we have a really strong music program here. It's exciting for our kids."

In addition, 60 singers (including those qualifying for state-level honors choir) participated in the MSVMA Regional Honors Choir. This also was the largest number of singers from Ann Arbor to participate in many years, Westerman said.

The MSVMA sponsors an honors choir program at both the junior high/middle school and high school levels. Students in the JH/MS honors choirs sing in combination ensembles of soprano, alto, tenor and bass with just one on a part for the audition.

Westerman said student singers learn a lot by participating in honors choirs. They are humbled by others who are better, they find out "they also know quite a lot and can be leaders," she said. They also learn to work with other students and different music directors with other approaches and they get to perform high-quality musical selections in a professional venue. "They are



Pioneer High School students during a fall practice for the Michigan Student Vocal Music Association Junior High/Middle School State Honors Choir performance which is scheduled for later this month in Grand Rapids.

singing for a number of other music teachers – a critical audience," she added.

All students selected must be able to clear their schedule to participate in rehearsals and be able to pay the fees to participate, although most schools host fundraisers to help pay for students who cannot afford it, Westerman said.

According to information from the district, students scheduled to participate in the Jan. 23 MSVMA JH/MSState Honors Choir performance include:

■ **Clague Middle School:** Noha Beleh, Emily Dodge and Maddi Shrinivasin.

■ **Forsythe Middle School:** Heather Duval, Abbey Johnson, Olivia Lamson, Olivia Merritt, Sorbie Richner and Jamie Seely.

■ **Pioneer High School:** Iman Aslani, Tre Brown, Kelsey Detering William Kryska III, Caitlin Mangan, Jenny Nathans, Maddie Polovick, Eli Rhodenhiser, Rebecca Shipan, Mark Strader, Karina Stribley and

Lukas Trierweiler.

■ **Scarlett Middle School:** Javairia Johnson and Prestine Spratt.

■ **Slauson Middle School:** Joe Babenec, Adriana Ellis, Cedric Gin, Josh King, Livia Luan, Maks Muno, Jake Norton, Chelsea Racelis, Maris Reid, Elise Reichard, Parker Sanford, Michelle Trent, Daniel Wu and Kenny Xue.

■ **Skyline High School:** Tasfia Bari, Alex Fuchs, Hannah Lehker, Yan Theros, Mitch Tolly, Sina Webster and Rachel Xydis.

In addition, Ann Arbor will be represented by the Huron High School Bel Canto, a selected women's choir directed by Bonnie Kidd; Ken Westerman, Pioneer High School choir director will present a session to other state music teachers; and other students from middle and high schools who were selected for the State Honors Middle School Band and Orchestra; and the State High Schools Honors Choirs.

Dishman, from previous page

know that everything isn't as it is in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It makes them better global thinkers. As a rule, many of them have never been out of the (United) States."

Dishman's parents moved to Ann Arbor from Nebraska ("They chose to go east, instead of west during the 'Dirty Thirties,'" he said,) and Dishman was born and raised here, attending St. Thomas the Apostle School. He is married to Donna and they have two adult daughters.

In addition to his dedication to the Hikone exchange program, Dishman is a Civil War history buff, likes 1930s and 1940s films, and enjoys the early history of college football (pre 1950.) He also loves Irish culture and music.

Larry Dishman

Occupation: Coordinator for Team Sports for the Ann Arbor Public Schools Rec & Ed Department and coordinator for the Hikone-Ann Arbor Educational Exchange Program since 1996.

Residence: Ann Arbor native who lives in Canton Township but maintains strong connections here.

Education: Undergraduate degree in English and French from Eastern Michigan University, two master's degrees in linguistics from the University of Michigan and a nearly completed doctoral degree in linguistics.

Age: 62.

Family: Married to Donna. They have two adult daughters, Megan, 26, and Bethany, 22.

Community service: His work with the Hikone exchange program.

Favorite meals: Yosenabe (a seafood stew) at Izakaya Sanpei, a Japanese restaurant in Canton



Larry Dishman coordinates the Hikone Exchange Program for Ann Arbor middle school students. Here, he wears a shirt designed by students.

Township, or ribs and kraut at Three Brothers Restaurant in Plymouth.

Favorite book: "All Quiet on the Western Front" by Erich Maria Remarque.

Life philosophy: "If you don't create a building or edifice, leave a mark in the hearts of people you touch. Leave the world a better place because of what you did while you were here."



Court in session for Tappan students

Law Club, mock trials part of experience

From AAPSNews Service

Thirty Tappan Middle School students in grades six through eight got a taste of a real-life courtroom action during college-level mock trials at the Washtenaw County courthouse last month.

The students are members of the Tappan Law Club, formed this fall at the request of students. It was organized under the guidance of Washtenaw County Circuit Judge Timothy Connors, University of Michigan Law School Assistant Dean of Students David Baum and Tappan Middle School teacher Wendy Raymond.

In the Dec. 12 mock trials, students served as witnesses and jurors in a mock lawsuit related to a head injury received in a car and motorcycle accident. Three local public defenders – Delphia Simpson, Laura Dudley and Elaine Spiliopoulou – served as judges, and law students from Wayne State University served as lawyers. Simpson's Washtenaw Community College students served as jurors with police cadets and middle school students.

The mock trials were part of course work required of WSU law students who are in Connors'



Washtenaw County Sheriff Department Det. Tom Sinks, left, with Tappan Middle School teacher Wendy Raymond, center, and Washtenaw County Circuit Judicial attorney Jennifer Sullivan. All have been part of the Tappan Law Club.

(Courtesy: Frank Weir, Washtenaw County Legal News)

classes. The same case scenario was conducted simultaneously in three separate courtrooms and each trial resulted in a different verdict.

Away from school on their own time, students Sena Adjei, an eight-grader, and Jacob Johnson and Emily Uhlmann, both seventh-graders, studied depositions for their roles as witnesses in the cases and were convincing and well-prepared when they testified, club organizers said.

The other 27 students served as jurors, taking their jobs seriously by contributing to discussion during deliberation. The middle school student jurors sat in the jury box with college students and listened intently to three hours of testimony from various witnesses. They were active participants in reaching verdicts during the final hour.

Connors said he was pleased and impressed by

the intense level of engagement demonstrated by the middle school students, and has invited them to return in the spring.

Some 50-60 students have attended the Tappan Law Club when it meets each Thursday. During its inaugural year, the club has welcomed a number of guest speakers including Washtenaw County Sheriff Department homicide detectives John Scafasci and Tom Sinks; University of Michigan law school students; local attorneys including law education advocates Greg Dodd, Lori Buiteweg and Julie Beck; and George Brieff of the Washtenaw County Youth Center Juvenile Detention Program, among others.

Information was submitted by Wendy Raymond, a teacher at Tappan Middle School.

Volunteers, from page 1

at Huron after she and her husband, Peter, arrived to live in the area.

This year, Cucuiet's volunteer time is more limited, as she has begun substitute teaching at Huron. Still, she spends between one to two days each week volunteering. She also is working to get her teaching certification and is considering going to college for a master's degree, perhaps in library science.

"I've improved my English," she said of her time volunteering in the building. "I've become a sub. I feel like I'm home here. I feel like part of the family."

Lauren Hallinan Warren, school librarian and media specialist at Huron, said Cucuiet's time in the school has impacted her, the library staff and students. "She was perfect for us, a good fit," Warren said. "She's integrated herself well – she's become part of the team. I can rely on her. We got better than we expected."

Warren said Cucuiet has worked the front circulation counter, shelved books and has even

helped make some of the Romanian students feel comfortable as they use the media center.

At Dicken Elementary School, Lois Zimmerman is in her fourth year volunteering in the classroom. She put in 184 hours of volunteer service last year and this year spends one day a week helping out in Sally Steward's kindergarten room.

The retired kindergarten teacher tutored at Washtenaw Community College for a year when she moved to the area four years ago. But the elementary school setting appealed more to her. "I knew that I belonged with children," she said. She assists one-on-one with students who need help with everything from writing to math.

"My effort is helping the children that don't have the basic concepts," she said. "It helps the teacher, it helps the children and it gives me something to do that I know I do well."

In addition to her time at Dicken, Zimmerman also volunteers in the Ann Arbor area as a clown where she does magic tricks as "Firefly the Clown." Firefly visits Dicken kindergarteners each year as a treat, but Zimmerman said she is realistic with students about it all. "They always recognize my voice," she said. "And I tell them there's no

such thing as magic. It's just something they don't understand."

Zimmerman has four children, seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. She enjoys reading, outdoor activities, is a member of the AAUW and is involved with her co-housing community in Scio Township.

She said volunteering is something people should consider if they feel the desire. "I wouldn't put a 'should' to it," she said. "If they love children and want to help, it's a good way to do it."

Steward called Zimmerman "phenomenal" in her approach. "She brings with her the background in education," Steward said. "She is the warm, fuzzy grandma personality that the children can relate to."

The Ann Arbor district has centrally screened and coordinated its volunteers since 2005.

Norma McCuiston, coordinator for partnerships and projects, said the district asks for a commitment of 16 weeks with a minimum of two hours each week.

McCuiston said volunteers add diversity and an economic value. "If they weren't volunteers, look at how much we'd have to pay," she added.