

AAPSNews

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

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Partners enhance excellence in Ann Arbor classrooms



Fifth-graders at Thurston Elementary handle transactions at their student-run credit union during a recent lunch hour.

Featured story

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Ann Arborites have a rich history of community service and much of it has taken place within the walls of The Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Through the district's 25-year-old program Partners for Excellence, civic groups, large corporations and other organizations have encouraged students and helped to train them for future careers and vocations.

The program started in 1985 with six partnerships. Today, between 30 and 40 formal partnerships exist in any given year around the district.

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Rotarian Jeannine Buchanan works with a young student at Angell Elementary School.

Rotarians tutor young elementary pupils

One longstanding partner with the Ann Arbor Public Schools is the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor. For 12 years, Rotarians and their spouses have visited Angell Elementary School to tutor students in reading and math. The program was expanded to Burns Park Elementary five years ago.

At Angell, the Buchanans come as a package deal, visiting Natalie DePasquale's blended first- and second-grade class each week.

Bob Buchanan, a retired pediatrician and corporate executive, takes pride in having



helped students excel in math for seven years. "Once you get into it, it kind of gets into your blood. It's the satisfaction of the little bit of progress each day and dealing with the adversity too," he said.

Jeannine Buchanan said she enjoys helping youngsters read. "It's just a joy to be here. To see some improvement with the kids we're tutoring," she said.

Angell Elementary Principal Gary Court said the Rotary help is welcome. "They get personal attention and they look forward to the Rotarians," he said. "They

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Final budget session at Pioneer

Inside:

Options Magnet may attract more high school students and revenue.

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Tuesday will be the last of four scheduled budget sessions by The Ann Arbor Public Schools, designed to offer budget-cutting and revenue ideas and gather feedback and ideas from the general public.

The district is facing a budget shortfall estimated at \$21 million heading into the new fiscal year that begins July 1.

The Jan. 19 meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. at Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Blvd.

A survey is also on the school district's Web page asking for public feedback and suggestions. Visit a2schools.org and find the survey in the budget box on the right. Those interested in offering feedback do it shortly after Tuesday's meeting to ensure all comments can be considered.

Director of Communications Liz Margolis said the district has begun the process of reviewing comments made at the meetings and on survey forms and will report out information from them in February.

Officials also will use the information to prepare a 2010-11 fiscal budget. Superintendent Todd Roberts said he plans to present a proposed budget to the school board in March.

Being considered are pay reductions, eliminating jobs and alternative approaches to operations, as well as attracting more students to the district. Proposed changes could add up to more than \$17 million in cuts or new revenue for the 2010-11 year.

Options Magnet offers high schoolers schedule flexibility

From AAPSNews Service

Seventeen-year-old Stephanie Chueh was home schooled until the 10th grade, when she entered Ann Arbor's Options Magnet Program. She will graduate this year as a senior with all of her required high school classes as well as 32 college credits thanks to the flexible program that has allowed her to dually enroll in high school and college as well as take online classes.

"I love it. It's been such a good lesson for me," said the Ann Arbor Options senior who lives with her family in Pittsfield Township. "I think the thing that impresses me the most is how nice everybody at Community High School is and how flexible they are."

The Ann Arbor Public Schools is hoping to entice students like Chueh from around Washtenaw County – and those within the district who don't attend public school – with a larger-than-ever offering of online classes and individualized learning through the district's Options Magnet.

Options is one of the ways the district is hoping to increase student enrollment and per-pupil revenue, for the county's largest district.

In Chueh's case, her mother has been willing to drive her between Washtenaw Community College, Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan so that she can experience high school in a unique way. "College is challenging, but not too hard," she said. "It's helped me to take initiative, because I had to look for the class."

She has taken courses online through the Michigan Virtual High School such as Western Civilization and Spanish. Through her home school network, she has taken some elective

courses. But, she will earn her degree through Ann Arbor.

Under the program, students can take a majority of their classes in a non-traditional format and pursue classes they might not otherwise be able to take in a traditional setting, said program coordinator Susette Jaquette. The Options program also serves students such as Chueh who may have been home schooled and want to transition into a public school setting, she said.

Active students who have scheduling issues during the regular school day also take advantage of the program, which was formalized by the district in 2008. Jaquette said what makes Options special is the variety it offers. "For students who are busy with language, music and other electives, they don't have time (to fit them in.) This appeals to them."

Any student from Washtenaw County can take part in the Options program for the 2010-11 school year, enrolling as a schools-of-choice student. The program is coordinated at both Community and Stone high schools.

One way of learning in the Options program are Community Resource classes, Jaquette said. These courses are taught by a volunteer "expert" from the community either off-site or in the school and monitored by certified teaching staff. They can be as specialized as a student and parent want them to be and can be for one student or many.

"Sometimes the CRs become so popular, they actually become (regular) classes," she said, using the examples of a Model United Nations class and a Google Ads class at Huron High School that uses the expertise from local Google staff.

Jaquette said a CR allows a student to explore career options, an opportunity to do community service or a way to accommodate a learning style preference. Another way Options students can learn is through dual enrollment, state approved since 1996, where students can take both high school and college-level classes simultaneously.

The district has beefed up its online offerings, allowing high school students the option of taking many classes online instead of in the classroom. Those enrolled in the Options Magnet can include these online offerings as they design their semester of learning. Some of the online offerings have included self-paced math, health classes and classes through the Michigan Virtual High School.

Other classes are blended, with some online components and some face-to-face learning.

This fall, Jaquette said the district plans to offer online options for all classes, but is unclear how many students will register. "We'll see what students sign up for and adjust accordingly," she said. "We don't know what will happen."

Of the 60 students currently enrolled in the Options program, about half would not be enrolled in Ann Arbor Public Schools were it not for the flexibility offered through the Options Magnet, Jaquette said. This has already brought about \$278,000 in revenue to the district that it would not have received otherwise.

She said the expansion of the Options Magnet with its flexible approach is one way to bring more students to the district. "It's potentially a way to get 500 new kids without a new school (building)," she added.

Rotarians, from previous page

feel special. These people really care."

Sandy Burdi, retired from the U-M Athletic Department and married to a Rotarian, has volunteered at Angell for five years. "This is one of the things I wanted to do upon retirement," she said. "I think it's a really, really good program. There are a lot of kids here for whom English is a second language and this is good for them."

DePasquale said she has come to rely upon the tutors. She said the partnership works well. "It's the relationships they build, the

confidence," she said. "They're fabulous."

Nick Lacy, a sales agent with Edward Surovell Realtors, oversees the program for the Rotary Club. He said it originated with a program called Rotary Readers at Angell, in which volunteers read to kindergartners.

Today, there are 20 members who visit the two Ann Arbor schools in any given school year. There also are two college-age tutors from the Rotaract Club at the University of Michigan who volunteer. Lacy tutors in the fifth grade at Burns Park.

"It has been a treat for us that so many teachers have opened their doors," said Lacy, who attended the Ann Arbor schools and is a former teacher. "It's a lot of fun. And it's one hour of the week I can look forward to putting everything aside and working with the students."

Lacy said he'd like to see the program expand.

"I think the more community support you have, the better," he said. "The more people we have involved, the better off we all are. We look at this as an investment in our community."

Pioneer principal leaves for active Army duty this month

Pioneer High School principal Michael White is scheduled to be deployed on Jan. 29 to Fort Benning, Ga. taking a leave from his Ann Arbor job, where the U.S. Army Reserve senior drill sergeant will commence full-time training of Army recruits.

"For me, (serving) it's important. It's one of the most patriotic things you can do," White said.

White, 49, said he has been called up to active duty from 12 to 18 months, but could serve up to 24 months. In his absence, senior class Assistant Principal Tamber Woodworth will take on White's duties as principal.

Community Ecology Club invites a green approach

By Melanie Langa
AAPSNews Service

The Community High School Ecology Club has an important mission: to significantly change the habits of the school and the greater community. And students in the club are tackling projects both around their school and in their back yard.

"It is a club for people who are interested in ecology, who want to get outside and be active in the community as well as help make Community High School a greener place," said science teacher Courtney Kiley, the club's adviser.

Members are involved with several large, long-term projects including promoting the mission of the Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy, making Community High School Green Certified and planting native gardens around the school. As they educate themselves about energy usage, pollution and other issues facing the environment, they are able to teach others.

"Environmental issues are something that are important to me. I feel like there is a lot of talk about humans destroying the earth but not as much action," said student Shadi Ahmadmehrabi. "So I'm glad to have the opportunity to be part of a group like this."

The Ecology Club has recently helped to produce a video explaining the mission of the nonprofit Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy.

The conservancy is attempting to establish a series of parks in downtown Ann Arbor to provide a way to walk or bike from the University of Michigan athletic complex to the Argo Dam. There has been talk of creating a greenway for nearly 30 years.

It would be situated on the historical route of Allen Creek, which is now buried in an underground drain and feeds into the Huron River.

It would take shape as a kind of "green infrastructure," said Margaret Wong, a member of the Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy. "We have

this floodplain and since the real floodplain is a natural system, it's not going to go away. It needs to really be respected and appreciated," she said.

The greenway is not just a matter of environmental concern. "There's an urban planning aspect that has major implications to make a place feel beautiful," said Wong. "There is a social, even cultural, component to why the stream is important."

Ecology Club members are excited about the collaboration. "It was great for us to get involved in the community and support a foundation that's got an important mission," said Kiley.

Students involved with the project consider the conservancy goals to be similar to that of the Ecology Club. The conservancy mission also connects with the Community science program. "It relates to our curriculum," Kiley said.

The Allen Creek Greenway project is not the only one students are working on. This year, club members plan to create a native plants garden working with JJR, a landscape architecture firm, to develop a series of gardens around the Community High School grounds. The purpose of the gardens is to "manage runoff and learn why native plants are good," said Kiley.

The Ecology Club also hopes to become an official Green School through the Michigan Green Schools Recognition Program. To become certified, a school is scored on its ability to reduce, reuse, recycle, and use renewable resources and energy wisely. "It is important for schools and students to be aware of the changing environment and for them to actually do something about it," said student Emma Hughes.

While the club has lofty goals, Kiley hopes to attain a more modest personal one. "All I want," she said, "is to keep kids interested in science."

Melanie Langa is a staff reporter for the *The Communicator Web*, the online edition of *Community High School's* student newsmagazine.



Courtesy, CHS Ecology Club
Members of the Community High School Ecology Club on the river during a club outing.

Partners, from page 1

"Sometimes it starts very small and grows. We encourage that," said Norma McCuiston, community partnerships and projects coordinator for The Ann Arbor Public Schools. "It's a real relationship. There's a level of expertise that sometimes we don't have. The world is changing so quickly. They are our partners, our resources."

The Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory has a longstanding partnership with the district's science program, in place since 1987. Each summer, two Ann Arbor high school students intern at the government agency, which is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"All of the students are really focused and gung-ho on science," said Tom Nalepa, a research biologist for the Ann Arbor-based agency, which shares the cost of the interns with the University of Michigan Cooperative Institute of Limnology.

Interested students write essays about topics such as the Great Lakes ecosystems, the environment or biology. They are screened by high school science teachers, and GLERL generally selects one student intern each from Huron and Pioneer who team with scientists for the summer.

The partnership is tied to the district's science curriculum and is a benefit to both the agency and the students. "It's been a positive experience both ways. It's a two-way street," Nalepa added.

At Thurston Elementary School, fifth-graders are responsible for running a student credit union branch, thanks to a partnership with the Midwest Financial Credit Union. Some 15-20 students each year participate in the student branch, which is open every other Wednesday during the school's lunch hour.

Fifth-grade teacher Michael Johnson coordinates the effort each year, fielding applications from interested students. Veronika, a fifth-grader, is the credit union's student manager this year and said she likes leading the staff.

"I make sure everything is running smoothly," she said. "I like being the leader. I any problems happen, I know I can control them."

Other longtime partners include AAA Michigan and Allen Elementary School, The University Musical Society in the district's elementary schools, Saint Joseph Mercy Health System's art enrichment programs and various programs with the University of Michigan Health System that include a Youth Mentoring Program for at-risk students at Huron High School and school health centers at Stone High School and Scarlett Middle School.

McCuiston said the partnerships offer the district much-needed contact with the community and gives employees from area businesses and organizations "good feelings when they know they are involved in the schools. It gives them the ability to have an impact on the workforce of tomorrow."

Bach music teacher learns lessons as a traveler, delegate to China

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

When Kristi Bishop visited mainland China last month, she discovered progress that has happened quickly in this Communist country that has only recently opened itself to world commerce and visits from people all over the world.

The Bach Elementary School music teacher was a People to People ambassador with 50 other music educators from the United States, including K-12 teachers and university level educators.

She said their Chinese hosts were cordial and curious, the architecture fabulous, the food delicious and the experience once-in-a-lifetime. And, she is reeling from the experience that will give her plenty of food for thought.

"I will continue to put my thoughts together," Bishop said. "There's enough here for me to think about for years to come."

Bishop, a 15-year teacher in Ann Arbor, had no plans to travel to China. In fact, she did not have a passport and had not gone out of country except for visits to Canada and Mexico. Then, she was invited to be a delegate because she is a teacher who likes to share her expertise with others.

Perhaps most valuable for Bishop, was something definitive she got from the experience: A rededication to her craft. She said she plans not only to ensure that all students in her care have an opportunity to learn music, but also to raise her expectations of what students can achieve.

"There's so much more I can expect from the students," she said. "I'm excited about it."

Bishop said she is thankful that all students in the United States get an opportunity to practice music. "We want everyone to participate, regardless of their talent," she said. "In our society, opportunities are limitless."

In China, she said, "children are identified (as musically gifted) at a young age and encouraged to go to boarding school. They go away from home as young as the first grade." She said other children learn about music, but only through music appreciation.

She noticed a difference in the overall school environment in China, as well. Classrooms are crowded (about 40 students per class, she said) and a huge emphasis is placed on appreciation of the arts, including calligraphy, dance, music and

silk printing. "I noticed that the Chinese honor their teachers in the same way they honor their elders," she added.

Bishop said she hopes continuing correspondence with some of those she met on the trip will help her to learn more. "The power of this (trip) is in the future connections," she said.

The People to People music delegation visited mainland China from Dec. 11-21 with each member paying for their own travel and trip costs. They stayed in Beijing for four nights, Shanghai for another four nights and spent most of their time in the country's urban areas. During her trip, she was part of round-table discussions, panels, seminars and site visits. Bishop also experienced culture and history through visits to the China Conservatory, Beijing No. 35 High School and visit to The Great Wall, The Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.

The trip was organized by Lynn Brinckmeyer, director of Choral Music Education at Texas State University. Brinckmeyer said she worked hard to get as many states represented on the trip as possible and said Bishop was selected as a delegate because of her involvement with her profession and the knowledge that Bishop and others in the delegation would come back and share their experience with others.

"We have already had some dialogue via e-mail," she said of the group. "And almost daily I'm getting something. It's been very rewarding."

Brinckmeyer said she expects many of the delegates will write about their experience for professional journals and, perhaps, present at state conferences before their peers. Bishop lost her voice early in the trip, so spent a lot of time writing observations in a journal, which she is now pleased to have and will use to put her thoughts into a professional paper.

Her favorite part of the trip was a visit to an elementary music classroom on the last day. "Even though the teacher didn't speak English, we knew exactly what she was teaching," she said. "It gave me a better understanding of our ESL (English as a Second Language) students and how they learn."

"I feel we were given such an opportunity," Bishop added.

Casey Hans edits this newsletter for The Ann Arbor Public Schools. Reach her at hanse@aaaps.k12.mi.us or call 734-994-2090 ext. 51228.



Kristi Bishop and National Guide "Wendy" Hou Liping at the Yu Yuan Garden in Shanghai.

Kristi Bishop

Occupation: Elementary music teacher at Bach Elementary School.

Education: Master of Music degree, University of Michigan; Bachelor's degree in Music Education, Wichita State University.

Residence: Scio Township.

Age: 38.

Family: Married to Andrew Bishop, sons Oliver, 9, and Linden 6.

Pets: dog Chancey and cats Bela and Domino.

Hobbies: Music, dance, gardening, jewelry making, sewing, studying archaeology and origins of religious traditions.

Community service: Trustee and vice president of the Educational Foundation of Dexter, co-chairwoman of Bates Elementary School PTO (Dexter), vice president of Arts Advocates in Dexter Community Schools.

Favorite meal: "Whatever my husband cooks, especially Chicken Marsala with smashed potatoes and steamed asparagus."

Last books read: "Eat, Pray, Love" by Elizabeth Gilbert and "A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future" by Daniel H. Pink.

Life philosophy: Victor Hugo: "The human soul has still greater need of the ideal than of the real. It is by the real that we exist; it is by the ideal that we live."