

AAPSNews

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

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Rec & Ed moving to Pioneer wing

The Community Education and Recreation Department moves this week from rented space to a west wing at Pioneer High School. Director Sara Aeschbach says it will be more convenient for the community and will save the department money.

See story on page 4.

Issue No. 7, February 1, 2010

Clague pals ACT-UP for friendship, mentoring

Featured story

By Casey Hans
AAPS News Service

Instead of clapping, dozens of people in the audience lift both hands over their heads and wave them in the air. Between each humorous skit on the Clague Middle School stage, the audience responds both with laughter and ... more waves.

On stage were 23 Clague students — some from the school's general education population and others from Katie Kiolbasa's self-contained special education room. They have become fellow thespians and friends, a relationship developed through a program called ACT-UP, which stands for "achieving connections through understanding peers."

Patrons wave instead of clapping during a recent ACT-UP student performance at Clague Middle School. The theater troupe includes both general and special education students.



The waving-in-lieu-of-clapping was done to allow students sensitive to noise to enjoy the accolades without becoming anxious, explained speech therapist Ben Darragh, who

has been involved with the ACT-UP class which started in the fall. Darragh said the new performing arts elective has enthused the entire school.

"We thought it would be good to have an activity for general ed and special ed kids to work together, to create something," he explained. "The general education kids accept the role of mentoring or guiding. It's good to have them be teachers and look out for someone other than themselves."

Teacher Jennifer Quint, a language teacher who coordinates the ACT-UP class, said the class has broadened her horizons.

"It's been wonderful. It's my favorite class of the day. I can't wait to get there," said Quint. "And now we're going to keep it going. Hopefully, we can keep it on a two-to-one ratio (of general ed students to special ed students)."

ACT-UP came into being somewhat by accident: When Quint

See Clague, page 2



King parents learn about reading, writing curriculum

Dozens of parents went back to class last week at King Elementary School to find out how their children learn to read and write.

The Literacy Night event was sponsored by the King School Improvement Team and included demonstrations from teachers as well as students. Camille Ziolek, a parent

who co-chairs the committee with Principal Kevin Karr, said the event was two years in the making. "I've heard so many comments of 'oh, I understand it now. Now I see what my kids are doing,'" she said.

A full story about this event is posted online.

King Elementary teacher Rebecca Gracey and students do a reading demonstration last week designed to show parents about how the school and district teaches reading and writing.

Students gain inspiration for big Forsythe Science Fair

From AAPSNews Service

The Forsythe Middle School community is gearing up for its annual science fair, which organizers boast as the largest of its type in the state.

Students are finalizing projects for the school-wide event slated for noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 14. Organizers are expecting 240 student projects which will be featured in the gymnasium and lab areas of the school. The event is free and open to the public. The

FORSYTHE
Science Fair 2010

fair has been an annual event at the school for as long as science teacher Dan

Ezekiel can remember – and he's been part of it for 23 years.

"I think science fairs are just so important," said Ezekiel, who is curriculum chairman of the science program at Forsythe. "I see their eyes light up and they tell me about their projects. I don't think you get turned onto science by doing a worksheet."

Students can work individually or in pairs on their project. Teachers start in the fall encouraging students to think about topics for their projects. Sixth-graders are required to participate; seventh- and eighth-graders can participate if they wish for extra school credit.

Project categories include either experiments or models and collections. Some 36 students will receive awards for their projects: first through sixth place in each category and grade are awarded prizes and those categorized in the top 20 percent of projects receive honorable mentions based on judges' scores. An iPod drawing is being offered



Dan Ezekiel, lead science teacher at Forsythe Middle School, says science fairs and the hands-on opportunities they provide are important to student learning. "I don't think you get turned onto science by doing a worksheet," he says.

If you go

What: The annual Forsythe Science Fair, featuring projects of experiments, models and collections by Forsythe Middle School students.

When: Free and open to the public from noon to 4 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 14. Awards are given out at 2 p.m.

Where: Forsythe Middle School, 1655 Newport Road, Ann Arbor.

Details: Forsythe.a2schools.org.

this year for seventh- and eighth-graders who turn in a completed project to encourage participation.

As an added incentive, the 36 winners will go to the Detroit Science Center for a field trip this spring, courtesy of the Forsythe PTSO.

Parents Karen Jacobson and Robin Hess are co-chairing this year's event.

"This has been the largest single school science fair in the state of Michigan. The judges really put a lot of time into it," said Jacobson. She said one of her favorite projects from past fairs was a 3D model of the city of Ann Arbor.

Hess said the projects are as diverse as the students and their ideas. Some past projects have included experiments with fluorescent bulbs and mold as well as models of solar/lunar eclipse, solar power and organic eggs.

"It's very interesting," Hess said. "It has all different kinds of topics. You can't go through it without finding something of interest."

The fair involves not only students, but community members as well. Parents and local businesses provide food for the 60 judges who volunteer their time to review the student projects and give awards for the best-done efforts. High school students are on hand to add up judges' score sheets. Parent volunteers help to set up the exhibit areas. In all, there are some 80 volunteers from the Forsythe community who help with the fair, Jacobson said.

Some of the Forsythe students will also take their projects to the regional Southeastern Michigan Science Fair, which takes place at Washtenaw Community College on Saturday, March 13 from noon to 4 p.m. It features student projects from grades six through 12 from Washtenaw and surrounding counties.

Clague, from front page

returned from a maternity leave last year, she was given a theater elective to teach, but the class was accidentally left off of the schedule. When a small handful of students did enroll, some were general education students and the others were from the school's special education program.

From that, the idea for an adaptive peer mentoring performing arts class took hold.

Darragh found a book with topics for skits and students were off and running, writing dialogue, creating needed costumes and props and preparing for their performance together on stage.

The ACT-UP performing arts class comes on the coattails of a year-old mentoring program at the school, which started with sixth-graders last year. It has surged in popularity this year, with

some 40 students from all grades rotating through visits to Kiolbasa's special education class where they have made new friends and helped to break down disability barriers in the school.

Connor, a sixth-grader, is a first-year mentor. "We play games, socialize with them," he said of his friends in the special education room. "They're just like us. They're just kind of people who need friends. Even though they might seem different at first, they're the same as you and me."

Kiolbasa said the number one benefit of students mentoring is the friendships that are developed within her contained special education classroom family. "I've seen kids come in here before the bell and some have wanted to do things outside of school," she said. "I think they do it for different reasons. Some of them come every day."

Kiolbasa said this is Clague's first experience with the mentoring concept, but noted that

Forsythe Middle School has had a successful mentoring effort through their gym program that brings special education and general education students together.

The Clague programs draw other staff members as well. Paraprofessionals involved with the programs include Robyn Conn, Ophelia Schoen and Sheryl Calcagno. Also involved is school psychologist Cathy Murphy, who said the programs have built a camaraderie around the school.

"They (students) recognize that everybody's different," she said. "There are definitely some who don't see themselves in a mentoring role, but in a friendship role. With some of the kids, it's made a positive impact on their behavior in other areas."

Brianna is a Clague seventh-grader who is a second-year mentor. She said her special education friends love it. "You really do have fun, like you would with any other kids," she said.

Superintendent thanks community, annual budget process continues

Dear Ann Arbor Public Schools Community Members:

I want to thank those who attended the AAPS Budget Forums during the past few weeks. I was very pleased with the turnout at the meetings. I hope the meetings were helpful in providing you with information about our budget and possible options to address our projected budget deficit for the 2010-11 school year.

These are difficult and uncertain financial times for our school district as well as districts throughout the state. The great interest our staff, students, parents and community members displayed at the forums regarding the issues and the input you provided on how we can best plan our budget gives me confidence that working together, we will address the financial challenges we face and continue to provide students with the outstanding educational opportunities that make our school district exceptional.

I want to share with you the next steps in our budget development process. Your input



Superintendent Todd Roberts

continues to be valuable as we lead up to the presentation of the 2010-11 draft budget plan on March 24.

We are currently reviewing the feedback and surveys collected at the four forums along with the feedback we have received online. A Study Session is scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 17 to go over this information with the Board of Education. We will then post the information on the district Web site.

On March 24 the administration will present a draft budget plan to the Board of Education for a first briefing. The draft budget is planned for a second briefing at the April 15 Board of

Education meeting. The district will host community meetings in late April to go over the approved plan.

In April the district will bring together the Strategic Planning team and individual action teams for the eight strategies in our Strategic Plan for a series of meetings. At these meetings the teams will review the plan and make modifications especially considering the expected ongoing budget issues. Those of you who filled out the survey citing your interest in this process will be contacted prior to the first meeting.

In June the Board of Education will officially adopt the 2010-11 AAPS budget.

Thank you again for your involvement. I appreciate your participation and input.

If you have any questions please contact me.

Sincerely,

Todd Roberts, Ed.D
Superintendent
Ann Arbor Public Schools
2555 S. State St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 994-2230
robertst@aaps.k12.mi.us

School Bells

3 high schools recognized in national magazine rankings

Huron, Pioneer and Community high schools were among 1,750 public schools recognized around the country for outperforming their state's standards in the U.S. News & World Report's America's Best High Schools rankings.

A total of 21,786 public high schools were examined for the project.

Huron and Pioneer earned silver status and Community bronze status in the analysis.

This is the third year U.S. News and its partner in the project, School Evaluation Services, have done a public high school analysis. A total of 100 schools earned gold medals, 461 silver medals and 1,189 bronze medals.

For information about the project and details visit: www.usnews.com/sections/education/high-schools/index.html

Preschool and Family Center earns national accreditation

Ann Arbor Public Schools Preschool and Family Center has been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The accreditation was granted in January and is valid through Feb. 1, 2015, according to information from the NAEYC. It is a new accreditation for the school, which opened in 2006 and specializes in early childhood education with a variety of programs.

Interim Principal Michelle Pogliano said the accreditation "shows that the center meets high standards the district has set for early childhood education."

Former Principal Connie Toigo, who died this month from complications of cancer treatment, spearheaded work on the accreditation which began in the fall of 2008, Pogliano said.

Interim Assistant Principal Jim Podojil, who saw the accreditation process through the final fall months, said the NAEYC is a "front-runner in setting a national set of standards for early childhood education."

Accreditation by the group helps schools maintain a high educational standard. "Their goal is to make programs better," he said.

For details about NAEYC, visit www.naeyc.org. For more information about the Preschool and Family Center, visit a2schools.org and click on directory of schools to be linked to the preschool page.



Eberwhite Elementary Principal Debi Wagner shows off the "One Small Step" wall in the school, added this year using photos of student feet and shoes. Wagner said the project was designed to let students know that small efforts can lead to even bigger things.

Recreation, community programs get stable home at Pioneer High

From AAPSNews Service

When the Ann Arbor Community Education and Recreation

Department moves to different offices this week, the program will be more centrally located for residents and will save money on rent.

The busy department has moved from rented office space south of Eisenhower Parkway to a new location in the "E" Wing of Pioneer High School. Staff will serve residents from offices located on the west side of the building, just off of Seventh Street.

"It's really helpful to be in school-owned property," said Sara Aeschbach, director of Community Education and Recreation. "It will be centrally located and so handy for people."

About 40 staff members will work in the 10,000-square-foot space. It has a lot of light and is designed with pre-fabricated walls which will allow flexibility of space.

After several days of being closed to move, staff will begin conducting business on Tuesday, Feb. 2. Regular hours for the department remain 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, but there will be a 24/7 drop box available in the lobby area for



customers to drop off registrations.

Aeschbach said the move also puts the department within the Pioneer community where many class offerings take place. The Pioneer location also gives the department a permanent home. Before moving to the Eisen-

hower Place location 4 1/2 years ago, the staff was housed in a variety of locations including Allen and Lawton elementary schools, Stone School, the former Balas III building and in former district-owned space on North Maple Road.

She said the new space will have sports equipment storage for classes and leagues; in the recent past items were stored at the administration building on State Street.

Aeschbach said her department serves a wide variety of people. "I like people to know this is the part of the school district that serves the entire community, from newborns all the way up until they are seniors," she said. "It's really designed to be something for everybody."

Community Education and Recreation programs must be able to collect enough money to fund themselves, Aeschbach said. In-kind contributions include use of schools and city parks and office space to operate the programs. Fees are two-



Community Education and Recreation Department Director Sara Aeschbach visits offices at Pioneer High School where the department is scheduled to move this week. The entry is off of South Seventh Street.

tiered: One level is for in-district residents and slightly more is charged to those living out-of-district who want to take classes. Offerings include a variety of leisure and sports programs and leagues, youth team sports and camps, lifelong learning classes for youth and adults, First Steps, tuition-based preschool and before- and after-school child care programs. Scholarships also are available for low-income residents.

The "E" Wing at Pioneer is accessible off of South Seventh Street between Main Street and Scio Church Road. A new, separate entrance will be well marked with a large rooftop sign. The address is 1515 S. Seventh St., Ann Arbor. Details: www.aarecd.com. or call 734-994-2300.

Budget concerns make Educational Foundation even more important

From AAPSNews Service

As uncertainty continues for public school funding at the state level, The Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation will play a more important role, according to the nonprofit's director and top Ann Arbor school officials.

The foundation will continue to explore ways to best use its donors' money, putting programs and new initiatives in front of students and keeping the district cutting edge, said Executive Director Wendy Correll.

"We've had great support from people in our community," said Correll, who was hired to lead the nonprofit in 2006. "This is a time when we are going to need to do more for the schools."

Although the group cannot realistically take on large areas such as staff funding, Correll said, the 501(c)(3) foundation can continue to help by contributing to the "margin of excellence" in the Ann Arbor Public Schools. She said that of the district's approximately 16,500 students, 11,000 were impacted in some way by grants given out

by the foundation last year. Grants were given to districtwide initiatives as well as smaller individual grants to teachers, she said.

Correll said the foundation often tries programs out and, if they are successful, can make the programs a regular feature in classrooms. "In the past, we've looked at our programs as pilot programs. Going forward, we may need to consider funding existing programs that work well and benefit our students," she added.

The foundation funds a number of "Initiatives for Excellence" each year, which are considered from a wish list that Ann Arbor school officials bring to the foundation board.

One such program is My Access. The web-based program provides feedback on grammar, punctuation and offers other writing help. It was piloted first at Scarlett Middle School and, while emphasis has been placed on every fifth-grader having access to the program, students in grades four through 10 use it across the district. Last year, the foundation gave \$25,000 toward the program, adding to the \$50,000 in the prior year.

Other grants are smaller, but still have a big impact. A program at Pittsfield Elementary School is being handled through the Karen Thomas Memorial Fund, an endowed fund named after parent Karen Thomas to improve literacy. Pittsfield Principal Carol Shekarian said a \$3,000 grant request was written by three teachers in the second, third and fourth grades.

"This fund was set up so students could gain access to books and a love for reading," Shekarian said, adding that students now have access to high-quality literature purchased.

Grants like these become even more important to classroom needs as the district faces a \$21 million deficit going into the new fiscal year that begins on July 1. Correll noted that even "small amounts of funding can create big impacts."

For more about the Ann Arbor Public Schools Educational Foundation, visit www.aapsef.org or call 734-994-1969 or email wcorrell@aapsef.org.

A more detailed story about the Foundation is posted online.