

AAPSNews

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

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Survey feedback assists district in budget process

More than 800 residents participated in online and in-person surveys to offer opinions as the district plans its 2010-11 budget. A proposed budget is due to come before the school board on March 24. *For a full report on the surveys, visit <http://a2schools.org> and click on link under "budget" section.*

Issue No. 9, March 1, 2010

Grant dollars boost communications and safety

From AAPSNews Service

A second round of federal grant money is helping The Ann Arbor Public Schools stay on top of emergency responses and better communicate with parents.

Ann Arbor is in its second grant cycle using dollars from the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grant – known

as REMS. The district is focused on staff training, emergency drills districtwide and at each building and implementing a notification system that can be used throughout the community. Special attention is also being given to the hearing impaired and disabled school populations.

The district is updating infectious disease, food defense and pandemic flu plans in this grant cycle. Ten

high school students from Huron and Community have been trained as part of a Teen CERT (Certified Emergency Response Team.) and six Critical Incident Stress Management Teams comprised of staff members are also being trained to support building-level crisis teams.

About 20 members of a coordinating committee assist Henry Caudle and Ann Anglim in implementing

the grant. "It's all for safety's sake," said Caudle, who serves as the district's REMS grant project director as well as its crisis response team coordinator. "I think we're headed in the right direction. And we couldn't have done this without the grants we've gotten."

Like all federal grants, REMS

See Grant, page 4



Eberwhite students who live at Parkhurst Apartments say they like the extra tutoring attention they get on Tuesdays and Thursdays in their complex's community room – an extra apartment that management converted for use by residents. A back room is used for the tutoring sessions.

Featured story

Eberwhite teachers reach out to tutor young at Parkhurst

From AAPSNews Service

Teachers at Eberwhite Elementary are involved with a program that gives students extra help, makes families more comfortable and increases the school's outreach into the community.

Each teacher tutors at nearby Parkhurst Apartments on Pauline Boulevard which is within the Eberwhite attendance area. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon a team of two or three teachers visits the complex's community center to offer one-on-one homework and school help.

Fifth-grader Kearria was shy about coming to the tutoring sessions at first. "But she came, and hasn't missed a day since," according to tutor Shelly Brock, a second-grade teacher who said that the program is building self-confidence for students.

Kearria was working on reading comprehension and science and doing some homework. "I like it so I don't have to do it at home," she said. She also entertained the group before the tutoring began by stepping into the room

See Tutors, page 4



Second-grade teacher Shelly Brock helps a fifth-grader with homework. Below, another student works on a lesson.



Pioneer peer group assists struggling students

By Carlina Duan
AAPSNews Service

It's third hour at Pioneer High School and two classrooms are abuzz with students discussing and reflecting on each others burdens.

Although backgrounds, ethnicities and social groups are diverse, they all are members of PPI, Pioneer High School's Positive Peer Influence group which helps students with challenges in and out of school that may interfere with their academic achievement.

Founded in 1988, the three-semester elective trains students to help others who may be struggling. Students are referred to the PPI group by administrators or friends and are given one hour to talk with PPI members.

The organization is divided into two groups by gender, each with about 10 to 12 student members. "PPI is separated by gender to create an 'audience effect,' said school social worker Jonathan Stern, who leads the Men's PPI group. You're in a room with 12 other people and you just have to be yourself. For guys, that's an unusual thing."

Both groups meet daily during third hour, where they assist other students or learn more about the self-help process.

"We're not here necessarily to give direction, or give advice; because we're not a therapy group," said school psychologist Kristine Wisner, the Women's PPI Group leader. "The premise is that students are more likely to talk to their peers."

PPI is guided by confidentiality, and information shared within the group by members or other peers does not leave the group. "Confidentiality is



Members of the 2009-10 first semester PPI Women's Group, which assists peers around Pioneer High School. The group meets every third hour as does a PPI Men's Group. (Photo courtesy, Mara Abramson)

the foundation of PPI – it won't work if it doesn't have confidentiality," Wisner said.

PPI member junior Ally Daniels agrees, calling PPI "a comfortable setting where you can talk without fear of things being leaked. It's a place to vent, and it's a place where people can breathe," she said. "You can talk about whatever you want without being judged."

Junior Emily Lim is also a PPI member. "We don't try to give advice," she added. "We try to boost (a referral's) confidence, and let them think of ways to help solve their own anger."

Members of PPI are chosen by other group members, who select their peers based on the diversity of social groups that they belong to and their level of social skill. Potential members must be interviewed and then the group decides whether or not a peer has met the qualifications.

The purpose of this diversity is to incorporate a sense of comfort for the referral, who may feel a stronger connection if speaking to a peer of his or her own social group or ethnicity.

"We're a group of different social and ethnic backgrounds," added junior and PPI member Adam DesJardins. "There's definitely going to be someone in our group that you're bound to identify with."

Wisner said communication is key and that "we don't want all our kids to be perfect – they have to have their own struggles that they've faced and overcome."

In addition to developing skills, PPI members also experience a group activity called, "Lifers", or life stories; where members "tell their own story, their own struggles, values, paths that they've walked to the rest of the group," Wisner said. "The most important part of this is that they now know what it's like to feel vulnerable."

Vulnerability, according to Wisner and Stern, is a crucial part of understanding what each referral goes through when talking about struggles. Wisner also points out, "Once you've gotten through Lifers, you know what each member has to contribute. It's such an important process."

PPI members must commit to three semesters of class, whereupon they leave with an understanding of resolving differences, creating goals, and conflict management.

On average, the PPI group receives about three to four referrals each week.

Carlina Duan is the News Editor for The Optimist, Pioneer High School's student newspaper. She also reports and writes for the AAPSNews Service.

Students serve as peacemakers around district

Mediation program expands from Pioneer into 4 additional Ann Arbor schools

From AAPSNews Service

The roles are set: Two Slauson Middle School students are peer mediators; two others play a boyfriend and girlfriend in a dispute from an off-site party that has carried over to school.

Tempers flare, but eighth-grade conflict managers Lalita Ramirez-Lopez and Evan Shambaugh hold to their script for Peers Making Peace.

"No interrupting," says Evan firmly to Alina Frye, who is speaking directly to her "boyfriend," played by Mason Kupina. "Don't talk to him."

Students must communicate via the mediators.

The program is gaining ground in Ann Arbor, empowering students to resolve their own disputes. Pioneer High School adopted it in 2007 and Slauson, as well as Skyline, Stone and Clemente high schools, adopted it this year, said Kenzi Bisbing, youth services manager for the Oakland Mediation Center which oversees the program.

Bisbing said the program is "for students, by students. Our ultimate vision is that will be at every, single grade level," she said. It is funded through a Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools federal grant.

Slauson teacher Donna McVey and counselors Jan Mackenzie and Grace Harbison are program advisers. "Conflicts are like an onion. Layers and layers of things that may have taken place at earlier times," said McVey. "You see them (students) in a bad mood, you check in. If you do see them going at it again, you can pull them right in."

At Stone High School, counselor Madeline Davis said 14 Stone students were trained in PMP in conjunction with several from Clemente, where community liaison Barbara Malcom coordinates the program.

"All of my leaders are good students and keep up their grades; that's a requirement of the program," Davis said. "They're able to maintain relationships (within school) but stand out as leaders."

Stone senior Nate Graulich is a trained mediator and has handled two situations. "It gives the kids a chance to talk about things instead of fighting and leaving school," he said.

■ Slauson students comment about the Peers Making Peace program, next page

■ A more detailed version of this story can be found online at <http://news.a2schools.org>



Student conflict managers at Slauson Middle School. (Photo courtesy, Jan MacKenzie)

What they say about Peers Making Peace:

■ "It allows me to put my friendships away and be somebody different. I need to be neutral. It helps our friendships – they know they can talk to me."
– Alina Frye

■ "I want to be more part of the school and help people out. This gets the students more together and peaceful. They come to us." – Lalita Ramirez-Lopez

■ "It helps because ... kids will open up to their own age more."
– Julia Moulat

■ "I really think it's making me a better person." – Bryce Young

■ "I got involved because my French teacher told me I would be good at it." It's good when "you're talking to a kid whose actually your age."
– Mallory Hoevet

■ "I ended up liking it. So far, I think it's going good." – Duane Boyd

■ "Some of my older friends told me about it. It's a lot easier (for students) to open up to kids their own age."
– Isidora Keeman

Clinics at Stone and Scarlett put focus on healthy kids

Students and families from Bryant, Carpenter, Mitchell and Pittsfield elementaries also served

From AAPSNews Service

Whether illness, injury, mental health services or preventative care are needed, two clinics in The Ann Arbor Public Schools stand ready to serve students and their families on site.

The University of Michigan Regional Alliance for Healthy Schools operates health centers at Stone High School and Scarlett Middle School, which also serves the elementary school communities of Bryant, Carpenter, Mitchell and Pittsfield. The program also has clinics in neighboring schools in Willow Run and Ypsilanti.

"We try to do everything to take care of the whole person. We bridge a gap – we're not here to replace a family doctor," explained Tiffany Moore, a social worker with RAHS at Stone High School, who offers counseling and social services. "As a counselor, I meet with the families also."

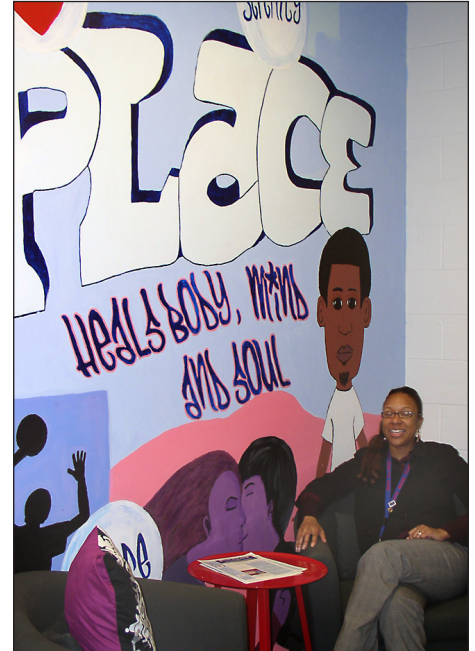
Lydia McBurrows, a nurse practitioner who supervises the Stone clinic, said the focus is on teen health with ongoing programs and a student Youth Advisory Council that deals with topics of interest to students and helps to educate them on health.

RAHS functions with the guidance of a Community Advisory Board that includes parents, students and community leaders. The program is operated by the University of Michigan Health System's Community Health Services in collaboration with the Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Willow Run districts, which provide in-kind space for the clinics to operate.

About 500 students and their families are seen each year at Scarlett and 200 students at Stone.

"There's a high need here, but a lower volume," McBurrows said of the Stone program. "Even though we don't have the same numbers, it's important we're here."

Jennifer Salerno is the RAHS director and has been with the program for 11 years, shortly after it began. "As the program has grown, I've grown up with it," she said. It began in Carpenter and Mitchell elementary schools in Ann Arbor in 1995, opened in Scarlett in 2001, began serving students in Pittsfield and Bryant elementaries in 2003 and opened at Stone in 2004 with a grant obtained specifically for that program.



Lydia McBurrows, nurse practitioner and site manager at the Stone High School health center. On the wall in the waiting room is a student-designed mural.

In 2004, RAHS lost major funding and incorporated elementary school care at Scarlett.

Salerno said a key part of the clinics is the community and educational component they provide.

"I think it's important to help kids understand their health," she said. "What it means to be healthy and how it connects with your success in school and in life."

At Scarlett, the school clinic is hopping, said Velda Coleman, the nurse practitioner who supervises that site.

"It's been very rewarding," she said. "And we are very busy here. We get everything: headaches, cramps, injuries and colds, especially when the flu season was here. One of the biggest things we do is educate students about their health."

RAHS accepts private medical insurance and also sliding scale fees.

It also receives funding from UMHS, the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Department of Community Health, The U-M Department of Family Medicine and Pediatrics, the Washtenaw County Health Organization, the United Way of Washtenaw County and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

On the Web: www.a2schools.org/rahs

Exceptional Education

Grant: Parent communication, emergency policies enhanced thanks to REMS money, from page 1

money must be used specifically for projects approved in the grant application, Caudle said. Projects must be completed by the end of January 2011.

The REMS grant, or similar federal funding in other forms through the U.S. Department of Education, has been in place for about 9 years, Caudle said. Its purpose, he said, is to enhance emergency management planning and training for staff.

During the first grant cycle in 2007-09, the district received \$245,000 to enhance the district's emergency management plan, update emergency and first-aid items in all school buildings and begin emergency preparedness training. In the second grant, which runs from 2009-11, the district received \$315,000 that will allow more equipment and training to take place through next February.

The first grant revamped emergency policies and protocols, put emergency "to go" bags into each classroom and first aid kits into the

hands of nurses at each school. Automated External Defibrillators were purchased for each building, extensive CPR training was offered to all staff and the six CISM response teams received enhanced training.

The current grant cycle continues this process, but adds equipment and training, Caudle added. Nurses in the Ann Arbor district are developing guidelines and protocols for handling emergencies on school grounds. Also, emergency "quick reference" flip charts published in English will be translated into the five main foreign languages spoken in the district: Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Spanish; the grant allows for translation services to accomplish this.

One visible project funded by the current grant is a community-wide mock disaster drill involving emergency agencies, as well as 35 simulated crisis drills at school buildings. According to Director of Communications Liz Margolis the large event will likely take place in

the fall.

Another important piece of the current REMS grant is the purchase and implementation of the SchoolMessenger emergency communications system.

SchoolMessenger allows the district or individual schools to send out simultaneous messages to parents via e-mail or voice mail and, eventually, text. The system will improve the district's ability to communicate during emergencies and provide other information, as well as assist with attendance at secondary schools, officials said. The system is capable of sending a message to all district families in less than 15 minutes.

"We have never had a way at the district level to reach all of our families," Margolis, who is also a member of the REMS advisory committee. "This is now one consistent database."

The system is first being used in a limited capacity. Parents have been asked to update their contact

information through Power School database so that e-mails and phone numbers are up-to-date. Margolis said the district would reserve calls to parent for reminders about student conferences, curriculum nights and other schoolwide events; other information will likely be sent out via e-mail.

Margolis said it costs about \$1.90 per student per school year for an unlimited number of messages. Both calling and e-mailing of messages should be up and running in March. She said the district will consider adding text messaging as an option in the fall, as well as allowing school PTOs access to the system.

SchoolMessenger will be used to enhance communication with hearing-impaired students and staff and additional equipment will be purchased with the REMS grant to better evacuate students with disabilities in the case of an emergency, Caudle said. The purchase could include evacuation chairs or other devices.

Tutors: Teachers take turns visiting apartment complex, helping after school, from page 1

to play the viola, which she is learning.

Principal Debi Wagner said the tutoring was a logical step to the school's work at Parkhurst. The school has hosted informational parent meetings and dinners for several years and, last year, sponsored math game nights for the kids. This year, Wagner said, they took it one step further and set up the tutoring schedule.

Teacher volunteers each visit Parkhurst seven times over the school year.

"They're all different ages, but they're all our kids," Wagner explained. "Even more important than the work is the relationship that's happening. It's really helped the relationships with the families. We're really seeing increased attendance at school events."

Wagner is working on the project with staff at Avalon Housing, which manages and operates Parkhurst Apartments. Avalon's Director of Family and Community Services Celeste Hawkins said Avalon was planning to open a community center space at the complex when she was approached by Wagner and the Eberwhite staff.



Art teacher Diane Grady helps a student at the Parkhurst community center.

"I thought it was absolutely wonderful that they were going to do this," Hawkins said. "We were in the planning stages of opening a community center space: a safe place for people to gather and share ideas. I was very excited about the opportunity to partner with Debi and make the connection. It has been a success so far."

Avalon converted a vacant apartment to the community center which is also used for community meetings, guest speakers and other informational sessions as well as kids' clubs which deal with issues of self-esteem, safety, feelings.

Parkhurst instituted a four-day after-school program that includes the Eberwhite teachers on Tuesdays and Thursdays and community volunteers and staff the other two days of the week. Avalon provides snacks for the children.

"All the feedback we've been receiving, the

parents really appreciate it," Hawkins added.

Wagner noted that the tutoring program helps her staff connect with students – some of their own and others who they might not have in class this year.

"It gives them an opportunity to get to know the children on a deeper level," she said. "It helps them to understand their lives."

On this afternoon, Brock is tutoring with physical education teacher Kristi Van Ryn and art teacher Diane Grady.

"I think it's great, a wonderful program" said Grady. "They're (the students) going to come in contact with every, single mentor. It's going to create a sense of community, a sense of belonging. What makes this work is that we come out into the community. That's huge."

Van Ryn said "it's been a lot of fun. I get to see more of who they (the students) are. I usually only see them in gym."

Eberwhite also has a donation bookshelf in the Parkhurst community center. Wagner said the school hosts an ongoing book drive to restock the shelves so parents can feel free to take the books and continue reading with their children at home.

Wagner said staff will evaluate the tutoring program at the end of the school year. "This is certainly the most ambitious project we've done," she said.