



Talmadge students top state on MCAS

By RICH FAHEY

It's no surprise to see the Talmadge Elementary School in Springfield ranked among the best elementary schools in the state, based on last spring's MCAS test. The school has a history of success.

But this time, Talmadge outdid itself. It was ranked No. 1 in the state (of 1,002 schools) in third-grade reading on the 2008 MCAS. It also ranked No. 5 in third-grade math scores, again out of 1,002 schools tested.

In third-grade reading last spring, 95 percent of students tested as advanced or proficient. In math, an amazing 85 percent of

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Talmadge Elementary School third grade teachers Ellen Izzo, left, and Patricia Pearson with their top ranked 2008 MCAS readers.

Delbridge: Education is the best investment

By PAUL HALLORAN

As a senior at the former Springfield Tech High School, Kevin Delbridge was set to go to college and study mechanical or electrical engineering, until he read a magazine article and discovered there were a number of reasons to reconsider.

"I saw that the starting salary for an engineer was near the bottom of the list and the salary for an accountant was near the top," he recalled. "I liked working with numbers, so I thought maybe I should go into accounting."

That prompted him to attend WNEC (Western New England College) and study



Kevin Delbridge

business. In hindsight, it looks like a very wise decision as Delbridge is a managing director at Harbourvest, a leading global private equity investment firm with offices in Boston, London and Hong Kong.

"Things have gone well the last 10 years," said Delbridge, who along with 11 co-workers bought the company they were working for from John Hancock in 1997 and renamed it. "We bought the company at a time when private equity was becoming a larger asset class for institutions to evaluate and invest in."

Delbridge, a high school quarterback who graduated from Tech in 1971, enlisted in the

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Together we can celebrate Springfield schools



From left, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Alan J. Ingram, Gov. Deval Patrick and Mayor Domenic J. Sarno are joined by parent Waleska Lugo-DeJesus and her son, Lorenzo, during a walk through Court Square.

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Published by:
Springfield Public Schools
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GRANT COMMUNICATIONS
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Proud of the past, focused on the future



Dr. Alan J. Ingram

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Springfield Educator*. As the pages of this newspaper reveal, Springfield Public Schools students, teachers and administrators have earned the District some major bragging rights.

It is impossible for me to single out any of these stories for individual recognition. Each one is extraordinary. They all serve as evidence that “creating a culture of excellence” within Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is more than a slogan. It is a deeply held belief and work ethic by which many people in our District already live.

As you flip through the pages of this newspaper, I hope your chest will puff up with pride just as mine did. For some of you, these stories will unearth attributes of Springfield Public Schools which you never imagined existed. Others of you will find use for this periodical as a tool to point out to others a reality you have long known – Springfield educators care.

While we have much to be proud of, it is

important to keep our focus on the hard work that lies ahead. Indeed, many of our schools are finding success, but there remain far too many that are challenged. Sure, segments of our students are doing well for themselves, but it is important that we have a system that affords every child an opportunity to get a great education – not just a good education, but a great one.

The mission of the Springfield Public Schools is to provide the highest quality of education so that all of our students are empowered to realize their full-potential and lead fulfilling lives as lifelong learners, responsible citizens and leaders in the 21st century. As superintendent of schools, I am privileged and honored to lead that mission. But I and my SPS team cannot do it alone. We need the strength and partnership of the Springfield community as we go about the important business of improving student achievement. Some of our work ahead must be focused on improving academic proficiency where the data tell us that only 28 percent of our students are proficient or above on MCAS; our high school graduation rate, which is at 53.8 percent; and our attendance rate, which at 89.4 percent leaves room for improvement.

Community involvement is critical and can exist at any level that works for you. Recently, a group of 14 Springfield women who form the Joys of Reading Book Club donated funds to two school libraries. Their donation provided students with new books and other library support material — proof that a small group can make a big difference. Individuals can, too. A responsible community member can become a student mentor, for example. A small business owner might adopt a school or even a program within a school. Many of you have already stepped up to the plate. We need many more. So, as you read about some of the exciting things taking place in our schools, please know that there is a place for you in all of this.

As we celebrate the inaugural issue of the *Springfield Educator* and the work ahead, I am reminded of a quote from the famous UCLA basketball coach John R. Wooden: “Don’t confuse activity with accomplishment.”

Thanks for your support and Happy Holidays!

Dr. Alan J. Ingram is superintendent of schools.

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Alan J. Ingram knows the challenge of directing Springfield Public Schools is significant – and he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“There’s certainly some heavy lifting in the work ahead, but we have great people and great community support from people who have a strong will and desire to make Springfield schools better,” said Ingram, who was selected superintendent in May.

“People in Springfield are very passionate and caring about their schools. I believe they genuinely want a better school system and I’m excited at the opportunity to lead it.”

Considering Ingram spent almost half of his life in the military, it is not surprising that he is not interested in listening to reasons why Springfield students can’t achieve. He doesn’t have time for that.

“In an urban district, there is a tendency to want to lower expectations,” he said. “It’s what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. People rationalize poor performance because of race, socio-economic factors or other social ills. I want to build a culture where all kids can thrive.”

A Detroit native, Ingram came to Springfield from Oklahoma City Public Schools, where he served as Chief Accountability Officer for 10

READY TO LEAD

Superintendent wants *all* students to achieve



Springfield Superintendent of Schools Dr. Alan Ingram visits with the Kensington Magnet School.

years, preparing to run an urban school district, including completing a Fellowship in 2007 at the Broad Superintendents Academy. Why urban?

“I’m a native of Detroit and a product of public and parochial schools,” he said. “I had a few teachers that made a difference in

my life. I’ve been blessed to have some great mentors and I have a compelling desire to give something back. My faith and beliefs tell me that I have a responsibility to give back and make a difference in the lives of young people.”

Ingram received a doctorate in education from the University of

Oklahoma, a master’s from Webster University and a bachelor’s from the University of Maryland University College. He spent 22 years in the Air Force, including 11 in Europe. For the majority of his tenure, he worked in education and training, so it is not surprising that he chose his current career path.

“When I served in higher education (at Oklahoma City University), I would say that if I could get to (kids) earlier, I’d have a better chance of making a difference,” he said. That will require overcoming some significant hurdles.

“We have pockets of success,” Ingram said. “A few schools are performing off the charts. Then there’s another group that are performing satisfactorily in some areas. But we have far too many that are underperforming. That’s the No. 1 challenge: How do we improve educational opportunities for all kids across the system?”

It is fairly obvious that Ingram’s background will serve him well in his new position. “I’m very proud of my Air Force experience,” he said. “It gives me confidence. I have the leadership experience that has prepared me to take on tough challenges.”

He also learned valuable lessons from Dr. Matt Blount, his middle-school English teacher in Highland Park, Mich.

“He was very stern and structured, a no-nonsense guy,” Ingram recalled. “I didn’t fully appreciate him until I got older, but I always respected him. He made a difference in my life.”

One gets the feeling that someday a generation of Springfield students will be saying the same thing about Dr. Alan J. Ingram.

Magnet for success



Zanetti Montessori Magnet School students, from left, Ronald Wallace, Aaron Bogin, and Nolan Cary.

Springfield schools reshaped by education grants

By DAVID LISCIO

Millions of dollars in federal education grants over the past decade have completely transformed some of Springfield's most challenged public schools into models of success with enrollment waiting lines.

The city has been the beneficiary of five cycles of three-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education's Magnet Schools Assistance Program.

"We have received more monies than any other school district in the country," said Josh Bogin, director of magnet schools in Springfield. "In terms of dollars, only one other district — New Haven — has nearly the same record."

Five schools directly benefit under the current grant cycle, which runs from 2007-2010. These schools will share \$10.1 million over the three-year term. They include: Brookings, an art expeditionary learning museum and magnet school, currently converting from K-8 to K-5; the Springfield Renaissance School, another expeditionary learning institution for grades 6-12; and Springfield High School of Science and Technology (Sci-Tech), with four in-house academies for grades 9-12.

The Sci-Tech academies are: BBF — biomedical science, biotechnology and forensics; information technology and film/media technology; design engineering; and finance and mathematics.



Teacher Mary VanLeeuwen works with l'Quan Naylor.

The other schools under the 2007-2010 grant are the newly-opened STEM Middle Academy, which will include grades 6-8 by 2010; and the Gerena Montessori School for pre-kindergarten through grade 5 students.

"There was a commitment made at all these schools to create teacher-training labs within them," said Bogin.

The previous grant cycle, from 2004-2007, brought in \$8.4 million shared by five schools, including Brookings, which partners with the city's library museum.

From 2001-2004, grants totaling \$6.5 million to \$7 million assisted five schools. From 1998-

2001, about \$7 million in grants helped reshape six schools. The first grant cycle, from 1995-1998, was for just under \$10 million and benefited five schools.

"The grant cycle we're in now was similar to the first in dollar amount and number of schools," Bogin said. "Over the course of this entire period, the grant program has been responsible in part for the complete transformation of a few schools, some of which were the city's oldest, most racially isolated."

According to Bogin, the Zanetti School stands out as a prime example of a school transformed by federal dollars and forward-thinking educators.

"The Zanetti School was troubled. Not only was the building more than 100 years old, it was racially isolated, had little parent involvement, high teacher turnover, low student achievement, and other problems," Bogin said. "In 1998, it became a magnet school and was transformed into our first Montessori school in the district. Once that happened, the Zanetti experienced a rapid transformation in all ways. Student achievement increased, as did student mobility. The racial integration numbers were turned around. Parents became interested and teacher stability improved. Now it's a heavy sought-after school, pre-kindergarten through grade 8, with a waiting list."

STEM Middle Academy has room to grow

By DAVID LISCIO

When renovations are completed early next year, Springfield's new STEM Middle Academy will be able to accommodate the 100 additional students scheduled to arrive in September.

The school opened this fall with 100 students in the sixth grade, a number that will double in the 2009-10 academic year.

"We will actually be adding a whole grade in September and another in (September) 2010," said Principal Andrea Lewis, former assistant principal and acting principal at the Springfield High School of Commerce.

STEM — an acronym for science, technology, engineering and math — is among several educational models currently implemented within Springfield Public Schools. Since the STEM Middle Academy is located behind the city's High School of Science and Technology (Sci-Tech), the STEM students can use the gymnasium and library.

Perhaps more important is the fact Sci-Tech is also a STEM 21 school, where the focus is similar to that at the STEM Middle Academy. The high school has academies within the building for students interested in forensics, mathematics, science, information technology and biotechnology.

"One of the great things about this arrangement is that if our kids are interested in those areas of study, they can matriculate into the Sci-Tech," said Lewis, who taught history at Sci-Tech for eight years.

The STEM Middle Academy was architecturally designed as a school building, but the anticipated growth of the student population will require some retrofitting. Some departments had to move out in order to make the building more child-friendly.

"But it will all work out because some of the Sci-Tech facilities have been made available for our use," she said.

Dressed for success

By RICH FAHEY

Clothes, it is said, make the man — or the woman. But research shows they can also make the student.

When students returned to the Springfield Public Schools to begin this school year, they found a mandatory dress code requiring uniforms at all 48 district schools. The code is similar to uniform requirements adopted either at specific schools or district-wide by numerous other urban communities in recent years, including Boston, Lawrence, Hartford, New York City, Baltimore, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles.

The code was adopted by the School Committee on a unanimous vote on April 10, 2008. Surveys were sent out to parents in the fall of 2007 on a mandatory dress code and hours of debate and meetings were held on the proposal before the committee voted to enact the code.

The policy now bans jeans, T-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, flip-flops, and caps, in favor of shirts with collars, slacks, conservative skirts and closed-toed shoes. It will be subject to a review after one year.

The mandatory policy requires that pants, skirts and shorts to be at least knee length, and made from cotton or cotton blends. The policy prohibits cargo pants, sweat pants and pajamas, and items bearing logos, pictures or messages. Studded belt buckles are also prohibited.

Patricia Spradley, chief parent and community engagement officer for Springfield Public Schools, said the School Committee has subsequently made two minor modifications to the plan. Pre-kindergarten students will not have to comply with the code this year, and students at the middle and high school levels will be able to leave shirts untucked.

“Pre-K students were not originally

New uniform policy enacted district-wide



Zanetti Montessori Magnet School students Kela Hernandez, Jesse Buckman, and Julia Cary show off their uniforms.

supposed to be included, and then the decision was made to include them,” said Spradley. “Because keeping shirts tucked in created self-esteem issues for some students at the middle and high-school level, that change was made. But drooping or baggy pants will not be allowed.”

Spradley said she does not anticipate any additional changes to the policy until the committee meets to review it at the end of the school year.

The uniform code, Spradley said, should actually save parents money on their clothing bill. The cost of the elementary uniform is about \$20, she said, and not much more at the middle and high school levels.

“Stores in the area have agreed to keep prices low on these items,” she said.

School PTOs have held fund-raisers to buy extra uniforms and the schools have put together a fund using contributions from businesses and community groups, as well as

grants. Spradley said each school was required to put together a contingency plan when it comes to uniforms.

“We really haven’t received many complaints about the cost of the program,” she said. “The complaints we have received have more to do with the rights of individual students.”

In a letter to parents and guardians, the committee outlined its reasons for the code. “Research shows that school uniforms support a safe and disciplined learning environment, which is the first requirement of any good school. Students who are safe and secure, who learn the basic American values and the essentials of good citizenship are better students.”

The committee is hoping that adopting the code will remove distractions, instill a sense of community, allow school personnel to recognize intruders, and help to prevent gang members from wearing colors and insignia at school.

The new policy spells out what is considered a proper uniform at each level and penalties for violation of the uniform code; it also provides for exemptions in the case of religious or health concerns, uniforms for JROTC and similar groups, and students on school grounds outside of normal school hours.

No oversized clothing is allowed at any level and no coats, jackets, hooded sweatshirts, caps or hats are to be worn during school hours.

There are penalties in place for code violations, but compliance has been good thus far.

“We’ve had very few incidents to date,” said Spradley. “When there are violations, parents are called and provisions are made to get the correct clothing. We want our teachers teaching our students, not enforcing the code.”

Springfield schools pay attention to attendance

By SEAN LEONARD

Among Dr. Alan J. Ingram’s first orders of business upon taking the helm of Springfield Public Schools in July was to crack down on the district’s truancy problem.

“This is something Dr. Ingram wanted to get a handle on quickly,” said Maryann Morris, chief of pupil services for Springfield schools. “Truancy and unexcused absences have been a problem in Springfield and Dr. Ingram has experience dealing with that issue.

“We’ve always had a policy on absenteeism in the student handbook and we require notes for absences, but now we have a comprehensive program to address the problem in every school. It outlines steps to take on day 1 all the way to day 13 of truancy,” Morris said, noting that the new Attendance Improvement Initiative was approved by the School Committee in September.

The steps vary depending on grade level, but Morris, who

was tasked by Ingram to oversee the program, said the initiative requires that parents be contacted on day 1 of an unexcused absence. Additional absences result in letters to parents, and, ultimately, intervention by either the court or the state Department of Child and Family Services.

In cases of chronic truancy, Morris explained, the district may, depending on specifics of the case, file a 51A (education neglect) report with the court, or file a Child In Need of Services (CHINS) report with Child and Family Services.

“There’s a flow chart that details what action to take for every unexcused absence, and we have had to file 51As and CHINS,” Morris said.

In addition to consistent enforcement, Morris said the new program, “for the first time gives us concrete, clear data on truancy and the actions taken for each unexcused absence.

“It will allow us to tell where the problem areas are,” said Morris, who on Nov. 13 gave a report to the School Committee on data from the first month of the Attendance Improvement Initiative. “I am optimistic this will make a difference.”

Morris said while the program requires the schools to work closely with the court and Child and Family Service, she said it may be expanded to get others in the community involved.

“We can’t improve attendance on our own; it will take the community,” Morris said, noting that if a truant is found on the street or in a

mall during the school day, the district does not have the authority to order the student to be taken into custody. That could change, she said.

“

“We can’t improve attendance on our own, it will take the community.”

**Maryann Morris
Chief of Pupil Services**

FAMILY PROFILE

Central intelligence

Pleet family sends three valedictorians to Brown

By SEAN LEONARD

The Pleet siblings — Julie, 23; Alex, 20; and Katie, 18 — know first-hand that a quality education is available in Springfield Public Schools to those who want it.

And their parents, Dr. Jacqueline Pleet and Dr. David Pleet, obviously know how to raise successful, well-rounded students.

In addition to sharing the common bond of Brown University, where Julie, now a sophomore at Mount Sinai Medical School in New York, graduated in 2006 and Alex is now a junior and Katie a freshman, all three were valedictorian of their respective classes at Central High School: Julie in 2002, Alex in '05, and Katie '07.

"We're incredibly proud of them," said Jacqueline Pleet, a pediatrician with Holyoke Pediatric Associates who was recently recognized for her longtime volunteer work in Springfield Public Schools. "How do you get them there?" she asked rhetorically. "It starts by parents placing a very large value on education ... Study skills and organizational skills are something parents can foster early on."

Jacqueline and David, a gastroenterologist with Springfield Medical Associates, met when they were freshmen at Tufts University, Jacqueline a product of New York City Public Schools and David of Baltimore Public Schools. Both went on to Mount Sinai Medical School, and their careers eventually brought them to Springfield.

"We finished our training when our oldest, Julie, was four months. We wanted to stay in the Northeast and job opportunities are what brought us here," Jacqueline said.

"We were fortunate, because of our profession, that our children were privileged. That's one of the reasons we thought it was so important for them to go to the public schools, to see there are people who are not as fortunate."

While Jacqueline credits her children for their hard work, she said a solid support system at home, great teachers, sports, extra-curricular activities and community service are all key ingredients of their success.

"What I have found in the Springfield school system is the teachers are exceptional and very dedicated," she said. "When they have students who they know are capable of achieving, they are able to challenge them. At its core — which is the faculty — it's an exceptional system with great teachers and great mentors."

All three Pleet children attended the Sumner Avenue Elementary School and the gifted and talented program at Chestnut Middle School before heading to Central High.

Jacqueline got involved as a volunteer on the elementary level, reading in the classroom and later as president of the PTO, and in recent years as a member of the district's Center Decision Making Team, a group of volunteers who meet with principals and teachers on policy decisions.

Last fall, Jacqueline and fellow parent volunteers Moira Garvey and Bonnie LaPorte wrote and obtained a \$50,000 grant from the Bardon-Cole Foundation of New York, used to help train advanced-

placement teachers and for AP program supplies.

"Volunteering in the schools has been very rewarding,"

Jacqueline said. "Community service is big in our family, and we've encouraged our kids to find additional activities to round out their academics. They all swam and played tennis and were captains of their teams, and they were all editors of their yearbook. That's what helped them get into Brown. They were well-rounded; they didn't just study all the time."

Julie Pleet, in her second year of a four-year program at Mount Sinai, said the means to success are there for all students in Springfield schools.

"You get out of life what you put into it," she said. "Discipline and balance don't come easy to anyone, especially not kids. I don't want to discount

all of the hard work I put in, but I had amazing teachers in Springfield who inspired me to continue learning and achieving, and it's my parents who really taught me how to lead a happy and fulfilling life beyond education."

Julie was also a strong role model for her brother and sister. "They know how much I loved being at Brown and that I spoke so highly of it; they really didn't have a chance but to follow me there," she said.

Julie and Alex, who is studying neurosciences at Brown, also share a favorite Central High teacher.

"Mr. (Francis) Funai taught calculus and physics. He retired a couple of years ago. He engaged students inside and outside of the classroom," Julie said. "He would force us to think about math problems in many different ways, and would include students' names in the problems. He came to school an hour early every day to meet with anyone who wanted help."

Alex also points to his parents as the driving force behind his success.

"They didn't look over my shoulder to make sure I finished my homework. They didn't reward me for good grades and they didn't chastise me for bad grades. But they gave me the desire to succeed," Alex said. "If I ever had a problem with understanding something, they would do more than just give me the answer. They would teach me the process of learning."

In addition to Funai, Alex said another of his favorite teachers at Central was history teacher John Dennis.

Katie is an accomplished swimmer who is studying biology at Brown.

“

Parents have to know their students are being challenged, and to find the programs that are best for them.

Jacqueline Pleet



The Pleet family, from left, Alex, Julie, Katie, Jacqueline and David.

Chinese spoken here

Foreign-language program a success

BY RICH FAHEY

It started 20 years ago with one part-time teacher and 11 students. Today, some 1,000 students working with eight teachers are now learning the Chinese language and culture at all four Springfield high schools — Central, Commerce, Putman and Science & Technology — and two middle schools, the Van Sickle and the Chestnut.

China is on track to soon become the U.S.'s largest trading partner, and that — coupled with the interest in the country generated by the recent Summer Olympics — is also helping to fuel even greater numbers of students studying the language.

Carmen Felix-Fournier, director of the Springfield Public Schools Foreign Language Department, said the success of the program has had a lot to do with the leadership of Dr. Mei-Ju Hwang and the strong partnership she has forged with the University of Massachusetts Asian Language and Culture Department, which has provided several of the teachers now working in Springfield schools.

In 1987, Springfield received funding from the Geraldine R.

Dodge Foundation Chinese Initiative to partially support a three-year project to introduce Chinese into the high school foreign-language curriculum. In the 20 years since, the schools have used federal funds from the Foreign Language Assistance Program, state funds from the Massachusetts Department of Education and, most importantly, funds from the school budget to expand and



Central High student Justin Pass listens during Chinese class.



Central High School chinese teacher Suhong Chang speaks with her students.

enhance Chinese instruction.

Three SPS students scored a perfect 5 on the Advanced Placement Chinese test last year.

In addition, Commerce High students have fared very well in the difficult International Baccalaureate (IB) Chinese Exam.

What is important is getting students exposed to the language as early as possible.

"Research has shown that when it comes to areas such as the performing arts and languages, starting earlier is better," said Felix-Fournier, who spent 18 years as a language teacher at Commerce before moving to the central office six years ago. "When they're younger, they're more spontaneous and open to new things."

She said the Chinese language teachers believe in what

they're doing and work very hard. Because students are not only learning to speak a new language but also write Chinese characters, teachers take a more hands-on approach.

The Chinese government is very interested in promoting the teaching of its language. In April 2007, a student/parent group of 30 from Central High School, including Principal Richard W. Stoddard, visited China under the auspices of the College Board and the Chinese government.

Over the past 20 years, other Springfield teachers and administrators have traveled to China and Taiwan as invited guests of those governments and ministries of education. Officials representing the governments of China and Taiwan have visited the Springfield program and supported the work of the district.

Principal: Studying Chinese is of Central importance

BY RICH FAHEY

For Central High School Principal Richard W. Stoddard, two trips to China opened his eyes — and reinforced the importance of his own students learning the language.

The first trip three years ago was with other school administrators from across the country, under the auspices of the College Board. He was able to visit numerous Chinese schools in Beijing and Hangzhou.

"The classes were quite large compared to our classes at Central," he said. "I found the Chinese educators and students very interested in learning about teacher and student exchange programs."

Stoddard subsequently tried to develop a Chinese teacher exchange program with the

assistance of an area college, but it never came to fruition.

He learned that there are more Chinese citizens who can speak English than the total population of the United States.

"China is very intent on having its citizenry rapidly learn English because it is the language of business across the world," said Stoddard.

In Hangzhou, he stayed at the hotel where Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger stayed during their initial visits to China, which opened Chinese-American dialogue in the 1970s.

During that first trip, Stoddard saw Beijing feverishly preparing for the Olympic Games.

"Old buildings were being razed

throughout the city and new buildings were replacing them. I recall viewing Chinese workers carrying rocks in backpacks made of straw," he said. "Chinese workers were observed on highways similar to our Mass Pike sweeping the gullies with handmade straw brooms. The roads in Beijing accommodated hundreds of thousands of citizens on bicycles with a lane specifically for bikers."

On the second trip, he went with Central High students, teachers, parents and his daughter.

"What was most enjoyable was seeing how the 20-25 students gelled with new friendships and meeting students of their age from an entirely different culture," he said.

They visited Beijing, took an overnight train trip to Xian to see the Terra Cotta Soldiers and flew to Shanghai, where they took a tour of the Pudong River at night.

"To see Central High students spend time in a Chinese school conversing with Chinese students was an unforgettable memory for me," he said. "When we boarded the bus to leave the school, the Chinese students and Central High students hugged and I observed some tears. It made me think that young people are the same throughout the world and want to share their experiences with one another."

Stoddard said he is very fortunate to have two outstanding Chinese teachers at Central — Suhong Chang and Jia Li.



Washington Elementary School Principal Kathleen Sullivan enjoys some time with kindergarten students.

Sullivan working miracles at Washington School

BY RICH FAHEY

The Tampa Bay Rays baseball team were one of the year's big sports stories. After all, how often do you see a team go from worst to first?

The Washington Elementary School in Springfield is the educational version of that team.

In 2004, the school ranked 32nd and last in MCAS scores among Springfield elementary schools; in fact, Washington scores were dead last among the 1,002 elementary schools that took the MCAS.

The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ordered the city to come up with a corrective action plan. The school was in danger of being taken over by the state or closed if improvements weren't made.

Fast forward two years: The Washington School is believed to be the first school to ever to be removed from the DOE action list after just two school years.

Move forward to this fall, when the scores for last spring's MCAS were announced: Washington was ranked fifth of 1,002 schools statewide in third-grade reading. Ninety-one percent of students tested in the advanced or proficient categories, with no student in the warning/failing category.

In third-grade math, 86 percent of third-graders were advanced or proficient, again with no student in the warning/failing category.

In fact, no fourth-graders failed the MCAS in either English or math at a school where the student body reflects the diversity of Springfield

Public Schools — 55 percent Hispanic, 21 percent African-American, 16 percent white and five percent Asian, according to 2007-08 enrollment.

Principal Kathleen Sullivan vividly remembers being involuntarily transferred from another school she had helped turn around — Glickman Elementary School — to the Washington in May of 2004.

She took two staffers from the Glickman with her to Washington — her reading and math specialists — and hired a completely new staff at the school. By the time she made her last hire — on Labor Day 2004 at 9:15 p.m., a young woman right out of college, the night before the first day of school, only one teacher remained from the former staff.

"The first thing we needed was teachers who wanted to be here," she said.

Part of changing the school's entire culture was giving the building a spanking-new look.

"I worked all summer filling up dumpsters," said Sullivan, who credited several people with helping her getting the building ship-shape.

She changed the school's math and reading series to texts she knew worked.

When Sullivan took over, there were 268

students at Washington; now, there are 468.

That didn't happen overnight. The hardest part of the turnaround was changing the perception of the school in the community.

"When I first came here, no one would send their children here," she said. "People would come up to me and say 'I don't want my children to come here.' It was a daunting task changing that perception."

Sullivan said she "is proud to have been born and raised in Springfield" and because of that, she believes she took the task at hand that much more seriously, and that structure and discipline were critical in turning the school around.

More than a third of her students are English Language Learners (ELL), there are two classes of students with social and emotional issues and, because of the district's boundary rules, the students are pretty much the same students from the Indian Orchard neighborhood who were there four years ago.

What has changed? Ninety-two percent of her faculty rates as "highly qualified" by state standards.

Sullivan is the first to admit times were hard at first. "My heart was breaking the whole first year," she said.

She would look at files and find some students who had failed the MCAS six straight times.

She remembers telling a fifth-grader who was reading far below his grade level that not only would he have to be kept back, he needed to go back to fourth grade to catch up. "He later thanked me for keeping him back."



Kathleen Sullivan

Springfield leads the way in training administrators

BY SEAN LEONARD

Springfield Public Schools has made a practice of selecting and training its administrators from within, and for the past six years that has been easier to do through a Project Lead grant.

"Project Lead was a program started in 2002 and it was designed to grow our own administrators," said Valerie Annear, supervisor of what is now the Cohesive Leadership Grant. "Springfield was one of the first programs in the state to be allowed to license our own principals and assistant principals."

The Wallace Foundation, established by DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace, founders of The Reader's Digest Association, initially awarded a six-year, \$8 million Project Lead grant that allowed Springfield schools to set up an intensive screening and two-year training program for new administrators.

"At the time, in 2002, we had 50 administrators who were either retiring or leaving the district, and we weren't getting the volume or quality of candidates we needed from our universities and colleges," Annear said. "(With the Project Lead funding) we were able to hire consultants in partnership with the University of Massachusetts Amherst and they came in and taught a curriculum (to administrator candidates) based on what we want and on our needs."

"It is a very rigorous intake process, beginning in January and going through May, and very rigorous training," she said, noting that since Project Lead was introduced in Springfield, the 48-school, 26,000-student district, among the three largest in the state, has licensed 80 for administrative posts, appointed 25 as assistant principals and 11 as principals. And today, Annear said, there is a pool of quality licensed administrators within the district to draw from when vacancies arise.

Last year, Annear said, the Wallace Foundation grant program was expanded beyond Project Lead, to the Cohesive Leadership Grant.

"We're now in the second year of the Cohesive Leadership grant which focuses on creating and implementing new standards for principals," Annear said. The Project Lead training remains part of this new grant program.

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"All administrators are affected by changes in licensure requirements, and we're creating cohesive leadership standards for all."

Valerie Annear



Above, Putnam Vocational Technical High School art students, from left, Ivan Torres, Blais Guzman, and Kyle Acruse with their mosaic, Obama '09. At left, carpentry student Kym Barnett works on sanding a door.



Above, Putnam auto teacher Jim O'Brien shows Stephanie Peters how to tape a car to prepare for painting; at right, carpentry teacher Allen Lariviere works with student Felix Igartua.



Above, Putnam student Eddie Lopez buffs a car.

Making the grade

Three Springfield schools show marked improvement

By RICH FAHEY

Progress is being made at Springfield schools that in the past have been plagued by problems such as low test scores and declining enrollment.

Three schools in particular have made strides in recent years.

Liberty Elementary School

The school that just two years ago was labeled chronically underperforming by the state Department of Education has been making steady progress.

Principal John Doty, now in his third year, said the turnaround actually began under his predecessor, Anthony Hill.

Test scores released in October 2006 showed some upward movement in English Language Arts (ELA).

Then, in October 2007, the school met its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in both ELA and math. That lifted the school out of underperforming status in ELA. This year the school met its AYP in math but not ELA, but a school is not relisted as underperforming until there are two straight years with no progress.

Doty said the school is re-targeting its efforts in ELA after making significant progress in math the past two years with a new program called Significant Investigations.

"We really, fully embraced it and it led to dramatic gains in math," Doty said. "Five years ago, we were well below the state average. Now we're closing the gap towards the state average."

Doty attributed gains made by his students to hard work by classroom teachers, magnet

schools grants that allowed between \$800,000-900,000 to be invested in the building, and ventures such as an outdoor-based math camp in good weather, library grants for upgrading computers and providing laptops to teachers, and a full complement of textbooks for each student.

The school also offers "Friday specials," 90-minute segments of different activities such as chorus, technology, photography, color guard, arts and crafts, video making and producing school news broadcasts.

Kiley Middle School

The Kiley Middle School, for the first time, met its goal of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the guidelines of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which was established in January 2002.

Principal Kenneth Luce, in his second year at the school, credited a team of dedicated administrators and a drastic decrease in the number of suspensions.

"We gained about 10,000 student-days by lessening the number of suspensions," he said, noting that two years ago there were 2,200 suspensions at the school. That number was reduced to 900 last year and is on a pace to be about 500 this year.

Luce said a very powerful group of administrators that were installed along with him have changed the cultural environment of the school.

Stefania Raschilla is in charge of overall academics, while Alyson Lingsch is in charge of staffing. Chris Sutton and Opilio Alvarado are what Luce described as "floor generals" in charge of safety, security, and building readiness.

Luce also credited members of the Springfield Education Association, Ellen Hurley, SPS area improvement officer for Zone 3, curriculum coaches and school counselors.

Putnam Vocational Technical High School

Kevin McCaskill, principal of the Roger L. Putnam Vocational and Technical High School, remembers well what things were like when he first arrived at the school in the summer of 2004.

"There were only 900 students here and the perception of some in the community was that this was a dumping ground for students and the staff didn't want to be here," he said.

Fast forward four years. More than 1,600 students are enrolled at the Putnam, and more students than ever are listing it as their first choice for high school.

McCaskill said the progress stems from "a committed staff that understands the needs of the students. And kids who really want to be here." The school has also made gains in the MCAS exams the past three years.

McCaskill said when he came to the Putnam, he made his first priority building a positive, safe and secure school culture with an inviting climate for students, staff and the community.

The school has also added six new career programs and advanced placement college courses.

"People used to say that if you were going to Putnam you weren't going to go to college," he said. "Now we can put you on the track for the job market or college — or both."



Above, Kiley Middle School's Alexis Burgos and science teacher Katieann Demars work together during class. At right, student Nicholas Arroyo works on an assignment.



Kiley Middle School's Jonathan Garcia, left, and Zachary Paul listen during class.

Partnerships mean business in Springfield

BY DAVID LISCIO

Business partnerships are paying great dividends for Springfield Public Schools.



Take for example the contribution by the Mass Mutual Life Insurance Co., which over the past few years has paid for the cost of all sophomores taking the PSAT exam.

"We've been doing this for the past two or three years. We pay for what it would cost the 10th-graders to take the test, which I'd guess is about \$10-\$15 per student," said Nick Fyntrilakis, director of community relations for the company. "If we didn't, then the students would have to pay. We monitor it. We think it's important that students take the PSAT. It helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses." Fyntrilakis said the partnership will continue into the next academic year.

Baystate Medical Center has also stepped up its commitment to the school district. In 2006, it formalized the Baystate-Springfield Educational Partnership (BSEP), which aims to advance the academic and career development of students in grades K-12.



The idea is to help these students achieve rewarding careers in healthcare. As such, BSEP offers continuous programs over the course of a student's elementary, middle, and high school education to promote science, math, technology, and healthcare skills.

By linking a student's education to a health career path, the program helps students gain experience by working with healthcare professionals to develop skills that are attractive to colleges and employers.

In 2007 BSEP expanded its involvement with educational partnerships at the elementary, middle and high school level. The Robin Y. Brown Memorial Teen Mini Medical School was expanded to two sessions per year. Previously, this five-week session had run in the spring only; due to the popularity of the program, an October session was created.

BSEP assisted Big Brothers Big Sisters in obtaining a grant from the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to expand the so-called Baystate Bigs elementary school program, and it was awarded a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for the Baystate Academy.

The program, which began in summer 2008, engaged under-represented populations in science and health-related curriculum, and was designed to prepare them for a career in health care.

A new science and medicine program for sophomores was launched, as well as an additional program that provides employment and academic skills workshops for high school students. The workshops place an emphasis on preparing resumes, interview and job skills.

Another business partnership continues to flourish with help from the Big Y supermarket chain, which sponsors the Big Y Homework Helpline. Teachers volunteer to staff the phone lines from 4-7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, answering more than 7,500 calls last year, mostly from students in grades K-12 seeking guidance. The supermarket also supports a scholarship program in Springfield Public Schools.

Baystate Medical Center

BAYSTATE SPRINGFIELD EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Mentoring program gets super aid



Springfield Superintendent of Schools Dr. Alan J. Ingram was anxious to lend a hand to the mentoring program — and a handprint to a mural at Kensington Magnet School for Stephanie Ross.

Dr. Ingram leading by example

BY SEAN LEONARD

Superintendent Dr. Alan J. Ingram and the Springfield School Volunteers Office have set out to expand the district's Volunteer Mentoring Program, and Ingram is leading by example, meeting weekly with a ninth-grade student to offer advice and encouragement.

"Volunteer mentors and tutors have been in existence for some time in our schools. What we're doing now is placing an emphasis internally for district employees to mentor some of our high school students, especially those with truancy or attendance issues, and to foster relationships with them," Ingram said.

Ingram noted the district has 5,000 employees and 2,500 certified teachers. "I cannot require them to become mentors, but we're asking that every employee reach out for at least a semester to make a commitment weekly," he said.

"We have 26,000 students and there are attendance, truancy and graduation issues," Ingram said, noting there are plenty of students who could benefit from an adult mentor.

"I have a ninth-grade student I try to meet with face-to-face at least once a week. We have conversations about school, about life, and some of things he's interested in," the superintendent said, noting his "mentee" is involved with the Junior ROTC program. "I'll attend some of those events to support him. It's an opportunity to advocate for him on a personal level."

Ideally, Ingram said, mentors meet with their paired students for at least 20 or 30 minutes each week. "We leave that to the discretion of each individual employee," he said.

The primary goal is to build relationships and

encourage kids to stay in school.

"When we look at our truancy data and graduation data, this (program) is tied in to that. We're trying to address these issues by building relationships with the students," he said.

Patricia Spradley oversees the Volunteer Mentoring Program in the Schools Volunteer Office.

"We're trying to ensure that all of the senior leadership team members (the district's top 13 administrators)

participate, and our hope is that other employees throughout the district will join in," Spradley said. "There is an intake process for the mentors, a CORI (Criminal Offender Records Information) check that all of the volunteers have to go through.

"One reason we're focusing on employees is because they've already had CORI checks done, so it makes the process easier," she said, explaining there is also training that mentors must complete.

Spradley said it will be a number of years before all students in need are paired with suitable mentors. She said the tendency is for new mentors to counsel elementary students because it's easier to

build relationships with younger children. But, the need is greater on the middle- and high-school levels.

"This is a baseline year for the program," Spradley said. "We'll be looking at data from the first half of the year to see where the greatest need is."

Spradley said any teacher or employee in the district who would like to become a mentor — as well as anyone in the community interested in participating — should contact Denise Cogman in the Springfield School Volunteers Office by e-mail at cogmand@sps.springfield.ma.us.

“
I have a ninth-grade student I try to meet with once a week. We have conversations about school, about life, and some of things he's interested in.
Dr. Alan J. Ingram
Superintendent

Grant allows educators to learn as well as teach

By DAVID LISCIO

How better to prepare for teaching about the American Civil War than to visit such historic places as Gettysburg or Antietam?

Is there a more efficient way to learn about New York City than being guided on foot by a former Big Apple cabbie turned academic?

Learning experiences such as these are what the Teaching American History (TAH) grant program is all about, and since 2002 teachers in Springfield Public Schools have been reaping its many benefits.

"This past summer, the program funded a trip to Washington, D.C. I took some 30-odd teachers there for a week. We went to Gettysburg and Antietam, and other places of historic interest," said Rosemary Kalloch, director of social studies for grades K-12 in Springfield Public Schools as well as project director for TAH grants and the five colleges (Smith, Amherst, UMASS, Mt. Holyoke and Hampshire) that are part of the program. "We also went to Boston, walked the Freedom Trail, and went to other places in northern New England."

Dan Citron, ex-taxi driver and current textbook author, led the trip to New York City. "Dan took us on a walk from the Statue of Liberty down Wall Street and over the Brooklyn Bridge. We stayed overnight. It was phenomenal because the whole time we're walking Dan is talking history, explaining the buildings, the parks, even why Wall Street is called Wall Street, which needed a wall to keep certain water out," Kalloch said.

The Springfield teachers learned about urban bridge construction, visited a new museum, toured Chinatown and stopped at Ground Zero, site of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

To date, the school district has received nearly \$5 million in TAH grants, the most recent for history and language arts. Not all of the educational travel has been domestic.

Kalloch and Cheryl Bryant, a teacher at Kennedy Middle School, visited South Africa in the summer of 2007, accompanied by college professors, to get a first-hand look at the country's educational system. "We spent five weeks looking at schools, many of which had no roofs or windows," she said, explaining that a Fulbright-Hays grant, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, paid for their expenses.

According to Kalloch, the four federal grants received by the Springfield school district help pay the expenses of teachers from kindergarten to grade 12 as they gain a sense of deep history content. The program is part of a public school partnership with professors from five area colleges and is coordinated by Sue Thrasher, an author who was involved in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

"We want the teachers to see what they'll be teaching about and what the students will be studying," Kalloch said.



One of the various student clubs at Renaissance is the Ladies of Elegance; from left, Julia Hill, Denesha Brown, teacher Amy Cook, and Keisha Shephard

Renaissance movement

Focus on relationships bolsters growing school

By DAVID LISCIO

Two years ago, the fledgling Springfield Renaissance School was home to 200 students divided evenly in grades six and nine — the only two grade levels in the building.

Today, the school boasts more than 600 students and by the 2009 academic year the number will swell by yet another 100. The rate of growth is unprecedented in most schools, but the educational model here fuels the annual creation of new grade levels.

Here's how it works: In 2006, the school opened with the original 200 students in grades 6 and 9. By 2007, those students had moved on to grades 7 and 10, respectively, giving the school four different grade levels. This year, as all those students progressed, grades 8 and 11 were established to accommodate them. The goal for next year is to add grade 12, when the school will have approximately 700 students.

Principal Stephen Mahoney said the school is small, but effective. "It's a school very much focused on relationships," he said. "We value the fact that the students are organized into crews of eight to 12, and that each of them stays with the same crew teacher for the first three years, and then another crew teacher for the remaining three years."

Mahoney said students meet the crew

teacher daily, which inevitably develops a bond.

"This way, the kids have someone to go to when times get hard, or when there's something to celebrate," he said, adding that the crew model incorporates other components as well, such as community service, wellness and literacy.

At the end of grade 9, the student is assigned a new crew teacher. The transition is relatively formal. "We do a passage portfolio," said Mahoney. "We're going to see a lot of changes from the sixth to the ninth grade, and the crew teacher is the one there through all of them. It happens again from grades 10 through 12. The crew teacher sees not only the academic growth but also the personal and emotional changes."



Tim Kumor and Kristal Vera learn Tae Kwon Do at Renaissance School.

According to Mahoney, the crew concept is derived from the national Outward Bound organization, which emphasizes through a metaphor that none of us are passengers because we are all crew. "We must all pull our weight," he said.

The Outward Bound connection is also a major source of funding for the Renaissance School, which is among the first six Gates Foundation Expeditionary Learning Schools in the U.S. Microsoft founder and billionaire Bill Gates endowed the Outward Bound organization with a \$16 million grant and instructions to establish a series of innovative schools.

"The grant from Gates helps pay for curriculum development," said Mahoney, who joined the Springfield school at its inception and is currently in his third year as principal.

The funding additionally supports, in part, a staff position for a professional to help design the school's curriculum, which is somewhat different than the traditional model.

"At the Renaissance School, we don't track. There are no honors levels. All the kids work together in their classrooms. And we have the strongest test scores of any school in the city," said Mahoney. "Something is working."

Elementary Schools

Lincoln School

Lincoln School welcomed a new music program this year that is instructed by Amanda Woolley. The excitement the new teacher has generated with her music expertise is astounding. A new Lincoln School Chorus is a direct result of her enthusiastic engagement of students in this performing arts program. Students auditioned for a spot in the chorus and there was no shortage of applicants. The chorus was scheduled to perform on Dec. 4 at Tower Square and Dec. 18 at Baystate Medical's company toy drive.

Middle Schools

Forest Park Middle School

The Forest Park Middle School CharACter Council, which consists of approximately 30 students and three teachers, has been extremely successful in improving overall student character, as well as recognizing students who are demonstrating strong character every day. Formed through a partnership with Step-Up Springfield, the council meets at least once a week after school, planning student activities, discussing school issues and coordinating fundraising.

This year, as a result of the initiatives started by the 2007-2008 CharACter Council members, Forest Park has added a program entitled Character First. The mission of Character First is to implement character development on a school-wide level. The program is run by a group of teachers that create character development lesson plans. Twice a month, Forest Park students participate in the character lessons, creating dialogue and raising awareness of how character manifests itself in middle school students' everyday activities.

On Oct. 22, Forest Park celebrated National Character Counts Week by holding a celebration. Step-Up Springfield donated 1,000 bracelets embossed with the message: "Learn It, Use It, Live It." Every member of the school community received one of the bracelets and was encouraged to begin each day with the bracelet on his or her left wrist. Once the student or staff member performs a good deed, the bracelet should be moved to his or her

right wrist. Character First hopes that the awareness created by this simple act will encourage each of us to reach out and help others, making our school – and the community – a better place.

Van Sickle Middle School

The staff and students at Van Sickle Middle school are soon to become world-famous for all the right reasons. Teachers are working diligently towards authorization to become an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program school. The August professional development was unprecedented, as the school had IB educators from all over North America come to Van Sickle to educate its staff as well as the Commerce High staff during a Level 1 IB Training.

In July, a group of 10 staff members went to New York City to train to become Professional Learning Group Facilitators. Throughout the fall, there have been weekly professional learning group meetings where school staff discuss student work using specific protocols, best classroom practices, teacher work, and analysis of data. The school also has weekly IB meetings at which staff are working hard to incorporate an international approach to learning.

The beginning of the school year started off with all students participating in creating a school-wide social contract. Students proposed rules to live by at Van Sickle and then had a Constitutional Convention to unanimously agree upon five rules to live by, including: Respect yourself, others and environment; Take Responsibility for Actions and Rules; Never give up – Have courage; Participate and Show Leadership; and Be Kind and Have Fun. Students are currently working on community service.

High Schools

High School of Commerce

At Commerce, pride is taken in the ways students continue to learn outside of the classroom. The school's new principal, Stephen Collins, is encouraging Polly Ingraham, School-to-Work counselor, to build the internship program so that more strongly motivated students can earn academic credit while they pursue an interest in a particular career area. Fields of interest include: health, interior design, business, arche-



ology, engineering, psychology, architecture, and journalism.

This semester, four students – Edwin Rodriguez, Kenneth Torres, Jurnee Davis and Melissa Smith – are participating in the Excellence in Youth Entrepreneurship Program at Springfield Technical Community College. They have been learning, through a 10-week series of workshops, how to create a business plan.

Four other students – Jasmine Rivera, Jessica Monson, Dilara Eynula and Arlyana Dalce-Bowie – are discovering what it's like to work at Mass Mutual. They are participating in the Center for Youth Employment and Internship Program there, working after school in different departments. In addition, Sara Franco is pursuing her interest in criminal justice by participating in the

Springfield Police Department's Citizen's Police Academy. For his internship, Tyler Jones is helping out with an after-school program at the YMCA.

Commerce students are creating their second edition of the literary magazine "Inspired." This magazine is for any creative writing and artwork. The club is organized by Angie Scarfe and students meet after school to put this together.

Putnam Technical Vocational High School

Putnam has updated its advisor/advisee program this year. Every Wednesday during third period, teachers and students get together in groups that they typically would not meet with on a regular basis. Each period during the day is shortened by five minutes, so no time is lost from one particular class each week. Academic teachers work with different vocational shop students, and some shop students get to know an academic teacher that they would have otherwise never met. These groups will stay together until they

graduate, and then those teachers will acquire a new group of freshmen the next year. The program is meant to be run as an extra advisory program so that students have another adult in the school that they can relate to and turn to for help or guidance in their years at Putnam.

Several students are involved in the dual enrollment program with American International College. As a result of the program's success this first quarter, 15 students are expected to enroll in classes that coincide with their Putnam schedules. These classes range from college-level psychology, sports management, calculus, trigonometry and criminal justice. They will all receive three college credits per course.

The sports/scholar council at Putnam has raised almost \$1,000 for area homeless shelters, as well as food pantries. This council is made up of students from every athletic team at Putnam and meets as a large group to discuss projects or organizations to donate funds or time to.



Science at Central

Central High School student Kibbs Fortilus examines a substance through a microscope during biology class.

Learning environment thrives in Springfield

By DAVID LISCIO

During the same year that Earth Day was first celebrated in the U.S., Springfield Public Schools christened the Environmental Center for Our Schools.

That was back in 1970 and the program is still running, bringing approximately 8,000 local elementary- and middle-school students into the natural environs of Forest Park.

Once in the woods, the students get a taste of the outdoor world, an experience they can then compare and use to enhance the lessons they're learning in the classroom.

"This really all started around the beginning of the environmental movement," said Ron St. Amand, director of science for Springfield public schools. "Every year, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 come to the environmental center at the park for two days for a hand-on experiential program. The activities relate directly to what they're learning in the classroom."

St. Amand said the students examine various habitats and the organisms that call those habitats home. "The students go out with nets and explore aquatic habitats. They go into the forest and investigate food webs and how energy is expended. We even do a unit on winter survival. The big question is, what things do these organisms need to survive? So we have the students build a shelter to keep warm," he said.

Since the program relies heavily on the hands-on portion, students are also introduced to orienteering.

"They look at land forms, learn how to use a compass and try not to get lost. We even do some

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Every year, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 come to the environmental center at the park for two days for a hand-on experiential program. The activities relate directly to what they're learning in the classroom.

Ron St. Amand
Director of Science

technology engineering, asking them to design a boat to go down one of our streams in the park," St. Amand said. "The kids look at the whole design process. Typically they end up building rafts and we encourage them to use recyclable materials, which means lots of soda bottles because they float. I'd say 70 percent of the boat designs incorporate soda bottles."

The program is free to students in the Springfield public school system. The 750-acre Forest Park encompasses a zoo, gardens, ponds, athletic fields and other facilities, but the students concentrate on its wilder sides. "We take advantage of the natural areas," St. Amand explained.

Teachers visit the park first to prepare themselves for what to expect and what the place has to offer. The program runs throughout the school year, rain or shine, and even in winter.

The program employs four full-time science-certified educators skilled in the discovery-method of teaching, whose job is to make the all-important connection between the natural environment and the classroom.

The environmental center was named in honor of the late Clifford A. Phaneuf, who, along with educator Lorraine Ide, realized at the height of the environmental movement the necessity of educating students to appreciate and understand their role in nature.

The innovative pair worked in collaboration with the Springfield Park Department and the School Department to open ECOS, which has provided exciting environmental-based learning experiences to generations of Springfield residents.

SPRINGFIELD DIRECTORY SCHOOLS

Elementary Schools

Balliet
Gwen Page, Principal
111 Seymour Ave., 01109
413-787-7534

Beal
Linda Fenlason, Principal
285 Tiffany St., 01108
413-787-7547

Boland
Thomas O’Brien Jr., Principal
426 Armory St., 01104
413-750-2925

Bowles
Luisa Rivera, Principal
24 Bowles Park, 01104
413-787-7791

Brightwood
Shalimar Colon, Principal
471 Plainfield St., 01107
413-787-7235

Brunton
Darcia Milner, Principal
1801 Parker St., 01128
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DeBerry
Mary Worthy, Principal
670 Union St., 01109
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Dorman
Shannon Collins, Principal
20 Lydia St., 01109
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Dryden Memorial
Ann Dryden, Principal
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Ells
Jose Irizarry, Principal
319 Cortland St., 01109
413-787-7814

Freedman
Gloria Williams, Principal
90 Cherokee Dr., 01109
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Gerena
Analida Munera, Principal
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Glenwood
Rhonda Stowell, Principal
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Glickman
Martha Kelliher, Principal
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Harris
Deborah Lantaigne, Principal
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Homer
Linda Wilson, Principal
43 Homer St., 01109
413-787-7646

Indian Orchard
Deborah Beglane, Principal
95 Milton St., 01151
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Johnson
Francine Pina-Council, Principal
55 Catharine St., 01109
413-787-6699

Kensington
Margaret Thompson, Principal
31 Kensington Ave., 01108
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Liberty
John Doty, Principal
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Lincoln
Diane Gagnon, Principal
732 Chestnut St., 01107
413-787-7315

Lynch
Tara Clark, Principal
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413-787-6960

Milton Bradley
Beverly Brown, Principal
22 Mulberry St., 01105
413-787-7475

Pottenger
Valerie Williams, Principal
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413-787-7679

Sumner Avenue
Lisa Babowski, Principal
45 Sumner Ave., 01108
413-787-7435

Talmadge
Elizabeth Crowley, Principal
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413-787-7295

Walsh
Mary Ellen Petrucelli, Principal
50 Empress Ct., 01129
413-787-7464

Warner
Ann Stennet, Principal
493 Parker St., 01129
413-787-7577

Washington
Kathleen Sullivan, Principal
141 Washington St., 01108
413-787-7741

White
Geraldine Barrett, Principal
300 White St., 01108
413-787-7549

K-8 Schools

Brookings
Terry Powe, Principal
Hancock St., 01105
413-787-7401

Zanetti
Sandra Andrew, Principal
59 Howard St., 01105
413-750-2059

Middle Schools

Chestnut
Anthony Davila, Principal
355 Plainfield St., 01107
413-750-2337

Duggan
Jonathan Swan, Principal
1015 Wilbraham Rd., 01109
413-787-7800

Forest Park
Bonnie Osgood, Principal
46 Oakland St., 01108
413-787-7673

Kennedy
Bonnie Elliston, Principal
1385 Berkshire Ave., 01151
413-787-7557

Kiley
Kenneth Luce, Principal
180 Cooley St., 01128
413-787-6972

Renaissance
Stephen Mahoney, Principal
1170 Carew St., 01104
413-750-2929

STEM
Andrea Lewis, Principal
60 Alton St., 01109

Van Sickle
Cheryl Despirt, Principal
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413-750-2950

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Central
Richard Stoddard, Principal
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Commerce
Steve Collins, Principal
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413-787-7219

Putnam
Kevin McCaskill, Principal
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413-787-6907

Renaissance
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413-750-2929

Sci-Tech
Ira Brown, Principal
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Springfield Academy for Excellence

Springfield Academy K-5
Daniel Moriarty, Principal
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413-787-7261

Springfield Academy 6-8
Rhonda Jacobs, Principal
118 Alden St., 01109
413-886-5159

Springfield Academy 9-12
Walter Welch, Principal
90 Berkshire St., 01151
413-787-7036

Recovery 9-12
Michael Ellis, Principal
334 Franklin St.,
413-750-2484

Early College High School
Susan Gallagher, Principal
Holyoke Community College
413-552-2176

Gateway to College
Denise Calderwood, Principal
Holyoke Community College
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SAFE Middle 6-8
Rhonda Jacobs, Principal
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SUPER STARS



Players from Putnam Vocational High School celebrate their 24-21 victory over Littleton in the MIAA Central-Western Mass. Div. 3 Super Bowl, the second straight championship for the Beavers. Springfield Sci-Tech won the Intercounty League title and lost to Putnam in the semifinals. The Cybercats were also awarded the Western Massachusetts Football Officials Association Sportsmanship Award.
PHOTO: M. DENIS

New program holds key to improving Springfield schools

BY RICH FAHEY

Conversation is a two-way street. Springfield Public Schools administrators and teachers who are members of the Springfield Education Association may not always agree on every issue, but at least they know what the issues are.

Working with the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, Springfield teachers last year participated in the Keys to Excellence for Your Schools (KEYS) Survey, a comprehensive, research-based, data-driven program for continuous school improvement (CSI).

Developed by the National Education Association, the survey is the product of a 15-year collaborative effort involving educators, school district administrators, parents, and business and community leaders — everyone with a stake in improving schools.

Willette Johnson, area improvement officer for Zone 2 of the Springfield Public Schools, estimated that 80 percent of the district's teachers took part in the survey.

The results of the survey showed:

- ◆ many teachers do not believe they have the skill sets necessary to affect student achievement to the levels necessary to bring all students to proficiency;
- ◆ many teachers do not believe their voices were being heard when it came time to make decisions;

Johnson said the survey was initiated with the help of the Rennie Center, and a steering committee was formed to address the issues raised. Superintendent Dr. Alan J. Ingram now sits on the committee.

The data from the surveys is being shared with the staff and principals at each participating school and as part of school improvement plans, at least one of the key indicators voiced by teachers at that school in the survey is being addressed.

The KEYS data will continue to be used as a vehicle for district-wide interventions and the survey will be re-administered every two years to generate data on improvements. Teachers will retake the survey again next year.

Johnson said she believes the teachers and administrators are sending a positive message by working together to affect change.

"The message is we're better together than apart," she said. "We can agree to disagree but we really need to talk, to determine how to address the issues they've raised and then follow through."

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy was launched as a division of the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC) in October 2002. In the summer of 2005, the Rennie Center became an independent non-profit organization committed to addressing the critical challenges of reforming education in Massachusetts.

Delbridge: Education is the best investment

DELBIDGE: from Page 1

U.S. Naval Reserves while a freshman at WNEC and served two years active duty in Washington, D.C. He returned to WNEC — with help from the GI Bill — and graduated in 1977 as an accounting major with a degree in business administration.

Delbridge worked at Coopers & Lybrand in Springfield from 1977-81, and then in the investment division at Connecticut General Life Insurance Co., which became CIGNA. He earned a master's degree at UMass Amherst in 1985 and went to work in 1987 for the Hancock-owned company, which he and his partners bought 10 years later.

As a student in Springfield, Delbridge attended the former Acushnet Avenue Elementary School and John F. Kennedy Middle School before going to Tech. He recalls going to school in old buildings (other than Kennedy), but he said that did not detract from the

quality of the education he received.

"Facilities are important, but more important are the people in those facilities providing the instruction," he said. "I had a good experience with the teachers I had. The expectations of the teachers were high, and students had the personal responsibility to get it done."

While his career has been spent in the world of finance, Delbridge is acutely aware of how important a role education plays in the development of young adults. "Education is so critical," he said. "In my view, it is up to students and parents to make sure the student is putting in the effort."

"I always try to stress that education is the key," added Delbridge, who lives in a suburb west of Boston with his wife. They have two daughters, one an interior designer in New York and the other a senior at Skidmore College. "If you want to make a change in your life, education is critical."



Talmadge Elementary School third-grade teacher Patricia Pearson helps student Daniel Kelly.

Talmadge gets top MCAS reading scores in state

TALMADGE: from Page 1

students scored advanced, and another 13 percent were scored proficient.

Principal Elizabeth Crowley, in her fourth year at the school, said students come to school ready to learn.

"We expect a lot of the students," she said. "And they usually deliver."

She said parents play an important role in the process, getting involved in making sure homework is done and helping students reach their full potential.

"We have a school where there is a positive climate and an eagerness to learn," said Crowley. "The kids are proud of their accomplishments and take pride in what they do."

Crowley is one of the first to admit that her experienced faculty that has worked together for a long time is a big part of the equation. There are rarely any teaching openings at the school, except for retirements.

Third-grade teacher Ellen Izzo, a teacher for 24 years who has spent the last 17 at the Talmadge, said familiarity has bred success. "Probably because we've known each other so long, we really do support each other, trust each other," she said.

Izzo said the school's success starts with the voluntary before-school

tutoring program, which she estimated is attended by about 60 percent of the 41 third-graders at the school.

Teachers also take time out during the school day to tutor students individually when needed, and teachers often cover for each other to allow that to happen.

"We try to work together for the benefit of all," she said.

Talmadge teachers emphasize early and often the importance of homework and ask parents to reinforce the message at home.

"We're pretty persistent about making sure homework gets done," Izzo said. "We have after-school programs and we make sure the students schedule time to get it done." She also gave credit to the school's active PTO.

"We work at it every single day," Izzo said. "After all, every year there's a new student body. We're always doing some kind of professional development; there's always something to work on."

The student body of the Talmadge is much like that of other Springfield elementary schools. In the 2007-08 school year, the student body was 32 percent Hispanic, 29 percent white and 28 percent African-American.

Izzo said teachers at the school have high expectations for every student and that it helps that students know what to expect from year to year.

Sports return to Springfield middle schools

By RICH FAHEY

After a 10-year absence, sports have returned to Springfield Public Schools since they were eliminated due to budget cuts.

A \$20,000 challenge grant from the Hampden Bank Foundation allowed more than 300 boys and girls to participate in an after-school soccer program at seven middle schools this fall, according to Springfield Athletic Director Michael F. Martin.

Under the challenge grant, Hampden Bank will contribute a dollar for every two dollars raised in the community up to a total of a \$20,000.

After the holidays, middle-school students will begin a basketball league that will run until the February school vacation.

Martin also plans some kind of organized sports activity

for the spring season. He said that volunteerism and donations have helped stretch the funds to include as many students as possible. Teachers are serving as volunteer coaches and referees.

"They've been fantastic," said Martin.

First Student Transportation donated transportation between schools in the fall and made sure the students got home after games. The Hampden County Sheriff's Department has provided discounted stenciling of team and player names on shirts.

During the month of October, boys and girls practiced soccer twice a week and then played one game a week consisting of two 20-minute halves.

"For some of our students, it was their first time playing the game," Martin said. "The games had the feel of the pick-up games we used to play as kids, just for the fun of

it."

He expects some rivalries to spring up during the basketball season since many of the students will have faced each other in youth basketball or parks and recreation games.

"I think you'll see some intensity during those games," he said.

"When students become engaged in athletics, they then become engaged in academics," said Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, who played sports at Kiley Middle School.

Hampden Bank President Thomas R. Burton said the bank decided to take the corporate lead and challenged other corporations to help the youth of the school system.

While competition is great, Martin said, it takes a backseat to the actual goal of the program.

"We just want to get the kids out there playing," he said.



Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir goes one-on-one her father, Tariq.

Abdul-Qaadir chasing history

ABDUL-QAADIR: from Page 16

guards LaToya Bullard from the University of Florida and Brittany Carter from Georgia, but there is a need for a strong point guard, said Abdul-Qaadir, and she hopes to play a lot as a freshman.

"The coaches have told me there will be an opportunity," she said.

Abdul-Qaadir said ball handling is one of her strengths, and she has a good mid-range game. Because of her quickness to the ball, she also gets a lot of rebounds. One area she has to work on is her three-point shot, a must for point guards in Div. I programs.

Because she has been playing in AAU programs against some of the best players in the country for years, she is confident she will be able to compete at the next level.

Although she has scored 45 points in a game twice, Abdul-Qaadir also enjoys setting teammates up for easy baskets. New Leadership finished 13-10 last year and Abdul-Qaadir said that with only three returning players, the outlook for the season that opened Dec. 12 against Putnam High was uncertain.

"We're starting from scratch," she said. "We have a lot of new faces."

When she's not playing basketball, math is her favorite subject in school. Abdul-Qaadir said her basketball career has thrived thanks to strong support from her parents, Alooah and Tariq, and brother Yusuf Abdul-Ali, a standout point guard on Bentley College's nationally ranked men's team the last four years.

Her ultimate basketball goal?

"I'd love to play in the WNBA some day," she said. "I've been dreaming about it since I began playing."

SPORTS

THE SPRINGFIELD EDUCATOR



New Leadership Charter School's Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir with her parents, Alooah and Tariq.

Abdul-Qaadir chasing Massachusetts girls basketball history

BY RICH FAHEY

She's going down to Memphis ... and she hopes to take the city by storm.

Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir, 18, is a senior point guard at New Leadership Charter School in Springfield, a Grade 6-12 charter school and Springfield Public School that is managed by an independent board of trustees.

She accepted a scholarship from the University of Memphis after being

recruited by several Div. I schools, including Louisville and Boston College.

In four years of varsity basketball — she started her career as an eighth-grader — Abdul-Qaadir has scored 2,184 points, behind only to former UConn standout Rebecca Lobo (2,710) and Boston College's Sarah Behn (2,562).

“

I'd love to play in the WNBA some day, I've been dreaming about it since I began playing.

Bilqis Abdul-Qaadir

By the time the season ends — barring injury — she should be the all-time leading scorer in Massachusetts girls high school basketball history.

Abdul-Qaadir, who stands just under 5-4, likes to take it to the hoop, and has been

advised she needs to get stronger to compete successfully at the Div. I level. “The Division I players are bigger and

stronger and that means I have to get stronger,” she said.

The University of Memphis, which competes in Conference USA, already has a storied men's basketball program, led by former UMass coach John Calipari. Last year, the Tigers fell in the final seconds of the NCAA Tournament final to Kansas.

The women's team has a new coach, Melissa McFerrin, and got off to a 5-2 start. The roster boasts two strong transfers in

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