

BIG HIT

Governor Deval Patrick visited DeBerry Elementary School to read “A Home Run for Bunny,” the story of Springfield baseball players who stood by their teammate.

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PHOTO: Eric Haynes / Governor's Office

DUGGAN GROWING

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INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

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Springfield dropout rate lowered significantly

BY RICH FAHEY

Over the past two years, the Springfield Public Schools dropout rate has dropped by a staggering 50 percent, 35 percent in the last year alone.

School administrators who have played a leading role in the decrease all agree: The data is driving the bus. They have tried to go where the data leads them and that has helped them devise the strategies needed to bring down the dropout rate.

The dropout rate accounts for the number of students who start school in the fall but drop out during the course of the year. In January, Superintendent of Schools Daniel J. Warwick

announced that Springfield Public Schools' dropout rate fell from 10 percent in 2012 to 6.5 percent in 2013, according to information from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The 6.5 percent dropout rate is the lowest that Springfield has had since the state started publishing the number.

Springfield had 241 fewer students drop out in 2012-13 than in 2008-09 and the district's dropout rate matched the statewide average high school dropout rate of 6.5 percent.

See **DROPOUT RATE** Page 12

Reasons to be proud of successful year



DANIEL WARWICK

It has been an exciting year. Teachers and students at every school have had good reasons to celebrate, but there are a few districtwide accomplishments that I'd like to highlight as the 2013-14 school year comes to a close.

I am extremely proud of our work to keep kids in school. Across the nation, increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate have become a priority for urban school districts. The concept of keeping kids in school may seem simple to some people who are not intimately familiar with the challenges that districts such as ours face — challenges that I believe we are doing a better job of overcoming each year. I am proud of the most recent achievements in these areas.

This year we saw a 35-percent decrease in our dropout rate. At 6.5 percent, this new and improved rate represents a huge breakthrough, and it is the lowest Springfield has seen since the state started publishing the number. Over the past two years, the district's dropout rate has been reduced by nearly 50 percent.

The contributing factors to these achievements are many but none is more important than the work our teachers do every day when they stand before students. Springfield Public

Schools (SPS) is committed to making even our greatest teachers (and there are many) even better. Earlier this year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) publicly recognized us as a leader in this work.

Pointing to the implementation of what we have dubbed the "Springfield Effective Educator Development System" (SEEDS), Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester said Springfield has "figured out" how to evaluate educators at all levels based on a system of standards and principles designed to build on an educator's strength while supporting areas of weakness. The system is demanding of both the evaluator and the one being evaluated, but the process has been designed as a partnership with both parties as contributors at every step.

As Superintendent, I utilize the tool with my direct reports. I am also 100 percent committed to my own continual professional development. I am a member of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the Urban Superintendents Association, among others. Also, I am mentored under the tutelage of former Superintendent Jim Marini, who is a coach in the New Superintendents Induction Program jointly run by the MASS and DESE. These affiliations afford me with ample opportunities for honest feedback, constructive criticism and self-directed improvement.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the Springfield Public Schools FY2015 Operating Budget, a copy

of which is available on the SPS website. Approved by the School Committee in May, the budget puts students first and equips us to continue them along their pathway to improved achievement.

I am proud of our work to successfully address a funding gap of more than \$19 million, yet continue with investments in professional development and instructional materials that align with our strategic priorities.

Here is a small sample of what the budget supports for our students:

- the establishment of a new school of performing arts in Springfield;
- a technology blueprint that will provide every student with a computer, every day, in every classroom by the 2015-16 school year;
- \$5.4 million to support intervention services to students;
- the expansion of Duggan School to grades 6-12 over the next four years.

So, as this school year draws to a close, I remain as enthusiastic as I was back in August. I am proud of our schools, grateful for our supporters and partners and excited about our future.

I wish everyone a restful and safe summer. Congratulations to the Class of 2014 and I will see the rest of you in the fall!

Daniel J. Warwick is superintendent of schools.



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Fruits of their labor

USDA grant helps district expand farm to school program

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

The Springfield Public Schools farm to school initiative has received some much-needed fertilization—approximately \$100,000 in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The grant program was initiated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which authorized and funded USDA to assist eligible entities in implementing farm to school programs that improve student access to nutritious, local foods. Sodexo is managing the grant and implementation in Springfield.

Currently, there are outdoor gardens at six Springfield Public Schools: Brightwood Elementary School, DeBerry Elementary School, Kennedy Middle School, Springfield Public Day Elementary School, Washington Elementary School and Zanetti Montessori Magnet School. While five have either raised beds or planters, Kennedy Middle has turned a former tennis court into a farm, which is cultivating onions and collard greens that will be used in the lunch program next year.

The grant will allow the district to create four new outdoor gardens, 20 indoor gardens and 10 agriculture clubs. Each school must select a team that will be vital to the garden's planning, implementation and ongoing success. Those teams must commit to sustaining the project year-round and coordinating summer maintenance with volunteers. Two of the outdoor gardens will be at the High School of Commerce and Kensington Elementary School. The other two have yet to be named.

"We'll be going from reaching 12 percent of the student population to 60 percent," said Dara Levy, the district's farm to school coordinator. "The ultimate goal is for every school to have an outdoor garden."

Garden-grown produce used in the cafeteria will increase from 12 percent to 20 percent in two years.

"Considering that 21,000 meals are served a day, an 8-percent increase is quite impressive," said Levy.



Kennedy Middle School students tend to their farm.



Students at Brightwood Elementary plant their school garden.

Food-service staff members will also use the herbs grown in the indoor gardens in school lunches and local farms will be providing fresh, local produce to the cafeterias. As part of the new agriculture clubs, students will also be able to take field trips to farms. Additionally, Levy has been working with teachers to infuse gardening and nutrition lessons into the curriculum and creating experiential learning opportunities. It is her hope that students who learn to grow their own food make healthier decisions about what to eat, and that they learn cooperation, responsibility and patience.

For more information or to discuss the possibility of creating a school garden, contact the Parks Department's John Alphin, garden coordinator, at 413-886-5116.



Duggan sixth-grader William Hoang examines a rock as part of science class.



Eighth-grader Avrie Palm works on Batman logo during art class. PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE

Duggan to get a makeover

School expanding to 6-12 model

BY RICH FAHEY

The goal of the Springfield Magnet School program is to offer students and parents as many quality options as possible. The latest Magnet School Assistance Grant (MSAP) from the U.S. Department of Education will provide \$11.5 million over the next three years to support magnet learning at three existing schools and one new school.

Among the current schools that will benefit is the former Duggan Expeditionary Learning Middle School, which is expanding to a grade 6-12 school with a social justice magnet theme, an exciting new option on the magnet school menu.

Joshua P. Bogin, director of the magnet schools program, said the district is responding to parents and focus groups who were seeking additional options.

Bogin said Duggan will retain its small-school environment even as it transforms itself. One high-school grade will be added per year beginning with grade 9 this fall, and seats at the high-school level will be limited to 60 per grade.

The school's focus on social justice will manifest itself in

many ways.

- Students will explore connections to community issues, environmental stewardship, global knowledge and understandings, and equity;
- Students will learn to use technology to support critical thinking, inquiry and research practices;
- Western New England School of Law, with a new pro-bono program requirement for all law students, will assist in the identification of law-related social justice issues that can be explored at every grade level, beginning in the middle school years;
- The Boston-based Discovering Justice program will partner with Duggan to initiate its mock trial training program.

All Expeditionary Learning schools address academic subjects through challenging, standards-based units with hands-on projects that are often interdisciplinary in nature.

Bogin said that curriculum unique to the project will, as in the case of the other magnet schools, dovetail with the regular curriculum.

"All students attending these schools are expected to meet the high-level SPS standards as well as the unique requirements expected of them within their magnet programs," said Bogin, adding that the Magnet Schools of America this year recognized STEM, Renaissance and Central for excellence and distinction.

Lydia Martinez, assistant superintendent of schools, said

the recent renovations at the school mean that it will not require major work to accommodate high-school students, adding that the trend to smaller high school classes is being driven by data.

"Our goal is to create and maintain small learning communities," she said. "We know that students who attend smaller schools consistently deliver better academic results and have better attendance rates than those in larger schools."

"Also, the more intimate learning environment of a small school is of critical importance during the high-school years when academic performance becomes the foundation of a student's transition to college."

Bogin, whose daughter and son attend a magnet high school, said Springfield's magnet schools are proof that joy, passion and discipline are critical partners with rigorous instruction in classrooms.

Bogin reiterated there are no admission requirements for students to enroll in any of the magnet schools, other than they be an active student in Springfield Public Schools. Visit: www.sps.springfield.ma.us/PIC for more information on what is needed for registering for SPS.

If a child is currently enrolled in SPS and has a student ID number, he or she may sign up for a magnet school during the designated enrollment periods. During these periods, parents can visit the main webpage of Springfield Public Schools (www.sps.springfield.ma.us) to cast their "magnet ballot."



Springfield Public Schools teachers and youth supporters gather with Erin Gruwell, second row center, and some of the original Freedom Writers in California last summer.

Freedom Writers movement comes to Springfield

BY RICH FAHEY

There is an old saying when it comes to creative writing: "Write about what you know."

But what if what you know is seen through the lens of a troubled existence?

Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, Calif., once a high-achieving school, was in the midst of an integration plan and tensions were running so high that many students simply stopped attending school.

That was the situation a teacher named Erin Gruwell faced in the mid 1990s when she challenged her students in Room 203 at Wilson High to write diaries recording the chaos in their school and during a very troubled time in Southern California, following riots in Los Angeles and the O.J. Simpson trial.

Gruwell also brought in guest speakers and designed a reading list to which teens could relate. She eventually compiled her students' diaries in book form: "The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them," which eventually became a New York Times No. 1 bestseller and a 2007 motion picture starring Hilary Swank.

Gruwell now teaches philosophy at the collegiate level, using what she learned with her "Freedom Writers," whose name is an adaptation of those civil rights activists who rode buses in the South in the 1960s.

Gruwell's teaching methods survive to this



Debra Lord speaks to her students about the power of creative writing at the High School of Commerce.

day, and have been extensively studied and replicated, largely through the efforts of the Freedom Writers Foundation, which she founded to spread her message.

One place it has reached is Springfield Public Schools, where 25 educators and youth supporters traveled to California last summer to study Gruwell's methods and



Elissa Colon, left, and Jailene Santiago are part of the Freedom Writers class at Commerce.

bring them back to Springfield. That makes it the first district to train that number of teachers in the Freedom Writers methodology.

Springfield Assistant Superintendent of Schools Lydia Martinez said a selection committee that was comprised of SPS administrators and the Freedom Writers

Foundation evaluated applications and essays from more than 100 teachers who applied.

Martinez also credited the Springfield business community, led by Dr. Carol Leary, president of Bay Path College, with coming together to raise the funds for the trip, and noted that the program also had strong support from the office of Mayor Domenic J. Sarno.

Among the teachers selected was Debra Lord, a Springfield native and a licensed attorney who left the practice of law to become a classroom teacher. She is an English teacher in the Pride Academy at the High School of Commerce.

Lord spent five days in California with Gruwell and many of the original Freedom Writers -- all 150 of whom graduated from high school and many of whom went on to college -- and said she was "thrilled" to have had the opportunity.

Many of the students whom Gruwell reached with her Freedom Writers program were once considered "unteachable," but she proved them wrong. Lord also believes that every child can be helped.

"To me, Freedom Writers is really about reminding people how important it is to believe in all kids and to teach kids to believe in themselves," Lord said. "They have a voice and it matters when they have something to say."

Continued on next page

Art, history come to life

Civil Rights study leads to portrait of Rep. Swan

In a unique partnership between Forest Park Middle School and Trinity United Methodist Church, social studies and art students combined lessons about an ancient art form called iconography and the Civil Rights Movement.

Last fall, the church funded a field trip for students to view an Elms College art exhibit entitled "Icons of the Civil Rights." Once back in the classroom, students discussed the art of iconography and studied the Civil Rights movement.

After learning about Springfield leaders involved in the movement, students brought together lessons learned in art and social studies and chose state Rep. Benjamin Swan as the subject for a Springfield icon.

Swan, who served three years active duty in the U.S. Army and five years in the reserves, has spent most of his adult life fighting for civil rights, human rights and justice. He has served as a state representative for 20 years and is currently vice chair of the House Committee on Post Audit and Oversight. He also serves on the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs and the Joint Committee on Public Service.

The church commissioned artist Pamela Chatteron-Purdy to create an image of Swan.



Forest Park Middle School social studies and art students stand with Rep. Benjamin Swan, third from right, as their chosen Springfield icon.

PHOTOS: LUCILA SANTANA



Mayor Domenic Sarno speaks at the ceremony.



The Trinity United Methodist Church commissioned artist Pamela Chatteron-Purdy, left, to create an image of Swan.

Freedom Writers movement comes to Springfield

Continued from preceding page

Lord said she puts a strong focus on developing relationships with students and between students and making them feel comfortable and part of a family, so they won't be reluctant to try new things or take a chance.

"It's building a sense of trust and valuing their opinions," Lord said.

Springfield's Freedom Writers teachers meet monthly to compare strategies. Gruwell has visited Springfield twice this school year, the first time with two Freedom Writers to meet and conduct a day of training with teachers who had applied to the program but hadn't been accepted.

Among the places she visited this spring was Lord's classroom, where Gruwell and Freedom Writer Tiffany Jacobs shared

stories with the students and led a group discussion.

This is just the beginning.

"The Freedom Writers teachers in Springfield will plan an event that will take place in Springfield next year," said Martinez.

Lord said in her classroom, activities will include students' compiling their memoirs and publishing their own book.

"This has helped them look at who they are," Lord said. "I'm proud of them. The kids have really responded. They have put some really difficult stories down on paper."

And while Gruwell's message and methods began with the 25 teachers and youth supporters who went west, it has spread beyond that, thanks to Gruwell's visits here and the sharing of information among teachers.

Schools affected by 2011 tornado are rebuilding

Three years after a summer tornado twisted across the city, leaving two devastated school buildings in its wake, Springfield Public Schools is getting its more favorable due.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) has announced approval of full reimbursement of funds for the \$27.9 million Brookings Museum Magnet Elementary School project and the \$15.2 million Mary Dryden School project. Both schools suffered severe damage when the tornado of 2011 tore a large portion of the roof off of Dryden and tore through the hallways of Brookings. The agency is fully funding the construction projects with the aid of federal disaster funds.

“Just days after the tornado hit, we visited these two schools and got a firsthand look at the damage that this natural disaster left,” said State Treasurer Steven Grossman, chairman of the

MSBA. “The MSBA is proud to stand with the City of Springfield and its children as we commit to fund and rebuild these two schools.”

The Dryden renovations and new wing have been completed, and a new Brookings School is under construction at 433 Walnut St. The building will occupy 65,000 square feet and will have state-of-the art educational equipment and features. It is expected to be complete in 2015.

Grossman and Jack McCarthy, the MSBA’s executive director, joined Mayor Domenic Sarno, Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick and other officials for a “topping off” ceremony for the new Brookings School in April. The event celebrated the final steel beam being put into place, and students had the opportunity to sign their names on that beam.

“We are very grateful for the extraordinary support the

MSBA has provided for this and so many other school projects over the past 10 years,” said Sarno. “They have been a friend to the children and community of Springfield and have been a tremendous asset as we work to make Springfield whole again in the tornado aftermath.”

Pointing to academic gains made by Brookings students over the past two years, Warwick said that school’s staff, students and families has exemplified what it means to not just endure a setback but to keep thriving even in the midst of one.

“We are absolutely elated about the progress of this project and the promise it holds for our students and for our community,” he said. “We are thrilled the patience and tenacity of the Brookings family will be so richly rewarded for many generations to come.”



State Treasurer Steven Grossman and Brookings Principal Terry Powe sign a beam during a “topping off” ceremony for the new Brookings school in April. They were joined by Mayor Domenic Sarno, Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick and other officials.

PHOTOS: LUCILA SANTANA



Brookings students also signed their names to the beam.



Principal Terry Powe speaks with school supporter Rev. Steven Williams.

GENERATIONS OF EDUCATION



Misael Ramos Sr., his wife, Olga Suarez, and their daughter, Odelis Ramos Garrafa, pose for a photo in Olga's first-grade classroom at Samuel Bowles Elementary School.



Forest Park Middle School teacher Misael Ramos Jr., left, with his wife, former teacher Nelly Ramos.

TEACHING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

BY RICH FAHEY

The Ramos family came to Springfield from Puerto Rico in 1997 in search of more opportunities and better lives.

They appear to have found both, and, just as working in the school district supported the family, it allowed the children in the family to get an education and give back to the Springfield schools by joining their parents as teachers.

Misael Ramos Sr. and Olga Suarez were already teachers in Puerto Rico when they uprooted their family, which included children Misael Jr., Odelis and Olga, and brought them to Springfield. Misael Sr. and Olga were 40 years old at the time and had been teaching for many years in Puerto Rico.

"I think we packed up in just 10 days," said Misael Ramos Jr., who was 14 at the time while his sisters, Odelis and Olga, were 12 and 11, respectively.

They stayed in the basement of a friend's home for a month before finding their own apartment. Both Misael Sr. and Olga found jobs in the district's ELL (English Language Learner) program, and the family began together the arduous process of becoming bilingual.

"We children studied English in school but weren't fluent," said Misael Ramos Jr.

"We all learned together, practicing, watching TV, talking to each other."

Olga Suarez, who teaches math to ELL first-graders at

the Samuel Bowles School, remembered the difficult transition she had to make when the ELL program went to an English immersion program, when suddenly after teaching in Spanish for many years she had to begin teaching in English.

"The first two to three years were very difficult," she said. "I had a very good principal who stood by me."

Several other family members have had connections to the Springfield schools. Odelis Ramos Garrafa, the older daughter, taught math in Springfield for a period of time and currently works in accounting.

Daughter-in-law Enélida "Nelly" Benjamín-Ramos is a former SPS teacher. Son-in-law José Garrafa is an SPS substitute teacher; his sister and his brother are paraprofessionals in the schools and his oldest sister has taught in the district.

Misael Ramos Jr. studied in the ELL program and played baseball at Sci-Tech High, then went to UMass Amherst, where he also played baseball. He returned to Sci-Tech to teach math in the same program he went through, as well as coaching the varsity baseball team.

He now teaches at Forest Park Middle School and is an assistant baseball coach in Chicopee. He has also coached the middle school baseball team.

Misael Jr. said he serves as an example for those who have been born in another country.

"Everything is possible," he said. "What is a barrier at first – a need to study and learn English – becomes a bonus when you know two languages and are bilingual."

Olga said that many of her first-graders find comfort in learning from someone who has shared their struggles with learning a second language.

"I know how they feel," she said. "I always tell them 'the first one to make a mistake is me.'"

Olga said she has high expectations for her students, just as she had high expectations for her children growing up, and they are now working towards master's degrees.

Misael Jr. said one of the things he learned from his parents and has tried to retain in his own life is that if you have a bad day in school, you don't bring it home, and if you have a bad day at home, you don't bring it to school.

"When I'm in school, I'm working 110 percent at that," said Ramos, who is married with two children. "When I'm home with my family, I'm working 110 percent on that."

Both Misael Jr. and his mother said the most rewarding moments are when former students succeed. In Misael's case, there was a former student who returned to the school as a teacher.

Ramos family members say their church and their faith have always been a large part of their family life. The elder Misael Ramos, now retired from teaching math to ELL students, serves as pastor of the Apostolic Renewal Church on Salem Street in Springfield.

"They have strong beliefs and strong values," Olga said about the family members. "They are leaders in their church and these things have helped them in their everyday lives."



Kensington International students proudly pose in front of the school's new name.



Fourth-grade teacher Angela Boulay discusses newspaper headlines with her class as students Emilie Goodrow, left, and Qwana Carter look on.



From left, Springfield City Councilor Kateri Walsh, Superintendent Daniel Warwick and Mayor Domenic Sarno cut the ribbon at the renaming ceremony.

It's all in a name

Kensington International gets new identity

Kensington's new name reflects its mission to develop global thinkers

Kensington Avenue Magnet School was officially renamed Kensington International School, with a ceremony unveiling the change held on April 7. Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, Superintendent of Schools Daniel J. Warwick and Springfield City Councilor Kateri Walsh attended the ribbon cutting ceremony, along with students, parents, teachers and community members.

"Our new name speaks to the excellence in which Kensington operates," said Kensington International School Principal Margaret Thompson. "Students at Kensington International receive a world-class education, making them not only world-competent, but also independent thinkers, effective communicators and lifelong learners."

Kensington is one of three schools in the district and 3,698 schools in the world offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, which aims to develop intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world. Other schools in the district



offering the IB curriculum include Van Sickle Middle School and the High School of Commerce.

Authorized as an IB school in 2006, Kensington is one of the few elementary schools in the country to offer the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), which focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside. The program seeks to nurture the natural curiosity of students and help them become lifelong learners. Teachers work to incorporate an international focus into daily lessons and connect PYP learning across content areas. Doing so requires a commitment on the part of staff members to work closely together on planning learning projects and activities.

"Teachers and children are encouraged to pursue learning's two most important components: curiosity and exploration," said Thompson. "We are confident that by encouraging students to lead a well balanced life that incorporates intellectual, artistic and physical pursuits we will see them blossom into responsible, open-minded, caring citizens of the world."



Kensington International School fourth-grader Dahnaey Shean is hard at work.

160 lucky elementary school students were surprised with new bikes and helmets.



BIG WHEELS

Initiative surprises 'character' students with new bicycles

The summer of 2014 got off to an unforgettable start for 160 lucky elementary school students when they were surprised with a shiny new bike and helmet during a recent event at the Basketball Hall of Fame.

The unsuspecting kids believed they were special guests for a morning of fun and excitement. They had no idea the fun and games were merely a prelude to the real reason they were all being assembled. The students selected to receive the bikes were chosen by their school administrators based on their character and commitment to education.

The Bikes for Kids initiative was a partnership between The City of Springfield, Foundation for Life, Basketball Hall of Fame and Barnum Financial Group. Spearheaded by the Office of Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, the initiative received an

outpouring of support from the community willing to sponsor a bike and helmet for the cause.

"This is a really great initiative that brings together public and private organizations to brighten the day of some of our outstanding kids," said Mayor Domenic J. Sarno.

Sarno credited Chief of Staff Denise Jordan for bringing the initiative forward. Jordan, who worked closely with Springfield Public Schools administrators to organize the effort, said the business community, non-profit agencies and other organizations really embraced the initiative by raising over \$10,000, enough to purchase 160 bikes and helmets.

"This was truly a labor of love and the willingness of the sponsors to donate was overwhelming. I would really like to thank all of the guidance counselors and school

administrators for assisting in submitting the names of the lucky kids," said Jordan.

Superintendent of Schools Daniel J. Warwick said he was "thrilled for the lucky students" and pointed out the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child as an educational system.

"That is what makes this initiative so wonderful for our kids," said Warwick. "It ties something fun and recreational to education and school; the element of surprise is really the icing on the cake."

Warwick thanked the Mayor's Office and all of the supporters behind the initiative. "This would not have happened if not for them," he said.



One smiling student was rewarded with a bike and helmet based on his character and commitment to education. PHOTOS: MASSLIVE.COM

SPRINGFIELD CONSERVATORY OF THE ARTS DEBUTS THIS SEPTEMBER

BY RICH FAHEY

The city's magnet school program is about to take an exciting new turn that includes singing, dancing, acting and music -- all during the school day.

Aided by the latest round of federal magnet school grants, the Springfield Conservatory of the Arts (SCA) will debut this September with 60 students in grades 6 and 9, and will then expand by 60 students per grade. In 2017-18, the school will be fully enrolled as a 6-12 school serving 420 students.

Magnet School Program Director Joshua P. Bogin said there has been "lots of interest" in the new school during the magnet school enrollment period, and that more parents

requested the school than there are slots available, with the result being a lottery that will be used to determine which students will attend.

Bogin said the school is expected to occupy a temporary location at the former Immaculate Conception property in Indian Orchard that Springfield Public Schools owns before moving to a more permanent facility.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Lydia Martinez said the district's goal is to have a permanent home for the school within four years.

Bogin said under terms of the Magnet School Assistance Grant (MSAP) from the U.S. Department of Education that will provide \$11.5 million over the next three years, there will be no auditions. Students are picked by lottery so there will be no perception of favoritism.

"We assume families that select the academy will have the appropriate interest in the arts," he said. "We encourage students who have more interest in science and math to seek other schools such as STEM, for example."

The SCA is expected to fill an important need in Springfield — a conservatory-type arts environment for students who seek an intensive and rich arts learning and

performing environment.

The SCA will constitute a dramatic community effort to place arts education clearly at the center of one of the district's secondary schools, where all students will have opportunities in middle school to explore the various arts areas, before settling on a particular area of concentration.

Students will receive arts instruction in specialty areas (instrumental music, vocal music, drama, dance, visual arts) from licensed Springfield arts teachers as well as from artists in residence and consultants with expertise in particular arts-related fields.

The school will enable students to focus on their interest in the arts, whether they be dancers, artists, musicians, actors or working behind the scenes on stage design, lighting, sound, costume design, choreography, or directing.

A rigorous academic program based on the Common Core standards will ensure that graduates are prepared to attend college and join the work force as creative and effectively critical thinkers.

The school's first principal will be David Brewster, whose experience in both the fields of education and the arts makes him the ideal candidate for this important position. Brewster has created two specialty schools during his career with Brockton Public

Schools.

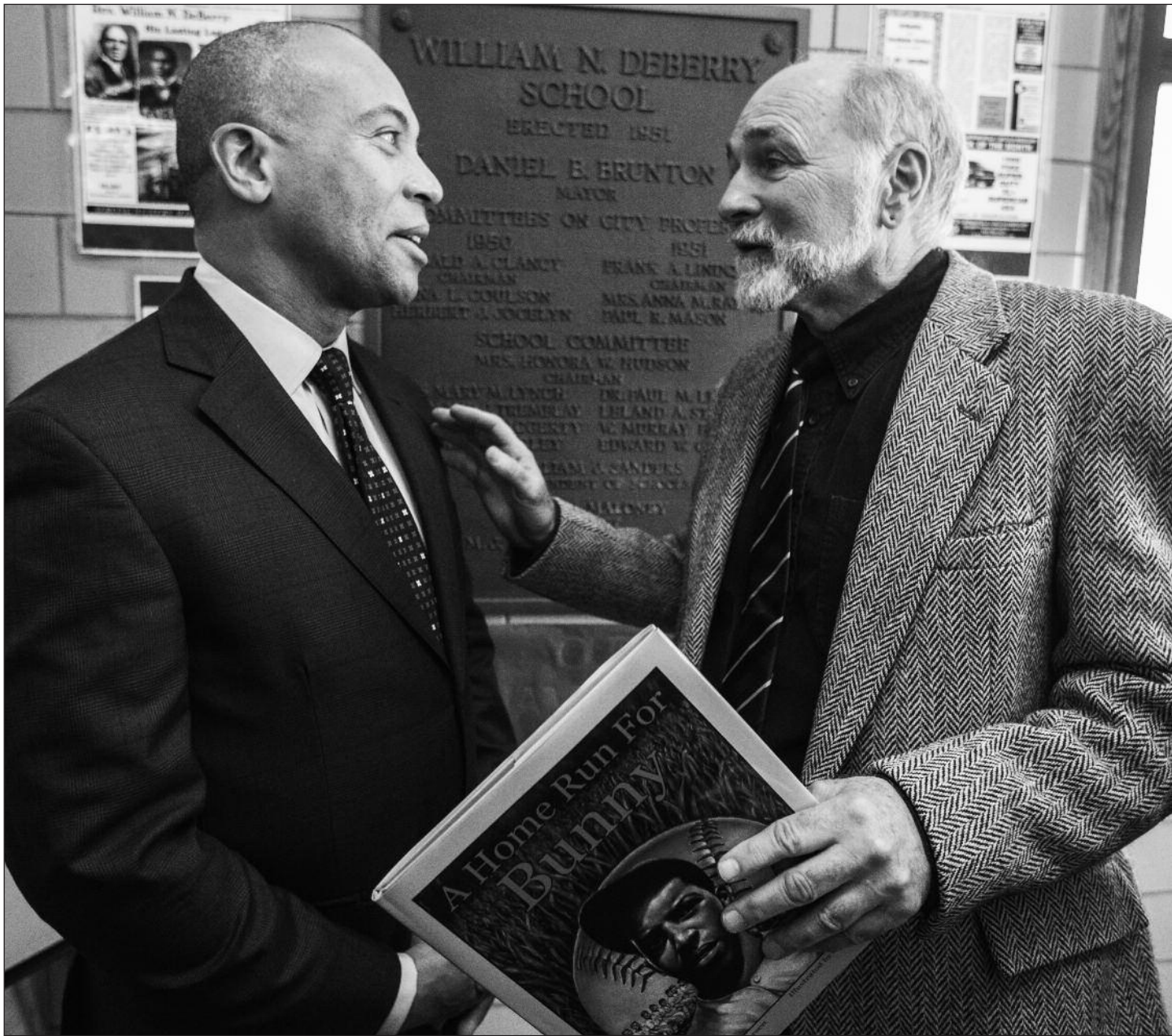
Relative to his experience with performing arts, Brewster is founder and director of Plough and Stars Films. Founded in 2011, the academy has served nearly 300 students who have created two feature-length and seven short films. He serves on the Somerville Arts Council Board of Directors, and the Museum of Fine Arts' Educators' Advisory Board of Directors. He has also served as a grant manager for the MCC Creative Schools Program, director of the New Art Center in Newton and as an admissions representative for the Art Institute of Boston.

Brewster holds a master's degree in education from Wheelock College in Boston, a bachelor of arts degree in English from the University of Massachusetts and has attended courses at the Art Institute of Boston.

Arts groups who have already expressed interest in working with the SCA include:

- Community Music School
- The Drama Studio
- Enchanted Circle Theater
- Springfield Symphony Orchestra
- Springfield Museums at the Quadrangle
- Shakespeare and Company
- Teatro V!da

Bogin said he has a particular interest in making sure the SCA becomes a passionate, thriving community school.



Gov. Deval Patrick visits William N. DeBerry Elementary with Richard Andersen, Springfield College professor and author of the children's book, "A Home Run for Bunny."

Home run for brotherhood

Books detail baseball team's victory over segregation

By RICH FAHEY

Unlike the other champions who have boosted the city's sports profile in recent years, American Legion Post 21's 1934 junior baseball team didn't get the trophy to prove it.

But the team does have a different kind of hardware -- a monument in Forest Park, "Brothers We All Are" -- that attests to their accomplishments.

Now, two new books will preserve the tale for current students and future

generations.

Springfield College professor Richard Andersen of Montague is the author of the new children's book, "A Home Run for Bunny," including illustrations by artist Gerald Purnell, published by Illumination Arts Publishing, of Bellvue, Wash.

He has also authored a novel for young adults based on the same team, "We Called Him Bunny," (Levellers Press), which was released in mid-April.

Both books focus on the story of the 15 Springfield boys who were members of the American Legion Post 21 junior baseball team that, led by captain Tony King, voted to withdraw from a sectional tournament in Gastonia, N.C. when Legion officials refused to let African-American pitcher/outfielder Ernest "Bunny" Taliaferro play.

King, 96, of Holyoke is the sole surviving member of the team.

In January, Springfield Public Schools made sure the story would be preserved for future generations, making the children's book available in all elementary school

libraries in the city, and the book for young adults in middle- and high-school libraries.

The team's vote came at a time when the South was a bastion of segregation, 13 years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball.

"I was just a youngster when I began to hear the story about Bunny and the team," said Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick. "I remember having a difficult time imagining people treating other people so unjustly. I didn't realize it then, but I think it has a big impact on me in terms of standing up for what's right."

Author Andersen said the book-writing process began when a former student, Barbara Dismuke, now a teacher at Sumner Avenue Elementary School in Springfield, was biking and came across the plaque in Forest Park that commemorates the Legion team.

"I had never written a children's book before," said Andersen, 67, an author of 29 books who teaches writing and literature at Springfield College and was the recipient

of the college's Excellence in Teaching Award.

The ballplayers were from different neighborhoods of the city but had grown up competing against each other. Andersen said it was jarring when they first learned that Bunny wouldn't be allowed to stay at the same hotel as them, but would be forced to find refuge in the home of a black doctor. The team's coach, Sid Harris, eventually had Bunny sleep in his room.

When word spread Springfield had a black player, 2,000 people showed up at batting practice and watched Taliaferro hit six home runs in six pitches, triggering even more fan reaction and threats of violence.

Teams from Maryland and Florida said they would not play Springfield if it had a black player, and tournament officials said they could not guarantee the team's safety. After deciding to withdraw, the team was later greeted as heroes at Union Station.

Andersen said the best part was, "This was a decision made by a group of 15-year-old kids, not by adults."

The book for young adults is an historical novel about the incident from the viewpoints of three of the participants: Bunny, teammate Johnny Coffey, who later became a state senator, and Danny Keyes, who lost four fingers in a childhood accident but later became the youngest judge in state history at the age of 28.

Andersen said one of the major differences between the children's book and the young adult novel is that he goes into more detail about the prejudice and threats levied against the players, and the raw language that was used at the time.

Warwick said the decision to make sure the books are available in all Springfield school libraries was an easy one.

"Students today should know about this story so that they can cultivate a new sense of pride in their city's history," he said. "It's a story that is still relevant today because as a nation, I think we all still need to be reminded what it means to see beyond the color line. The story teaches kids today a lesson about true friendship, courage and serves as a poignant reminder of how far we've come as a nation."

As the 80th anniversary of the Legion team's decision approaches on Aug. 23, the team will be remembered again. Andersen will throw out the first pitch at the "Bring it Home" baseball celebration from June 13-15 in Forest Park; a plaque will be presented honoring Taliaferro, Tony King, and McTye Blackwell, the athletic officer who re-established Post 21's baseball program in 2010 after a long absence.

The illustrations done by artist Purnell for "A Home Run for Bunny" will become part of a permanent exhibit at the Springfield Historical Museum and at Springfield College's commencement exercises on May 17, the college's first annual Humanities Achievement Award was presented to Tony King.

Andersen said not everyone has the talent of a Bunny Taliaferro, but everyone can make the decision to do the right thing.

"We can't all be Bunnys, but we can all be Tony Kings," he said.

Teachers of Excellence



The Class of 2014 "Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award" recipients were announced in March. They are: James Adamopoulos, Springfield Central High School, Gianna Allentuck, Elias Brookings School, Denise Cardona, High School of Science and Technology, Colonel Thomas Cleland, Springfield Central High School, Aurora D'Angelo, M. Marcus Kiley Middle School, Christian Dalessio, Brightwood School, Katie Anne DeMars, M. Marcus Kiley Middle School, Thy Duong, Springfield Central High School, Elizabeth Fazio, William N. DeBerry School, Catherine Florence, Mary M. Walsh School, Tim Garvey, Sumner Avenue School, Lauren Hotz, Springfield Renaissance School, Karen Limero, The High School of Commerce, Catherine Maccini, M. Marcus Kiley Middle School, Meagan Magrath, Springfield Renaissance School, Laverne Mickens, Rebecca Johnson School, Sheree Nolley, Kensington International School, Jeanne Parks, Springfield Central High School, Kathy Paulin, Mary O. Pottenger School, Stephen Pearson, Van Sickle Middle School, Lisa Rahilly, White Street School, Heather Rollins-Chappel, Springfield Public Day Elementary School, Lisa Wetherell, William N. DeBerry School, Kathryn White, Lincoln School, Jennifer Young, John J. Duggan Middle School, Lauren Morency, White Street School.

Dropout rate on the decline

DROPOUT RATE: from Page 1

Warwick credited a number of innovative programs and hard work by staff for the decrease.

"We have deployed a network of strategies all aimed at keeping kids in school, and they work hand in hand," said Warwick.

Referring to the dropout rate as one of the district's "most important measures," Warwick said that the remarkable decline in the dropout rate came on the heels of the district's 4.5 percentage point jump in the graduation rate last year.

Warwick said the district's overall dropout prevention strategy focuses on four key areas: instructional excellence, using data to direct efforts, implementing a strong curriculum that addresses the needs of struggling students in relevant and unique ways, and providing support for struggling students and families.

"This is great news of groundbreaking proportions," said Warwick. "The data makes it clear that we are moving at a rapid pace in the right direction."

Dr. Mary Anne Morris, chief of pupil services, said the schools do not want to only prevent dropouts, but also make sure they go on to thrive and succeed.

"Obviously, we want students to stay and finish high school, but we also want them to pass the MCAS and get a diploma, and also to go on to college or be career-ready," Morris said.

The first order of business is identifying students who are at risk. Truancy is an early indicator of a child at-risk for dropping out, so any problem with truancy is investigated, even at the pre-kindergarten level.

"We try to intervene on Day 1," said Morris, who cited the district's attendance policy that was passed in 2009 as one of the cornerstones to the dropout prevention effort.

Morris said she, Yolanda Johnson, director of student support services, and Warwick, spent "a lot of years peeling back the layers of the onion" when it came to determining the factors that went into a student's decision to drop out.

Middle-school students receive increased attention, since the difficult transition to high school can be a tipping point.

"Middle schools are an area of concern across the country, not just in urban areas," said Morris. "In many cases, they're not coming in with skills they need. So we needed to look at what we're

offering kids at the middle-school levels and really target kids with problems."

Now in its fourth year, the online credit recovery program has been a huge success, with more computer labs available in schools offering the program.

Since September 2012, teachers and counselors at the Student Re-Engagement Center have been tracking down dropouts and helping them "drop back in" to obtain their high school diploma.

The program has served students such as 17-year-old Joshua Pollender-Rivera, who re-enrolled in school this year after leaving the High School of Commerce as an 11th-grader.

"The program made it so much easier for me to pick up where I left off," said Pollender-Rivera, who will receive his high school diploma in June and plans to become an emergency medical technician.

The district's four-year graduation rate took a step back in the latest figures, but it may be just a bump in the road.

"As we get better at keeping kids from dropping out of school, the four-year graduation rate will get better, but like many urban systems we also look at the five-year graduation rate," said Morris.

The schools have also engaged with community partners such as the United Way to get the message out about finishing school.

As with other urban systems, Springfield schools serve a large number of transient

students, further complicating the effort to keep them engaged.

Yolanda Johnson, director of student support services, said there are many obstacles an individual student might have to overcome: work, caring for siblings at home, mental or physical health, or child-care issues for students with children.

"We try to embody all of that in our approach," she said.

Johnson said she and her staff have been "very persistent" when it comes to home visits for students who have dropped out, revisiting students who have declined to come back in the past. "Sometimes circumstances change," she said.

"We're never going to write off a child," she said. "Sometimes it's just as simple as caring. Some students tell me they didn't know someone cared."

Buoyed by the success of the past two years, school officials will redouble their efforts to bring the dropout rate down even further.

"We will continue to be relentless in our work to graduate more students," said Warwick. "We are constantly reviewing data so that we can identify early on strategies that need to be tweaked or strengthened."

Morris said that as dropout prevention programs become second nature and part of the fabric of the district, the numbers will continue to improve incrementally.

Lifeline for Sci-Tech

Mass. Life Sciences Center grant will help train next generation of engineers

By MEAGHAN CASEY

In order to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow, they must have access to the most innovative resources and equipment of today.

That is why Gov. Deval Patrick and the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center (MLSC) announced more than \$3.27 million in grants to support the purchase of life sciences training equipment and supplies for 35 public high schools and training programs throughout Massachusetts. Springfield's High School of Science and Technology was among the grantees. It was awarded \$44,766 to create an advanced electronics lab.

"Continuing to invest in STEM education in our schools will create new jobs and opportunities for the next generation of students and leaders in our economy," said Patrick.

Daniel Radin, a Magnet Resource Teacher at the High School of Science and Technology, said the new lab will be equipped with Arduino, which is an open-source electronics prototyping platform based on flexible, easy-to-use hardware and software. It can sense the environment by receiving

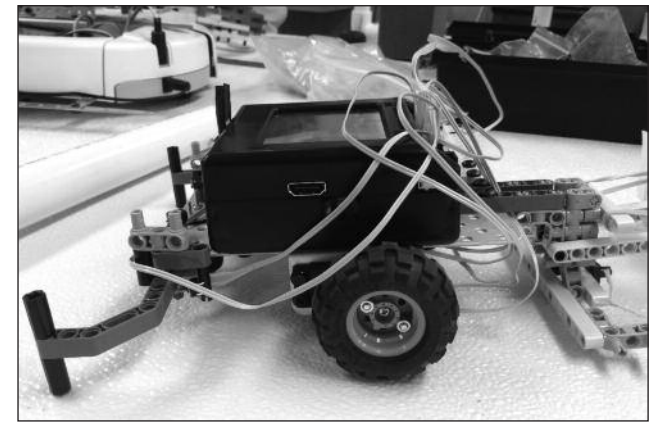
input from a variety of sensors and is ideal for creating interactive objects or environments.

His students have already worked with Arduino and LEGO robots at Western New England University. The university also donated a collection of their Arduino and LEGO kits to the school, which Radin has been able to use in a class he designed last summer called Advanced Engineering and Robotics.

"There's a lot of talk, nationally, about trying to bring computer programming back to our high schools," said Radin. "By having students learn through robotics and Arduino, we're doing that but in a much more engaging way. Whenever we've visited Western New England University in the past, students have come back incredibly enthused and charged up about engineering. That's what we want to see. If we can give them a reason to be excited to come to school, that's already a big win."

Radin also plans to utilize LilyPad Arduino, a microcontroller board designed for wearables and e-textiles. It can be sewn to fabric and similarly mounted power supplies, sensors and actuators with conductive thread.

"So much of this high-tech engineering world appeals to



Students at the High School of Science and Technology designed this robot for the 2014 Botball competition.

our male students, but we want to engage our female students and something like high-tech fashion design might be a way to do that," Radin said.

The lab will be equipped with other state-of-the-art tools, building contraptions and storage materials. Radin is currently designing curriculum for a freshman survey course on engineering, as well as four new electives for upperclassmen: robotics, Arduino, alternative engineering and bio engineering.

The MLSC grant funding builds on the work the high school has already done thanks to two three-year grants, funded in 2007 and again in 2010, from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP). More than \$2.5 million in MSAP funds were used to create state-of-the-art computer, engineering and science labs. The school boasts three engineering labs, a finance trading room supported by MassMutual, forensics labs and technology upgrades in every classroom, including iPad carts, Smart Boards and document cameras.

AROUND SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

MCAS Spirit

Teachers at Dorman Elementary School found a unique way to inspire students for MCAS success this spring and simultaneously took their message on the road.



Assignment combines English, social studies and civics lessons

Students at Lincoln Elementary School recently wrote letters welcoming the incoming police commissioner to his new post. The students talked about what they love about their communities, their concerns and hobbies. They then walked together to the nearest post office to mail the letters.

An uplifting message for every third grader

Third graders throughout the district were recently given the gift of an inspirational

book, "The Gift of You, The Gift of Me," courtesy of author Nila Webster. Diagnosed with lung cancer in 2010, Webster began a campaign to gift her award-winning, uplifting books to third graders. The Springfield donation brings the number of books given out to 20,000.

Webster's children's stories celebrate diversity and tolerance. She is also the author of "Remember Rain and Songs of Wonder for the Night Sea Journey" and "Remember Beauty and Songs for a Blue Time." "I would love the children reading these books to take a sense of comfort and awareness that they can be friends with anybody," Webster said in an interview with the Binghampton Press.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Chorus takes the gold

The chorus at M. Marcus Kiley Middle School earned the gold medal recently at the Great East Festival. Last year, the chorus earned silver at the same competition. Held at Six Flags, the Great East Festivals offer an opportunity for performance in an educational atmosphere. Elementary, middle, and high school music festivals are geared to musical organizations of all sizes, grades and ability levels.

Trip abroad

The pages of history textbooks leapt to life for a group of seventh grade students from Chestnut Accelerated Middle School who recently visited Rome, Pompeii, Olympus, Epidauros, Athens, and the ancient ruins of the Mycenaean. The trip abroad was part of the school's curriculum on the contributions of Greece and Rome to world history.

HIGH SCHOOLS

History and innovation

Students from Early College High School were among those who attended "The City," a conference hosted by Wilbraham & Monson Academy this spring. The conference focused on economic/urban development, the history and innovation of Springfield, the future of global cities, culture and arts, and politics and cities. Students heard from keynote speaker Xiangming Chen of the Center for Urban and Global Studies at Trinity College, who detailed comparisons between bustling Shanghai, Springfield's revitalization potential and Detroit.

Breakout sessions included Richard Walker, senior vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston;

President and Chief Operating Officer of MGM Springfield Michael Mathis, and Mary Steele, who revealed how cities can be transformed through art. Early College High School students participated with Wilbraham & Monson Academy students in a simulation activity that focused on drafting the agreement between the City of Springfield and MGM. The conference ended with a panel comprised of Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse, Springfield Chief of Staff Denise Jordan, and State Senator Gale Candaras.

Band goes international

This year, the marching band at Central High School earned first place at the Invitational Marching Band competition in Rocky Hill, CT. Other performances were held at Gillette Stadium and in Montreal, among other locations.

International executives tour vocational school

In March, representatives of the Changchung Railway Vehicles Co. toured the Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy. The company is considering building a \$30 million factory in Springfield to manufacture cars for the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority. School officials highlighted the school's state-of-the-art vocational programming, cutting-edge

technology and academic curriculum.

SPS students dominate oratory competition

Three Springfield Public Schools students earned prizes at the sixth annual Alpha Phi Alpha Senator Edward Brooke Oratorical Contest. Congratulations to Jose Toledo of The Springfield Renaissance School, Raekwon Wheeler of Central, and Tynayko Melendez of Renaissance, who won first through third place, respectively.

DISTRICTWIDE

Turn the key. Be idle free.

Springfield Public Schools is asking your support and partnership in our efforts to improve the air quality around our schools. An important change adults can make to help make the air our children breathe healthier is to turn off your car engine when you are waiting to pick up or drop off your student. When many vehicles are idling at once, it can produce an area of exhaust pollution. Chemicals from exhaust are harmful for children and can make asthma worse for asthmatics. Reducing idling at schools can reduce children's exposure to toxic vehicle exhaust. Please turn off your engine if you are going to be waiting more than 10 seconds for your student.

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Kiley

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STEM

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Van Sickle

Cheryl DeSpirt, Principal
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6-12 School

Renaissance

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Putnam

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413-787-7424

Sci-Tech

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Springfield Public Day Middle

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Springfield Public Day High

Breon Parker, Acting Principal
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Liberty Prep. Acad.

Michael Ellis, Assistant Principal
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Holyoke Community College
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Gateway to College

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Holyoke Community College
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Gateway to College

Rachel Jones, Director
Springfield Technical Community College
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Matthew Bean, Asst. Principal
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Student Attendance Resource Center

Michael Ellis, Asst. Principal
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413-552-6495



Coach William Shepard led Putnam to a second straight state title.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR CHAMPIONS

- ◆ Central Wrestling — Div. I State Champs
- ◆ Central Girls Basketball — Western Massachusetts Champs
- ◆ Putnam Boys Basketball — Div. I State Champs
- ◆ Putnam Boys Basketball Coach William Shepard — Western Massachusetts Coach of the Year

Learning beyond the bell



Liberty School second-grader Elijah Perez takes a swing at a wiffle ball during the after-school program. PHOTOS: SEAN BROWNE

AFTER-SCHOOL: from Page 16

recreational activities.

On July 1, the Recreation Division's summer enrichment programs kick off and will run through August 1, Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Each school site will offer a different thematic-based program, hands-on activities, field trips and recreation, with breakfast and lunch provided.

At Chestnut Middle School, students will explore the natural world in their own school environment and take field trips to learn about the habitats of meadows, forests and ponds. They will learn to observe and research through music, puppet shows, artwork and nature books.

Fitness and nutrition will be the focus at Duggan Middle School. The program is designed to help children expand their knowledge of health and fitness and explore a variety of physical activities and nutritional options.

At Bowles Elementary, students will explore their artistic side through hands-on projects such as murals and canvas paintings. They will be able to document their summer through art projects.

Another program will explore the ecosystem of Springfield's own environmental treasure, Forest Park. Attending sessions in the park's ECOS building, students will become citizen scientists studying everything from water quality to the community of animals and insects that live in the park. They will be able to take advantage of the park's outdoor recreational activities from swimming to adventure nature walks.

Also taking place this summer is the Springfield Summer Leadership Program at Forest Park Middle School. The program, by invitation only, is a partnership with Springfield College and Becket-Chimney Corners YMCA, empowering youth and teaching them about problem solving, critical thinking, community service and the skills they will need to become leaders in their schools and community. Designed for rising fourth- and fifth-graders, the program will have 70 participants this year.

Other summer recreational opportunities include a tennis camp, soccer academy and a week-long adventure program with kayaking, fishing, hiking, snorkeling and treasure hunts.



Recreation staffer Elise Montes and sixth-grader Ryoki Badea build with Jenga blocks.



Forest Park sixth-grader Alait Desta gets help with her homework from Jen Gregorio.



Liberty School second-grader Vivian Polk swings on the jungle gym during the after-school program.

Learning beyond the bell

After-school, summer programs are extensions of the school day

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Learning doesn't stop when the final bell rings in Springfield—nor does it stop when summer vacation rolls in.

Partnering with the Recreation Division of the Department of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management (DPBRM), Springfield Public Schools offers after-school programs at three elementary schools—Liberty, Lincoln and Pottenger—and three middle schools—Van Sick, Forest Park and Duggan. The programs provide students with a broad array of fun, safe, hands-on educational and recreational opportunities to support what they are learning during the school day.



Forest Park sixth-grader Lillyanna Gomes gets some homework help from Department of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management staff member Felix Covas.

In addition to offering homework help, the after-school programs provide project-based learning opportunities and enrichment experiences ranging from fitness to rocketry. Students participate in a variety of educational games and other small-group learning experiences. The activities are designed to help build children's communication skills, healthy habits and self-confidence they need to succeed in school and in their daily lives.

"It helps them build character, learn English and build the social and emotional skills to have a better relationship with their teachers and peers," said Paula Thayer, director of the after-school programs.

All programs are led by certified teachers and community-based partners. Throughout the year, periodical assessments are made to better meet the needs of individual children and to evaluate the program's effectiveness. This year's session ran four days a week, Oct. 21 through May 8, with more than 400 participants. On May 3, 70 participants visited Becket-Chimney Corners YMCA's Berkshire Outdoor Center for a day filled with leadership training and



Liberty School second-grader Jacob Clark has some fun during the Department of Parks, Buildings and Recreation Management and Springfield Public Schools' after-school program.