



Deren Muñoz and his fellow students at Van Sickle Middle School are part of the International Baccalaureate Programme, along with two other Springfield schools: Kensington International School and the High School of Commerce. Story, Pages 8-9.

## Graduation rate is on the rise

No child starts preschool with a plan to drop out of high school. Recognizing that the road to graduation starts as soon as a child enrolls in the system, Springfield Public Schools is committed to understanding and eliminating the factors that lead to dropping out and making sure the number of students who graduate continues to rise.

According to information released by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Springfield's graduation rate increased from 52.1 percent in 2011 to 56.6 percent in 2012 – a 4.5 percentage point increase as compared to a statewide increase of 1.3 percentage points.

Likewise, the district's dropout rate fell from 11.7 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2012 – a 1.7 percentage point decrease as compared the statewide decrease of two-tenths of a percentage point.

"I am absolutely thrilled by our progress," said Warwick. "Great deals of resources have been invested in helping struggling students who may have quit in the past, now stay in school. It's rewarding to see those efforts taking root and encouraging knowing that our improvement rates outpace the state."

Warwick said the improvements are a result of intensive, sustained efforts to keep students in school until the successful completion grade 12. Programs introduced over the past several years have been designed to focus on steering students to graduation from as early as elementary school with consistent follow-up through the

**See GRADUATION Page 14**

## MCAS scores show progress in Springfield

Springfield Public Schools students' academic improvements in math, science and English Language Arts have exceeded their peers throughout the state, Superintendent of Schools Daniel J. Warwick announced following the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recent release of MCAS data by district.

"This is a great day marking the forward momentum of Springfield Public Schools," said Warwick. "Our students have been working hard and we should all be proud of their achievements. I am certainly proud of them and of their teachers."

The improvements are based on DESE's reported Composite Performance Index, a number that measures how well a school or district is progressing toward 100-percent proficiency for all students.

Results shared by the state revealed Springfield's significant gains in math, science and English Language Arts (ELA). Impressive by themselves, those gains are made even more striking when compared to the state average.

Consider: From 2012 to 2013, Springfield Public Schools gained 2.2 points in science, compared to the state's average of just 0.4 points.

In the subject of math, Springfield students gained 2.0 points while the state average was 0.9 points.

In English Language Arts, they gained 0.6 points compared to the state average of 0.1 points.

"Our kids simply hit the ball out of the park," said Warwick. Adding to the overall success of the school district are the improvement levels achieved by several student populations.

English Language Learners (ELL), for example, made gains that are as much as three times higher than the state averages.

**See MCAS Page 11**



# Getting closer to goal of equity for all students

As we begin this school year, I am excited and encouraged because our school district is moving in a positive direction. The Springfield Promise of equity and proficiency for all of our students is a goal that I believe



DANIEL WARWICK

we are closer to reaching than most people realize.

This was the message I shared with approximately 4,000 members of the Springfield Public Schools faculty and staff during a convocation

ceremony that occurred the Friday before the first day of school. I was pleased to have the opportunity to highlight for our educators the results of their dedication and hard work.

Our MCAS scores are up in almost every area. Student attendance rates are also going up. Truancy is going down. The improvement in our graduation rate last year was three times that of the state average. This summer, our district experienced one of the best summer school graduations we have ever had.

In addition to those positive developments, our district recently settled a ground-breaking teachers' contract and we have either settled or are very close to settling contracts with all of our other major collective bargaining units. We have formulated the district's priorities for the next five years as defined in The Springfield Promise Strategic Plan. We have forged a partnership with Harvard University's Education Laboratory. The renovated Forest Park School opened this year. And we continue to rise from the devastation caused by the June 1 tornadoes of 2011, with the renovation of Dryden School and ground-breaking for a new Brookings School.



Massachusetts Secretary of Education Matthew Malone, left, and Superintendent Daniel Warwick speak at the convocation, which was held in the auditorium at Van Sickle/Renaissance and broadcast live throughout the district.



Certainly, this news on its own is affirming and uplifting. But the message delivered by Secretary of Education Matthew Malone during the convocation ceremony was all the more exciting. As keynote speaker, Secretary Malone shared a fresh perspective; one that could only be observed from someone with his vantage point; one which made us all swell with pride.

Malone explained Springfield's recognition as a school district whose work has been recognized and touted throughout the state.

"People point to Springfield when they are looking for a model of success," he said.

Specifically, Secretary Malone pointed to

our outstanding record for bringing teachers and administrators together to make decisions that are based on the best interest of students.

He told us of the impact, which our "College, YES!" campaign had on educators across the state; he talked about our focus on early education, academic rigor and college/career initiatives.

"There is important and noble work going on in Springfield," Malone said during his keynote address.

Certainly, the secretary's message was not lost on me. It is a privilege and honor to serve as Superintendent of Springfield Public Schools. While I know we still have much

work to do to realize "The Springfield Promise," I see our progress and accomplishments every day in many ways.

I hope our hard working teachers and principals; students and parents; and education supporters throughout the community recognize and appreciate that progress also.

For more on The Springfield Promise, please visit [www.sps.springfield.ma.us](http://www.sps.springfield.ma.us)

*Daniel Warwick is superintendent of schools.*

*Reprinted from The Republican.*



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## Teachers, district happy with contract

After 18 months of negotiations, Springfield teachers signed a new, four-year contract that increases their salary, adds more opportunities for professional development and provides incentives for good attendance.

"We're just thrilled with this contract, which is fair and beneficial for both labor and management," said Superintendent of Springfield Public Schools Daniel J. Warwick. "I'm especially pleased about what the raise in pay will mean for our deserving teachers and their families and also about what the improved salaries will mean for our students – that the district can better compete to retain great teachers and attract new ones."

Under the new agreement, approved in May, a salary schedule has been set up to increase teacher pay over the next four years – the percentage of which varies based on the step and level of each teacher, factoring in educational degrees and licenses. Some teachers who are on the new salary scale will see an annual increase of \$7,000 to \$9,000 and that

salary scale includes a 1.5-percent increase in the second year of the contract. Teachers whose status does not place them on the scale will receive a 2.25-percent increase in the first year of the contract and a 1.5-percent increase in the second year. All educators will see a two-percent increase in their pay in the third and fourth years of the contract.

"There is still more work to be done, but overall I am pleased and I very much appreciate the efforts of the School Committee to increase our salary so that we can better compete with surrounding communities," said Springfield Education Association (SEA) President Timothy Collins.

Collins and Warwick said the multi-year contract lends the school district a level of stability and budget predictability that it has not had for many years. "It's a big win for us," said Warwick.

Teachers voted in favor of the contract with a more than 75 percent majority.

In addition to the wage increase, the contract also adds three more working

days to teachers' school year, which will be used for professional development. Currently, professional development sessions are added to existing work days, requiring teachers to stay after school.

Instructional leadership specialists will be required to work 10 extra days per school year, providing them with greater opportunities to assess and critique teacher effectiveness, curriculum and student performance.

Admitting that the negotiating process was long and arduous at times, Warwick and Collins both agreed that the result is a fitting conclusion for a school district that has earned a national reputation for labor-management collaboration.

"Every step of the way we operated from a team-based approach," said Warwick. "We remained focused on our shared interests and worked hard to fairly navigate our differences."

Warwick said the district has either reached or is close to reaching a contract agreement with all of the other major bargaining units.



# Room service

## Students reaping benefits of having breakfast at their desks

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Equipped with food in one hand and pencils in the other, students at 11 of the district's schools are starting their days full, focused and ready to learn.

The approach is simple. Through the Breakfast in the Classroom program, Sodexo, the district's nutrition provider, delivers free, nutritious breakfast directly to students. Gathering in their classroom before or right after the bell, students enjoy well-balanced foods such as low-sugar cereals, fresh muffins, pancakes and waffle sticks, yogurt, low-fat milk and fruit. They are required to take at least three of the four components, ensuring they have a balanced meal of protein, fiber and dairy. They eat while their teacher takes attendance, collects homework or teaches a short lesson plan, and then the school day continues.

"Research shows that kids don't always want to go to the cafeteria, so we want to meet them where they are," said Dara Levy, Sodexo School Services district dietician.

The program was piloted in 2011-12 at German Gerena Community School and White Street School and expanded to Brookings School later that year. Last year, Duggan Middle and Brunton and Walsh elementary schools were added. This year, the program will expand to: Balliet, Bradley, Brightwood, Ells and Liberty elementary schools.

"The biggest advantage is we're ensuring all of our students are eating," said Gerena Principal Diane Gagnon. "Before, students were skipping breakfast in the cafeteria because they were afraid of being late. They're also not heading down to the nurse's office first thing in the morning, hungry, with upset stomachs."

The program has helped to increase classroom performance and students' ability to concentrate; yield better test scores and grades; increase attendance rates; and decrease disciplinary issues, tardiness and visits to the nurse. "It calms the morning down, and it's a better day when students are engaged, better behaved and on target from the start," said Levy.



Zianali Hernandez gets her milk at school.



Sabrina Thoma, left and Mariangely Zayas enjoy breakfast at Gerena School.



From left, Ivanel Maisonet, Jonathan Lopez, Sebastian Marini and Kevin Toledo are focused on having a good breakfast.



# Teachers of Excellence



The Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching award acknowledges an educator's high degree of professionalism, subject knowledge, effectiveness, creativity, student impact and support for colleagues. The 2013 recipients from Springfield Public Schools: Christina O'Connor, Balliet; Joette St. George, Brightwood; Anne Marie Bettencourt; Travis Reed, Central; Cathy Denno, Dorman; Laurie Ellis, Dorman; Audrey Sienkiewicz, Dryden; Sheryl Hall, Ells; Kelsey Bishop, Gerena; Emily Huntington, Glickman; Tim Losee, Kennedy; Nathan Orie, Kennedy; Jillian Abdow, Lincoln; Denise Greenberg, Pottenger; Sage Lteif, South End; April Wesley, Springfield Public Day High; Martha Manzi, Districtwide Instructional Leader for Science; Katie Bevan, Sumner Avenue; Katie Strong, Sumner; Robert Jones, Springfield Renaissance; Deidre Cuffee Gray, Springfield Renaissance; Lynn Beglane, Talmadge; Maryann Sullivan, Walsh; Nicole Howell (New Teacher Award), Washington; Mariel Vazquez, White Street; Diane Zamar, White Street.

## Minority recruitment a priority in SPS

BY KEVIN DOYLE

Like urban school districts nation-wide, Springfield faces a shortage of minority teachers. An overwhelmingly minority student body of 86.5 percent is being taught by a predominantly white staff (79 percent). Despite that inequity, Springfield ranks high in Massachusetts, well ahead of Worcester, the most comparable district.

During the past two academic years, six of 14 principals and nine of 24 assistant principals hired in Springfield were minorities. Ninety minority teachers were hired and the makeup of the district's Cabinet grew to 38 percent minority participation. This year, two of five new principal appointments and six of 16 new assistant principal assignments were minorities.

Still, long-range forecasting by the National Education Association (NEA) is grim, predicting a growing minority student body (approaching 40 percent) will be taught almost exclusively by white instructors (95 percent).

According to the NEA, low salaries in comparison to other professions "lowers the prestige and social value of a career in teaching for many potential minority teachers." Consequently, the

NEA noted that "minority students find more career opportunities outside of teaching." Additionally, the NEA reported that the decline of Black and Hispanic students majoring in education is steeper than the overall decline in education majors; and that minority teachers leave the profession more often than white teachers do.

Springfield is taking a proactive approach to address the imbalance.

"We needed to improve our hiring time line. Our teacher contract requires internal transfer before we hire from the outside. We collaborated with the teacher's union to move that process up earlier in the year. We were losing highly-qualified candidates because we were too late in the process and they'd been hired elsewhere," said Melissa Shea, Chief of Human Resources.

Shea, a lawyer, brings a background in labor relations and knowledge of education, employment and labor law to this position. The School Department was a client while she was in private practice.

A new collective bargaining agreement with increased salaries and additional financial incentives should help attract and retain minority teachers. And, Shea said, school culture throughout the district is being addressed in an attempt to create a more positive teaching and learning environment.

For the past year, the sole focus of HR Administrator Lucy Perez has been recruitment and retention. Perez grew up in the Pioneer Valley and has worked for the school system since 2005.

"Springfield has a lot to offer and there are some great things happening here. Thanks to the funding sources we've been able to avail ourselves of our professional development component is Number One in Massachusetts," Perez said. "We have partnerships with area colleges and universities so our teachers can take advantage of advanced educational opportunities. And

we have a new teacher orientation program a week before school opens. It's a full week of professional development that gets them started before they have their students in front of them."

Additionally, the Springfield Effective Educator Development System (SEEDS) is an analysis tool designed to help teachers grow and flourish. Springfield also offers its own continuing education programs for teachers. For example, the Moderate Disabilities Competency Program allows teachers to become licensed in Special Education. Massachusetts Teacher Education License (MTEL) preparation courses are offered and a district-based licensure program provides support and course work for teacher advancement.

Perez has left no avenue untraveled in her recruitment efforts. She has visited traditionally black colleges such as Howard University and the University of Wilmington (NC) and Ivy League institutions including Harvard and Columbia; attended conferences (ALANA, National Association for Bilingual Education Conference, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Conference), engaged in Social Media, and advertised in minority web and print media outlets.

"I've engaged in a lot of outreach to organizations that serve teachers of color and under-represented groups. I've also reached out to faith-based organizations and organizations that serve minority educators. We're casting a broader net to let people know the employment opportunities that are available," Perez said.

She is resolute in her belief this approach is working and the data in comparison to Worcester in particular and the state as a whole backs her up.

"We need great teachers and folks that can relate to our students, can inspire them, can get them through the system and to aspire to great jobs in the future," Perez said.





Principal Kristen Hughes enjoys spending time with students at White Street Elementary School.

# Principal is on a mission at White Street

## Hughes determined to raise student achievement

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

As first-year principal of White Street Elementary School, Kristen Hughes has made a bold, unwavering commitment.

"I won't quit until we're one of the highest performing schools in the district," she said. "We are going to move this school forward and make it a place people are talking about for all the right reasons. There's not a person in the building who doesn't want our students to achieve and that excites me."

White Street is one of the district's Level 4 schools, standing in immediate need of improvement. Hughes hopes to have the same success she had at Lincoln Elementary School, which was designated a Level 3 school when she assumed leadership in 2010. Just two years later, in 2012, Lincoln was identified as a Level 1 school.

"We were able to increase achievement at all levels, particularly ESL," said Hughes. "I want to move White Street in the same direction."

To begin with, Hughes has established a culture of the highest expectations for every student. She has rearranged and departmentalized the fourth- and fifth-grade classes, which is something she also did at Lincoln, and she has recruited experienced staff members to coach new teachers. Her main areas of focus for her students and staff are:

establishing routines and procedures to minimize interruptions; mastering academic objectives; being explicit in instruction; and creating a safe school environment.

White Street will also join Chestnut, Kennedy and Kiley middle schools, the High School of Commerce and DeBerry Elementary School in a program that uses strategies and best practices from successful elementary and secondary schools across the nation. Five strategies have been identified by Harvard University's Education Innovation Laboratory (EdLabs), the district's partner in this program. Those strategies include:

- ♦ An effective principal and effective teachers
- ♦ More instructional time
- ♦ Use of data to drive instruction
- ♦ In-school tutoring
- ♦ A culture of high expectations

EdLabs, an education research and development laboratory devoted to closing the achievement gap, has had success helping schools in Houston and Denver to improve student performance. In both cities, student performance improved dramatically in math and reading. In Springfield, the schools will focus on intensive science, math and reading curriculums. The programs will include small-group tutoring sessions for students and revised teaching and learning strategies, among others initiatives. The process begins with an evaluation of each school's current tools, resources and practices.

Also recognizing the importance of family involvement in a child's success, Hughes has taken a direct approach in reaching out to parents, starting with a meet-and-greet event

in August.

"I outlined my commitments and I asked them to make their own – making sure their children are in school every day and making sure they're getting their homework done at home," said Hughes.

She also asked families to be proactive in attending school meetings and reaching out with their ideas and questions.

"I want to hear everything," said Hughes. "I'm a problem solver, but if I don't know what the problem is, I can't fix it."

Hughes began her teaching career at Pottenger Elementary School in 1997. She remained there for six years before accepting the position as instructional leadership specialist, first at Milton Bradley Elementary School and then at the district level.

"I love the urban setting," she said. "I wanted the challenge and I've always wanted to be with students who truly need me. I'm in this field so that children can reach high levels of achievement and come out as the leaders in this community."

Born and raised in Springfield, Hughes spent her elementary- and middle-school years in the Springfield Public Schools. She went on to Wheelock College to study child therapy, but quickly changed her major to education.

"I always wanted to work with children," said Hughes. "Originally I was thinking more of a hospital or clinical setting, but the very first day I stepped into a classroom, I knew I found my home."

The district is fortunate that home has been in Springfield.



## ALUMNI PROFILE: ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ-ROSS

# Career in law provides order in the life of Commerce grad

BY KEVIN DOYLE

In retrospect, it seems natural that Springfield native Elizabeth Rodriguez-Ross, a 1989 High School of Commerce graduate, became an attorney. After all, even as a child, she said her aunts called her the lawyer of the family.

A decade removed from high school, and with two young children, Rodriguez-Ross took a leap of faith by enrolling at prestigious Mt. Holyoke College under the Frances Perkins Program, developed especially for women of non-traditional age seeking to complete their bachelor of arts degree. She graduated in 2004, then earned her law degree from the Western New England University School of Law three years later.

"I was a property manager for 10 years, making great money, but I was bored. I had two daughters and I wanted to be in the position to have the flexibility to provide for them and to give them something to look up to," Rodriguez-Ross said.

She is a partner in the Springfield firm of Ramos, Robinson & Rodriguez-Ross, LLC, established in December 2010. She and Tom Robinson began as public defenders in Springfield District Court and were both later promoted to Superior Court.

"We realized we made a pretty decent team and it made sense to leave together. I had met Nancy (Ramos) years before. Vanessa Martinez (also a Springfield native) is our newest member. The three women are all Puerto Rican, so we share that. And we all share a passion for protecting the rights of our clients. We're striving to become the go-to firm in Springfield and our mission is to provide the best representation to our clients that we possibly can," said Rodriguez-Ross.

She first got a glimpse of the legal system's inner workings when, as a Commerce junior, she did an internship for a firm at which David Hoose, one of the country's most well-regarded criminal defense attorneys, was a partner.

"It was my first opportunity with an office job as a file clerk. I worked with some really amazing lawyers, like David Hoose. It was a great experience for me. I was with other Latino women who were professionals in the field. They really gave me a look at something else in life," Rodriguez-Ross recalled.

Years later, "I realized that, at some point, I needed to do something. There were a number of high profile death penalty cases that took place in the 1980s and I remembered seeing David Hoose's passion. That lit the flame in me," Rodriguez-Ross said.

Commerce also provided Rodriguez-Ross a slice of life beyond Springfield.



"YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOALS DESPITE THE SETBACKS. YOU HAVE TO FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU WANT AND BELIEVE YOU CAN DO IT."

ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ-ROSS  
HIGH SCHOOL OF COMMERCE '89



Attorney Elizabeth Rodriguez-Ross with her family, from left, daughter Karinna, son Moses, husband Daniel and daughter Natasha.

"I was a member of the show choir and in 1989 we were invited to participate in the bicentennial festival in France. My parents are both natives of Puerto Rico, so I had never been anywhere but there. It was my first time away from home, my first time staying in a hotel and my first time being on a plane for so long. There were a lot of firsts for all of us. It was an amazing experience," she said.

Commerce's partnership with Springfield Technical Community College enabled Rodriguez-Ross to take her first college prep courses in accounting at STCC.

Rodriguez-Ross said growing up in a poor neighborhood at a time of racial inequality nurtured her curiosity in the law.

"There were drugs, gangs and violence all around us. My parents both worked in factories. I don't know how they did it but we were the only house on the block with a yard," Rodriguez-Ross said.

Her message for youth is straightforward: "You can accomplish your goals despite the setbacks. You have to fight for what you want and believe you can do it. You have to learn from failure and you have to be willing to be patient. I had my first child when I was 18. Life can get in the way and put enormous barriers in front of you, so you have to believe in yourself — be strong, be patient and be zealous."

As the firm gains traction, Rodriguez-Ross envisions becoming deeply involved within the community. Coming full circle, she is hopeful of establishing a high school internship program in the fall of 2014.

As a professional, Rodriguez-Ross was involved in helping to formulate and implement the Volunteers for Justice program that assists individuals without the means to afford an attorney. A year spent as city solicitor in Holyoke made her realize how much she loves the law (she specializes in criminal defense and landlord/tenant law) and dislikes politics.

Away from the job, she still sings, having performed with a local band since 1996. She and her husband, Daniel, have three children: two daughters, Natasha and Karinna, and a son, Moses.

"Personally, I'm a happy person. I love my work, I love my family and I love seeing my kids prosper," she said.



# Parents are partners at Dorman

## Engagement efforts are paying big dividends

By KEVIN DOYLE

Validation that efforts to engage parents and engender their trust while strengthening the climate and culture at the Hiram L. Dorman Elementary School were working came midway through the 2012-13 school year when 94 percent of parents either attended the school's first report card distribution night, or arranged to come in at another time to pick up their child's report card.

"I was absolutely shocked, the parents were thrilled, and the teachers were really, really happy," said Principal Rhonda Stowell-Lewis, a veteran educator of 20 years now in her fifth year at Dorman. "It's the first time we did it. We sent out a letter inviting parents to come in and set up a two and one-half hour block for them to talk to teachers. If they weren't able to, the teachers came in early or stayed after school to meet with them.

"It was just a nice way to have a conversation to let parents know how their child was doing. It was a nice way to say to parents your child has strengths and these are the things we can work on together to make them even better. We utilized the parents as partners," she added.

Such a scenario wouldn't have played out when Stowell-Lewis first arrived at Dorman.

"There was a disconnect and part of the problem was that there had been a lot of different administrators in a short period of time. People had done some good things but weren't there long enough to see them through. There wasn't a true investment in the school. We had to look at ourself and it was eye-opening and a little sad. We hadn't connected the way we should have," Stowell-Lewis said.

Dorman, though, has emerged as a shining example in the system-wide initiative and works closely with the Parents and Community Engagement (PACE) office to fast-track state criteria and self-evaluation guidelines for teachers and schools.

The Springfield Housing Authority has proven a powerful ally, playing a lead role in implementing the nationally-recognized Talk/Read/Succeed! early literacy summer program, funded primarily by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The vast majority of Dorman's nearly 300 students live in the SHA's Robinson Garden housing community. Talk/Read/Succeed! is designed to help children achieve grade level reading proficiency at an early age.

"We needed help fast and we were fortunate to partner with the Housing Authority. With Talk/Read/Succeed! they looked at the big picture. They had resources to help parents and it really made a huge change. They weren't an association with negative connotations; they were genuinely there to help," Stowell-Lewis said.

"Talk/Read/Succeed! is really like a summer camp. We open up the school, the families come in and it has helped change the culture so quickly," she added. A component of Talk/Read/Succeed! is Dorman's partnership with the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.

The Home Visit Project, funded by the Springfield Collaboration for Change, is another successful initiative.

"It trains teachers to go out to homes to talk to parents. They just talk. They have no agenda and no clipboards — it's 'Let's get to know each other.' We had 45 families the first year. This (past) year we had literacy nights for families where they all received books and new pieces of literature. We're just thrilled with the outcome," Stowell-Lewis said.

Additionally, a full-time Behavioral Health Network (BHN) therapist is on staff at Dorman and also works in the housing community. "When she's not servicing the children she's working with the parents, further establishing the trust relationship," Stowell-Lewis said.

Another indicator of culture change at Dorman? Three years ago, 64 students were suspended during the course of the year. That number shrank to 11 last year.

Clearly, the dynamic has shifted.

"Five years down the road, my hope is that we're a high-performing school. The culture of the school is changing and if there is a strong culture in place, it doesn't matter who the principal is — the work will continue," Stowell-Lewis said.



From bottom of stairs, Parent Facilitator Yvette Brown, students Joseph Amaro, Kolsen Coughlin, Aamina Jones, Ezekiel Feliberty, Yasandra Feliberty, Olivia Brochu, Idona Dulude, Omar Martinez and Lenia Belnavis. Principal Rhonda Stowell-Lewis is at left.



# International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme

## IB academic pipeline flows in all levels of education

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, offered to more than one million students in 144 countries, demands the best from motivated students and teachers.

In Springfield, where the IB Programme is available at Kensington International School, Van Sickle Middle and the High School of Commerce, hundreds of students and teachers are among that elite and motivated group.

The district was the first in the state, more than a decade ago, to offer IB education in a public school, and it continues to be one of the very few districts in the country with authorized IB schools at each level. It received federal grant funding through the Magnet Schools Assistance program in 1998 to establish an IB Diploma Programme at Commerce. The school was officially authorized as an IB diploma school in 2001, following intensive training. The Diploma Programme is an academically challenging program for highly motivated high school students, preparing them for success in college and beyond. At the completion of the program, students are assessed through oral exercises in language subjects, projects, student portfolios, class presentations, practical laboratory work, mathematical investigations and artistic performances. To ensure the greatest degree of objectivity and reliability, the students' grades are then reevaluated by the IB Organization.

"It's served students well in terms of college readiness and making them more aware of global issues and the consequences of their actions," said Linda Terrinca, IB coordinator and teacher at Commerce.

The IB Middle Years Programme, offered at Van Sickle since 2008, provides a framework of academic challenge that encourages students to embrace and understand the connections between traditional subjects and the real world and become critical and reflective

thinkers.

"By adding the Middle Years, it was our goal to create a seamless IB pipeline," said Van Sickle Principal Cheryl DeSpirt.

Students at Van Sickle are required to study their native language, a second language, humanities, sciences, mathematics, arts, physical education and technology. They have participated in webinars with their IB peers from around the world and have had opportunities to participate in podcasts and Skype across continents, develop digital portfolios of their learning experiences and graduate well positioned to take advantage of advanced communication tools and rigorous academic courses — both Advanced Placement and IB — in high school. Students have also participated in virtual classroom experiences and a project in which they sent artwork to students in Hungary, and received artwork in return.

"It gives us an overarching philosophy and umbrella under which all our academic life flows," said DeSpirt. "Students are using 21st century skills and they're extending their learning beyond the four walls of the classroom."

Kensington International School, authorized as an IB school in 2006, is proud to be one of the few elementary schools in the country to offer the IB Primary Years Programme, 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 and teachers work to incorporate an international focus into daily lessons.

"It's wonderful for students to start taking responsibility for their learning at a young age, becoming culturally aware, caring citizens of the world," said Kensington Principal Margaret Thompson. "The inquiry model is the best way for them to learn."



1. Kiaralis Maldonado and Karina Rivera enjoy their IB class at Van Sickle Middle School. 2. Commerce student Natanael Velez displays his painting at IB Art Night. 3. Nigel LaFlamme is at work in an IB history class at the High School of Commerce. 4. From left, Karen Son, Breyanna Jones and Alexandra Santiago use technology in their IB history class at Commerce. 5. Leslie Key displays her artwork at Commerce. 6. Principal Cheryl DeSpirt works with student Raymond Perkins at Van Sickle Middle School. 7. Kensington student Sadika Abdi types an essay about roses. 8. Kensington Elementary students present their work about gardens. 9. Van Sickle student Brandon Lagasse plays the flute. 10. Adegoriola Thomas displays his artwork at Commerce.



# HOLINES ANSWERS THE DIV. 1 CALL

Commerce star on full scholarship with help from coach

BY RICH FAHEY

The opportunity was out there for High School of Commerce football coach Tyrone Mathis, shimmering in the distance.

But when he went and tried to reach for that brass ring, he missed.

He determined that the same thing wouldn't happen to Sha-Ki Holines.

Mathis, like Holines, came to football later in life. He didn't play football until grade 11, but as a defensive lineman he led Albany (N.Y.) High to the state playoffs in football in 1996, catching the eye of Div. 1 college coaches. Since Mathis couldn't meet the academic standards for Div. 1, he attended Div. 2 American International College instead, and began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at the school in 2002.

AIC head coach Art Wilkins recognized that Mathis had "the hunger and thirst to coach" and said he showed almost immediately he had the ability to lead young men. "He'll give you the tough love and kick your butt when it needs to be kicked."

When Holines signed a letter-of-intent to play Div. I football at UConn, it was the culmination of a process that began when he was a student at Kennedy Middle School, before he had ever played a down of football or met Mathis, who was working at the school at the time.

Mathis, who was a friend of Nicole Coakley, Holines' older sister, was coaching at Commerce by the time it came for Holines to choose a high school. The coach lobbied Nicole and Margie Coakley, Holines' mother, for the chance to work with him on the football field.

Together, they helped turn the Commerce program from an also-ran into a playoff and Super Bowl contender. And with Mathis' mentoring and coaching, Holines became an All-State football player who was able to take advantage of the scholarship opportunity by meeting the standards required by the NCAA to accept a Div. I scholarship.

"His family — his mother and sister — are his support network and the backbone of his success," said Mathis. "They handled him properly. They gave him the food, clothing and support he needed to succeed."



Sha-Ki Holines, flanked by his coach, Tyrone Mathis, and his mother, Margie Coakley, at his letter-of-intent signing ceremony. He has since transferred to UMass, where he enrolled Sept. 23.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE REPUBLICAN

Mathis' first Commerce team in 2008 went winless, but Holines came on the varsity in 2009 as a tight end and defensive lineman and the program steadily gained steam. In 2011, Commerce made it all the way to the Div. 2 Western Mass Super Bowl, losing to Putnam, and in 2012 the Red Raiders made it to the playoffs again, losing in the Div. 2 semifinals to South Hadley.

In 2012, the 6-4, 250-pound recruit had declared his intent to attend UMass but eventually de-committed and signed with UConn in front of fellow students at an academic recognition assembly.

"I'm excited. I feel accomplished," Holines said at the signing, noting his decision came down to UConn, UMass and Boston College.

"It took a lot of hard work, but he received a scholarship worth more than \$200,000," Mathis said. "He's going to be playing on TV."

This fall, Holines changed his mind again and transferred to UMass. Per NCAA recruiting rules, Holines will have to sit out this year, but he enrolled at UMass on Sept. 23 and began practicing with the team the next day.

He will still have four years of eligibility remaining, and this season will count as his redshirt year. It is currently unclear whether Holines' scholarship will count toward the 2013 or 2014 class.

As a Commerce senior playing

linebacker and defensive line, Holines had five sacks, and 29 of his 80 tackles resulted in lost yardage. He forced four fumbles, recovered three and made one interception. As a tight end, he caught 13 passes for 262 yards and one touchdown. He also played fullback and was named to the Super 26 All-State team.

Mathis said the entire school celebrated Holines' success because it showed what talent combined with hard work could accomplish. He added that the teachers at the school played a significant role in Holines' success by making sure he did the work required of him.

"I think some of them didn't know he was an athlete and didn't care," he said. "No one gave him a pass."

Mathis said the road to success for student-athletes is really fairly simple. It involves taking care of what they have to do in the classroom and off the field.

"You handle the grades," he said. "I'll handle the football."

After Holines received an MVP award at a development camp as a freshman, Mathis told him he might be able to make a living playing football some day.

"That's when I got serious about football," Holines said.

"He believes in himself," said Mathis. "He took the information I gave him and put his dream in motion. Now he's on the way to a great degree."



"IT TOOK A LOT OF HARD WORK, BUT HE RECEIVED A SCHOLARSHIP WORTH MORE THAN \$200,000. HE'S GOING TO BE PLAYING ON TV."

HIGH SCHOOL OF COMMERCE FOOTBALL COACH TYRONE MATHIS, LEFT, ON SHA-KI HOLINES



# Students urged to **Stay in School**

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Springfield Public Schools has a simple demand of its students: show up, every day.

In March, educators, students, parents and business leaders gathered to launch a major community initiative, Stay in School, designed to encourage students to attend school daily and earn a high school diploma.

"Research shows good attendance is a predictor of high school success and ultimately graduation," said Superintendent Daniel Warwick. "We not only want to graduate our kids, but we want them to get to college. We need to do more and it's up to the staff, parents and the community to make that difference."

The campaign has been spearheaded by SPS and the United Way of Pioneer Valley and supported by dozens of organizations.

"Intelligence, plus character – that is the goal of true education. We know to achieve this goal we must have our children present and ready to learn," said Dora Robinson, President and CEO of United Way of Pioneer Valley. "It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a village to graduate a student from high school."

The message hits close to home for some parents who may not followed the path to graduation themselves, but who want better futures for their children.

"Growing up, I never really understood the value of a high school diploma," said Adelaida Ortiz, who dropped out of high school and had difficulties finding work to support her family. "As I struggled, I found myself wishing my kids wouldn't make the same mistakes I did."

Ortiz, who is a parent of three children enrolled in the district, eventually obtained her GED and is now studying at Springfield Technical Community College to be a kindergarten teacher.

"Now I understand a diploma is more than just a piece of paper with your name and signature," she said. "It's an essential accomplishment that leads to a better life."

Springfield's four-year high school graduation rate increased from 52.1 percent in 2011 to 56.6 percent in 2012, but officials want that momentum to grow. The goal of the Stay in School initiative is to increase the graduation rate to 77.4 percent by the year 2015.



Arianna Williams, last year's student representative to the School Committee.



Adelaida Ortiz, mother of three Springfield students, and Mayor Domenic Sarno.

## MCAS scores show progress in Springfield

MCAS: from Page 1

In math, Springfield's ELL population made a gain of 3.4 points compared to the state's 1.3 points. ELA gains by ELL students were 3.3 points, while state improvement was flat in this area. In science, Springfield's ELL students gained 3.4 points compared to 0.8 for the state.

"These results are remarkable because these students are not only learning academic material, they are simultaneously learning English," said Warwick. "I am absolutely thrilled by their progress."

Springfield Public Schools students with disabilities also experienced significant gains. In math, for example, that student population gained 1.7 points compared to 0.5 statewide. In science, Springfield students with disabilities gained 2.4 percentage points compared to a 1.1 point gain for the state.

Warwick pointed out that English Language Learners and students with disabilities — including, but not limited to learning and physical disabilities — are not the district's only students who face unique challenges.

Of all Massachusetts school districts, only Chelsea Public Schools has a higher percentage of students who come from low-income households than Springfield. Therefore, Springfield Public Schools must often address unique, poverty-related issues that can range from social/emotional, behavioral, health/wellness and others in order to clear a pathway for effective teaching and learning.

"Our students are proving what we've believed all along. We know that if we expect more from our students and provide

them with systems of support, they will deliver," said Warwick. "We've expected more of them, but given them the right to expect more from us. Both sides are working hard to hold up their end of the bargain."

Warwick recognized that while the district outpaced the state in the area of MCAS improvement, there is still much work ahead to bring the district in line with the state's overall MCAS performance.

"We have a relentless focus and commitment to improvement," Warwick said, pointing to additional recent achievements.

Some of those include:

- Attendance has risen from a rate of 90.4 in 2010 to 92.2 this year, while truancy has decreased from 5.4 percent in 2010 to 3.8 percent this year.
- Suspensions are also on the decline: In-school suspensions fell 20.2 percent this year; and out-of-school suspensions dropped 16 percent.
- Student arrests are on the steady decline dropping 37.4 percent this year.
- Reported bullying incidents have fallen 9.2 percent this year.
- The 2012 graduation rate increased by more than three times the state's average increase.
- The district settled a groundbreaking, multi-year teacher's contract this year.
- With input from the community, staff, students and parents, Warwick formulated the district's priorities for the next five years as defined in the Springfield Promise Strategic Plan (available at [www.sps.springfield.ma.us](http://www.sps.springfield.ma.us)).

- This summer, the district forged a partnership with Harvard University's Education Laboratories.
- This year marks the renovation of Forest Park Middle School and Dryden School.
- Ground has been broken for a new Brookings School and a new science wing at Central High School.
- The district has invested \$2 million in building upgrades.
- This summer, SPS opened a new Parent and Community Engagement Center.

In September, DESE announced that three Springfield Level 4 schools have exited that status. Zanetti catapulted from Level 4 to Level 1 while Gerena and Homer schools went from Level 4 to Level 3.

DESE announced that the High School of Science and Technology and Milton Bradley Elementary School, formerly Level 3 schools, will now have the opportunity for intense support as Level 4 schools.

"We are anxious to get started," Warwick said of the state's recognition of the need for additional support for these schools to realize rapid, significant improvements in student achievement.

Other changes in status for Springfield Public Schools include: Beal School improving from Level 2 to 1; Freedman School improving from Level 3 to 1; Glenwood School improving from Level 3 to 2; and Harris School improving from Level 3 to 2. Brunton School, formerly a Level 2 school, received a Level 3 status.

"We have reached an important milestone that deserves to be celebrated, but we know more work is needed before we can say that our school district has turned around," said Warwick.



# AROUND SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Elementary School

**Margaret Ells** and **Alice Beal** elementary schools each received the national USDA Healthier US Bronze School Award, placing them among a select group of only five percent of schools throughout the nation that are certified as Healthier US Schools.

The Healthier US School Challenge is a key component in First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move!" campaign recognizing schools that have created healthier environments across the board.

To promote a healthy lifestyle, both schools have implemented a thorough nutrition and physical education curriculum, as well as provided more opportunities for physical activity. Joined by the Springfield Public Schools nutrition partner Sodexo, the schools have also improved the quality of the foods served for breakfast and lunch.

The Western Massachusetts Counselors Association has awarded **Beal School Adjustment Counselor Sandra Collins** with the 2013 Counselor of the Year Award. The award recognizes an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the field of school counseling.

Springfield School Volunteers has awarded **William N. DeBerry Elementary School teacher Sharon DaSilva** with the 2013 Anne M. Dill Volunteer's Choice. The award is given to a school employee who makes the volunteer experience special.

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Program has awarded **Brightwood Elementary School** its prestigious national award in recognition of the school's Walking School Bus Program.

Brightwood was the first Safe Routes to School Partner in Massachusetts to receive the James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award, which is given annually for outstanding achievement in implementing Safe Routes to School program in the United States.

## Middle and High School

Four SPS middle-school students were selected to be ambassadors in Gov. Deval L. Patrick's community service program, Project 351: **Damian Byrd** and **Alyssa Pikul** of **STEM Middle Academy** and **Genesis Martinez** and **Justin Mufiz** of **John F. Kennedy Middle School**. In order to participate, student ambassadors were nominated and selected for an exemplary ethic of service, a potential for leadership, and by reflecting the values of compassion, commitment, humility and kindness. Pikul and Mufiz are now enrolled at Central and Byrd and Martinez at Putnam.

**High School of Science and Technology student John Nguyen** prevailed as the HOSA state champion in Medical Math, a 100-question knowledge exam based on medical calculations and conversions. HOSA is a national student organization endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Health Science Education

Division of ACTE. Its two-fold mission is to promote career opportunities in the health care industry and to enhance the delivery of quality health care to all people.

The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the largest professional organization in the world promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all, has awarded **Central High School science teacher Bridget Ward** with a fellowship in the NSTA New Science Teacher Academy. The fellows participate in a year-long professional development program designed to help promote quality science teaching, enhance teacher confidence and classroom excellence and improve teacher content knowledge.

Magnet Schools of America awarded **Springfield Renaissance Principal Dr. Stephen Mahoney** with the region's Principal of the Year Award. The award recognizes outstanding school leaders who have succeeded in providing innovative programs that promote equity, diversity, and academic excellence.

## District-wide

After a full academic year of review and analysis that included the work of hundreds of staff and administrators, community members, early childhood education providers, colleges and universities, parents, the business community and others, the strategic plan that Springfield Public Schools will use to improve student performance and close the achievement gap is complete. **The Springfield Promise: A Culture of Equity and Proficiency**, a blueprint for moving the district forward, builds on priorities identified in the district's previous strategic plan, which covered the period from 2009-12. The new strategic plan identifies four essential pieces that must work together to raise student achievement. The plan is available online at [www.sps.springfield.ma.us](http://www.sps.springfield.ma.us)

The Mass.Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has awarded **Springfield College** an \$867,000 grant to fund a partnership with Springfield Public Schools for a program designed to increase the pool of effective teachers in math and special education.

The Springfield Public Schools **Parent Information Center (PIC)** has moved from the Milton Bradley School basement into its own building, which has been named the Parent And Community Engagement (PACE) Center, at 91 School St. The PIC is the point of entry for parents and guardians registering their children for school. It is at the PIC where students are assigned to schools. The offices there also screen children for a variety of student and family support services. The Family Education, METCO, McKinney-Vento and School and Community Partnerships departments are also located in the PACE Center. In addition, the PACE Center houses satellite offices for Early Childhood, English Language Learners and Pupil Services.

# A way with words

## Central poet earns statewide honors

Popularizing the art of the written word, Central High School sophomore Courtney Stewart is proving to his fellow classmates that poetry belong not only on the page, but on the stage.

Stewart was named Massachusetts's 2013 Poetry Out Loud champion last spring, besting 22 other finalists including the 2012 winner, Stephanie Igharosa from Randolph High School, who was named first runner-up. Nearly 21,000 students from 82 schools across the Commonwealth participated in classroom and school-wide competitions in hopes of moving on to the state finals. As the champion, Stewart received an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. where he competed in Poetry Out Loud's national finals in April. The competition celebrates the power of the spoken word and a mastery of public speaking skills while cultivating self-confidence and an appreciation of students' literary heritage. Since its inception eight years ago, Poetry Out Loud has inspired hundreds of thousands of high school students to discover and appreciate both classic and contemporary poetry.

The contest requires each entrant to pick three poems, one of which must be pre-20th century. Stewart chose "Baudelaire," by Delmore Schwartz; "Planetarium," by Adrienne Rich; and "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown," by Walt Whitman.

In addition to competing in Poetry Out Loud, Stewart has made a number of public appearances. Last spring, he gave a recitation for Caroline Kennedy at the Coolidge Corner Theater in Boston as part of a book signing event for her latest work, "Poems to Learn by Heart." He also recited two poems when the Massachusetts Cultural Council's executive board held its spring meeting at CityStage in Springfield. In August, he attended the annual convocation for Springfield Public School teachers and staff and read a poem he wrote for the event.



Courtney Stewart is a prize-winning poet.

## "A Dedication to Key Cutters"

Dan Rather once said:

"The dream begins with a teacher  
Who believes in you, who tugs and pushes  
And leads you to the next plateau,  
Sometimes poking you with a sharp stick  
called 'truth'"

I sometimes dare to imagine what  
A day in your life must be like.  
Nights at home that break too short.  
Days at work that walk on into something  
close to forever.

You who awaken day by day and  
Despite all odds, task yourself  
To break the chains of ignorance,  
Shatter the walls of silence,  
And obliterate the mentality of incapability.

To ignite flames of curiosity.  
To unknowingly impact an unfathomable  
Amount of minds with the power of  
understanding.  
To cut keys.

It is often said  
"Education is the key to Success"  
To cut this key is to be a teacher.  
Those who teach are necessary.  
Those who teach are common.

It is less often said:  
"Leadership is the key to the world"  
Those who lead are vital.  
Those who lead are the elite.  
To cut this key . . .

This key that unlocks the workshop  
From which we pull forth the tools  
We use to fix, create, and transform  
The very foundation of life.

To cut this key and offer it to all  
Is to be a Leader.  
"The dream" continues with  
Unlocking the workshop and building a door  
To a world beyond.

*Written by Courtney Stewart*



# Forest Park gets a facelift

Forest Park Middle School reopened its doors to grade 6-8 students on Aug. 26, following a two-year renovation project that caused students to be divided by grade and spread out into three locations across the city. The \$43 million project has added dozens of classrooms, state-of-the-art science labs and more to the school, which was originally built in 1898. The Massachusetts School Building Authority funded 90 percent of the project.

Clockwise from right: Superintendent Daniel Warwick, Forest Park Principal Medina Ali, Mayor Domenic Sarno, City Councilor Kateri Walsh, City Councilor Tim Allen, School Committee member Antonette Pepe and City Councilor Tom Ashe; the school auditorium; library and media center; exterior of the school; a new science lab.





# Springfield DIRECTORY Schools

## Elementary Schools

**Balliet**

Shadae Thomas, Principal  
52 Rosewell St., 01109  
413-787-7446

**Beal**

Deborah Beglane, Principal  
285 Tiffany St., 01108  
413-787-7544

**Boland**

Lisa Bakowski, Principal  
426 Armory St., 01104  
413-750-2511

**Bowles**

Thomas Mazza, Principal  
24 Bowles Park, 01104  
413-787-7334

**Bradley**

Alyson Lingsch, Principal  
22 Mulberry St., 01105  
413-787-7475

**Brightwood**

John Doty, Principal  
471 Plainfield St., 01107  
413-787-7238

**Brookings**

Terry Powe, Principal  
367 Hancock St., 01105  
413-787-7200

**Brunton**

Martha Stetkiewicz, Principal  
1801 Parker St., 01128  
413-787-7444

**DeBerry**

Stefania Raschilla, Principal  
670 Union St., 01109  
413-787-7582

**Dorman**

Rhonda Stowell-Lewis, Principal  
20 Lydia St., 01109  
413-787-7554

**Dryden Memorial**

Diane Brouillard, Principal  
190 Surrey Rd., 01118  
413-787-7248

**Ells**

Janet Perez Vergne, Principal  
319 Cortland St., 01109  
413-787-7345

**Freedman**

Dr. Gloria Williams, Principal  
90 Cherokee Dr., 01109  
413-787-7443

**Gerena**

Diane Gagnon, Principal  
200 Birnie Ave., 01107  
413-787-7320

**Glenwood**

Martha Cahillane, Principal  
50 Morison Terrace, 01104  
413-787-7527

**Glickman**

Elizabeth Bienia, Principal  
120 Ashland Ave., 01119  
413-750-2756

**Harris**

Shannon Collins, Principal  
58 Hartford Terrace, 01118  
413-787-7254

**Homer**

Kathleen Sullivan, Principal  
43 Homer St., 01109  
413-787-7526

**Indian Orchard**

Jennifer Montano, Principal  
95 Milton St., 01151  
413-787-7255

**Johnson**

Darcia Milner, Principal  
55 Catharine St., 01109  
413-787-6687

**Kensington International**

Margaret Thompson, Principal  
31 Kensington Ave., 01108  
413-787-7522

**Liberty**

Robin Bailey-Sanchez, Principal  
962 Carew St., 01104  
413-787-7299

**Lincoln**

Jacqueline Hebert, Principal  
732 Chestnut St., 01107  
413-787-7314

**Lynch**

Linda Wilson, Principal  
315 North Branch Parkway, 01119  
413-787-7250

**Pottenger**

Valerie Williams, Principal  
1435 Carew St., 01104  
413-787-7266

**Sumner Avenue**

James McCann, Principal  
45 Sumner Ave., 01108  
413-787-7430

**Talmadge**

Carla Lussier, Principal  
1395 Allen St., 01118  
413-787-7249

**Walsh**

Lynda Bianchi, Principal  
50 Empress Ct., 01129  
413-787-7448

**Warner**

Dr. Ann Stennet, Principal  
493 Parker St., 01129  
413-787-7258

**Washington**

Deanna Suomala, Principal  
141 Washington St., 01108  
413-787-7551

**White Street**

Kristen Hughes, Principal  
300 White St., 01108  
413-787-7543

## K-8 School

**Zanetti**

Tara Christian Clark, Principal  
474 Armory St., 01104  
413-787-7400

## Middle Schools

**Chestnut Accelerated**

Richard Stoddard, Principal  
355 Plainfield St., 01107  
413-750-2333

**Duggan**

Marissa Mendonsa, Principal  
1015 Wilbraham Rd., 01109  
413-787-7410

**Forest Park**

Medina Ali, Principal  
46 Oakland St., 01108  
413-787-7420

**Kennedy**

George Johnson, Principal  
1385 Berkshire Ave., 01151  
413-787-7510

**Kiley**

Christopher Sutton, Principal  
180 Cooley St., 01128  
413-787-7240

**South End**

Daniel Rossi, Principal  
36 Margaret St., 01105  
413-750-2442

**STEM**

Michael Calvanese, Principal  
60 Alton St., 01109  
413-787-6750

**Van Sickle**

Cheryl DeSpirt, Principal  
1170 Carew St., 01104  
413-750-2887

## 6-12 School

**Renaissance**

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

## High Schools

**Central**

Thaddeus Tokarz, Principal  
1840 Roosevelt Ave., 01109  
413-787-7085

**Commerce**

Charles Grandson IV, Principal  
415 State St., 01105  
413-787-7220

**Putnam**

Gil Traverso, Principal  
1300 State St., 01109  
413-787-7424

**Sci-Tech**

Maureen Ciccone, Principal  
1250 State St., 01109  
413-750-2000

## Alternative SAFE schools

Rhonda Y. Jacobs, Principal  
413-335-5127  
Dr. Mary Anne Morris, Chief of Pupil Services  
413-787-7176

**Springfield Public Day Elementary**

Lisa Pereira, Assistant Principal  
34 Nye St., 01104  
413-886-5100

**Springfield Public Day Middle**

Linda Singer, Acting Asst. Principal  
118 Alden St., 01109  
413-787-7261

**Springfield Public Day High**

Walter Welch, Assistant Principal  
90 Berkshire St., 01151  
413-787-7036

**Liberty Prep. Acad.**

Michael Ellis, Assistant Principal  
334 Franklin St., 01104  
413-750-2484

**Early College High School**

Dwight Hall, Director  
Holyoke Community College  
413-552-2176

**Gateway to College**

Vivian Ostrowski, Director  
Holyoke Community College  
413-552-2370

**Balliet Middle School**

Sarita Graveline, Asst. Principal  
111 Seymour Ave., 01109  
413-787-7284

**Springfield High School**

Matthew Bean, Asst. Principal  
140A Wilbraham Ave., 01109  
413-787-7285

**Student Attendance Resource Center**

Francisco Anelo, Director  
140A Wilbraham Ave., 01109  
413-552-6495

# Graduation rate on the rise

**GRADUATION:** from Page 1

secondary years.

Initiatives such as identifying students at risk for dropping out early and providing the necessary academic and social/emotional supports; improving student attendance and expansion of alternative and flexible pathways to graduation, such as online credit recovery courses, have proven to be effective in reaching more students and keeping them in school.

Equally promising practices include the addition of graduation coaches, ninth-grade academies and a ninth-grade transition course at every high school, as well as the overhaul of the “Student Success Plan.”

The district also offers free night and summer

school courses. Last year, it expanded its outreach efforts to recent drop-outs with the development of the Student Re-Engagement Center where former students can “drop back in” to obtain their high school diploma.

“What we’ve tried to do is address the core issues behind why kids drop out,” said Warwick. “We still have a lot of work to do but our progress to date confirms we are on the right track.”

The most recent graduation numbers are an indication of that. At the High School of Commerce, for example, which had one of the greatest gains in 2012 with 70 percent of students graduating, the numbers are still on the rise. Diplomas were issued to 221 students in 2013 – up from 175 in 2012.





# Waste not, want not

## Teachers benefit from donations of excess supplies

Many of the teaching supplies that may have gone into retirement with their owners are now finding a second home thanks to a newly launched program, Tools 4 Teaching.

In August, the Springfield Education Association's Committee of Retired Teachers established the program, which gives retiring teachers and community businesses the opportunity to donate classroom materials or supplies to new teachers.

"We were looking for an opportunity to salvage what would otherwise be waste," said Christine Williams, who serves on the Committee of Retired Teachers. "And it saves new teachers money out of their own pocket."

The committee had collected items once a year for the past three years, but the demand was

becoming too great. Now, on a monthly basis, retiring teachers are being given the opportunity to donate their accumulated purchased or self-made classroom supplies they no longer need. Businesses also have the opportunity to donate surplus materials that creative teachers can put to good use in their classrooms. Suggested materials include leftover seminar/workshop materials such as three-ring binders, pencils, pens, pads, workbooks, charts, easels and outdated stationery folders. New materials such as crayons, pencils, markers, notebooks, pens, glue sticks, pencil sharpeners and scissors are also welcome. Electronics, stuffed animals and upholstered items are prohibited.

Donations are accepted at the Richard E. Neil Municipal Operations Center, 70 Tapley St., on the second Thursday of each month from 3-6 p.m. Teachers are invited to pick up supplies on the third Thursday of each month from 3-6 p.m.

For more information or if you have any questions about the nature of your proposed donation, please contact Chris Williams at [chris429544@gmail.com](mailto:chris429544@gmail.com).



Springfield Public Schools teachers browse through donated supplies at the Tools 4 Teaching site, open for shopping the third Thursday of each month.

## Putnam wins first basketball state title in school history

**PUTNAM:** from Page 16

do good things for Springfield."

It has been a meteoric rise since Shepard took over the Putnam program five years ago after spending 10 seasons as the head coach at Springfield Technical Community College.

"I'm really not surprised," said Springfield Public Schools Athletic Director Michael Martin. "(Former Putnam Principal) Kevin McCaskill and I had been pursuing Bill and approached him about the job before he finally decided to apply. We knew he was a good coach and a strict disciplinarian with the kids."

Martin said he was most impressed with how Shepard, a former Lahovich Award-winner at Commerce and a star at Western Connecticut State, got his players to buy into the team concept.

"Everyone bought into what he was selling," said Martin. "They listened to him and respected him. Everyone gave up his personal agenda to concentrate on the team."

"The basketball team truly represented the entire student body and the quality of students we have here at Putnam Academy and in Springfield," said Putnam Principal Gil Traverso. "This was a group of unselfish high achievers who put forth a great deal of importance in the team concept and maintained a sense of humility throughout their achievements."

Traverso said it was doubly sweet that the team accomplished what it did in its first year in its new \$114 million building. "We have worked diligently over the past three years to renew the longstanding sense of pride and the reputation that is Putnam's history."

Shepard, who has been a court officer in Springfield for 14 years, credited the leadership of Bynum, who is now a freshman linebacker at Southern Connecticut State University, with being one of the keys to the team's success.

"He came in with me as freshman in my first year coaching and he was with me all the way," Shepard

said. "He led by example and he would speak up when needed. He was a true leader."

Shepard said that even when the team's offense was up and down during the season, two things were not: the effort and the defense were always there. That stood the Beavers in good stead in the grinding state final against Mansfield.

"Even when we were down seven at halftime, I knew our defense would give us a chance," he said.

Putnam, despite a 20-1 regular season, was still doubted by many entering post-season play. Then came the victory over top-seeded and three-time state champ Central 61-45 to win the West Sectional Tournament at UMass, and the 52-39 victory over Milford in the state semifinals.

In 24 games entering the state final, the Beavers' only blemish was four-point loss to West Springfield without Dizel Wright. Excluding that loss without Wright, Putnam outscored opponents by an average of 24.3 points per game. Twenty three of the wins came by at least nine points, 21 of them by double figures.

With four returning starters, Shepard is hopeful for next season. He is looking for David Murrell and Wright to fill the leadership gap left by Bynum's graduation.

"I know they can do it physically," said Shepard. "They just have to be more vocal with the younger guys." Putnam also returns other key contributors such as sixth man Ty Nichols, Ki-Shawn Monroe and sophomore Jonathan Garcia.

Shepard admitted Putnam won't be sneaking past anyone next season coming off a state title.

"They were underdogs when the season began and they were underdogs until the very end," he said. "That may no longer be the case, with four returning starters and other kids who have played key roles." The fact they will enter next season as one of the favorites shouldn't change much.

"The hard work started on the first day of practice," he said. "The willingness to prepare was there all season long."

## Central back on top in high-school wrestling

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teammate of McLaughlin's in the 1992 state championship team.

The other wrestlers who contributed and their weights were: co-captains Luis Quiñones, 138 and Kamron Anderson, 220; Jered Escribano, 182; Stephen Maldonado 285; Juan Nuñez, 132; Ellison Robinson, 145; Justice Bolden, 171; and Mathew Paris, 195.

"The wrestling team is a clear indication that you get what you put into something," said Central Principal Tad Tokarz. "They work harder than any other group of individuals I've seen in practices and the off-season training and discipline. They serve as a guiding light to all the other athletes at Central High School."

McLaughlin noted that other teams at Central such as football and basketball have won recent championships, too, and every team works very hard.

"We just try to work hard, be the best students we can be, and try to act like champions when we're representing the school," he said.

He also credited the school with helping to make the kids as good as they can be.

"There's a tremendous support system for the kids in place, here from Tad on down, and it goes on year-round," he said.

Even though it is the off-season, McLaughlin said many of his wrestlers were in the weight room "busting their tails."

Going into the season, McLaughlin was optimistic but concerned because the team lacked experience at the lighter weights going into the season, from 106 pounds up to 132 pounds.

"They were young but they improved tremendously during the season," he said.

McLaughlin said he most proud of his team's consistency. "Very rarely do we into a season when the cupboard is bare."

He said while he doesn't get as many students out for the team — about 45, less than the 70 or so he has had in the past — the program still attracts the kind of student he likes to work with.

"The kids who come out have a pretty good idea of what the program is all about," he said.

The cupboard certainly isn't going to be bare next season. Not when you're talking about both Viruet brothers. Central will return the two state champions as well as seven of the 10 wrestlers who represented the school in the state championships.

"No, that's not a bad start," laughed McLaughlin. "Not a bad start at all."



# SPORTS

THE SPRINGFIELD EDUCATOR

## Putnam makes history with first hoop crown

BY RICH FAHEY

Making history isn't easy. And it definitely isn't pretty at times.

In a crazy quilt of a game that had a seemingly endless number of twists and turns, Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical School captured the first state basketball title in the school's 75-year history, beating Eastern Massachusetts champion Mansfield 50-48 in overtime in the state Division I final at the DCU Center in Worcester on March 16.

It was a nail-biting, grinding game in a season that had featured few such

games. KayJuan Bynum and Ty Nichols hit big free throws in overtime as Putnam rebounded from a seven-point halftime deficit, saw a seven-point lead disappear in the last two minutes, and then watched a game-tying Mansfield shot at the buzzer in overtime clang off the rim.

"We're bringing this back to Springfield, bringing something positive back to Springfield," said Putnam coach William Shepard after the championship game. "As a city, we can build on this and continue to

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# STATE CHAMPS



Members of the 2012-13 Putnam High basketball team celebrate their state title at the DCU Center.



Central High reclaimed its position at the top of Massachusetts high school wrestling teams last year.

## Central wrestling dynasty adds another title

By Rich Fahey

Despite having won other state titles and boasting a record of consistent success, some teams may have doubted Springfield Central's chances going into the MIAA Division I state wrestling team championships at Newton South High School in February.

How could a team with an average dual-meet record of 13-6 possibly contend for a state title?

Think again. The Golden Eagles swept to the Division I state championship with 160.5 points, easily outdistancing second-place Lincoln-Sudbury (127 points) and third-place Chelmsford (104.5 points).

"We typically have a brutal schedule, but we do it on purpose," said Coach Darby McLaughlin, a veteran of

Central's 1992 championship squad who has been the coach for 13 years. "By the time we get to the championships, we're well-prepared."

They wrestled the best the state had to offer, but also journeyed out of state to face top-ranked squads in the NHSCA Wrestling Festival in York, Pennsylvania.

Under McLaughlin, Central has won nine Western Mass. Titles and has been a finalist in the state Division I championship five times, also winning a state title in 2006.

It was depth and dedication this time that took Golden Eagles to the title. Central sent 10 wrestlers to the states, and all 10 scored points for the team, with seven wrestlers earning top-seven placements and medals.

Brothers Richard and Jonathan Viruet let the way with

their gold medal performances with Richard, a junior co-captain, pinning Chelmsford's James Clasen in 3:47 in the 152-pound final, and Jonathan, a sophomore, upending Barnstable's Will Henson with a 4-0 shutout in the 160-pound final.

Both Viruets also went on to win their weight classes at the All-State individual tournament.

"They just live and breathe wrestling," said McLaughlin to a reporter after the match. "That's a huge part of it. Some kids wrestle. There are other kids that are wrestlers. There's a difference."

Ricky Viruet, the father of the Viruet brothers, was a

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