



Message from Dr. Sebring



Thank you for taking the time to read our spring issue of the *DMPS Community Report*, where we highlight a few of the many unique opportunities available to our students. Our district takes pride in providing a quality education and meeting the needs of every individual student. Our Advanced Placement course offerings, our many services for students who are learning English, our continuous calendar schools, and our academic support labs for high school students who may be at risk for dropping out of school — are just some of the tremendous opportunities students are experiencing in Des Moines Public Schools.

I encourage you to learn more about our school district. The opportunities are endless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Sebring".

Nancy Sebring
Superintendent
Des Moines Public Schools

Des Moines Public Schools

DMPS

COMMUNITY REPORT

Spring 2011

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Art Brings Enthusiasm for Learning at Howe and Wright

Howe and Wright Elementary Schools in Des Moines implemented a new method of learning three years ago, and the change has been positive for everyone involved.

The method of learning is called Artful Learning, a vision of composer Leonard Bernstein. Artful Learning incorporates art concepts into all subjects to keep students engaged in the learning process.

“We know that our students need a lot more than a textbook and worksheet to survive in the 21st Century, so we want to be able to give them those skills to work cooperatively in groups with reading and writing, be able to apply what they learn

to different situations, and connect it to themselves,” explained Lindsey Cornwell, principal at Wright Elementary School.

Teachers and administrators at Howe and Wright chose Artful Learning after visiting Moffett Elementary in California and Hillside Elementary in West Des Moines, where this learning method was already being used. Staff members were impressed with what they saw and decided to bring Artful Learning to Des Moines. Teachers have taken part in three week-long professional development sessions to learn this innovative way of teaching and learning.

“It has been exciting not only to watch the students as they learn and

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HOW ARTFUL LEARNING WORKS

Using the Artful Learning method of teaching and learning, students at Howe and Wright Elementary Schools express what they have learned through many styles of writing, such as journal entries, letters, learning narratives, descriptive writing, and journey maps. Here is an example:

UNIT OF STUDY:

Persistence/*Ladder of Booker T. Washington* by Martin Puryear
By Prosper Berry, fourth grade,
Wright Elementary School

“The ladder in the picture is like Booker T. Washington’s life. It went from dark to light. At first it was bad for him, but by never giving up and always listening to adults, he did much in his life. I am persistent, too. I listen to grown-ups, never steal, never lie, and am just a good kid.”

Artful Learning at Howe and Wright

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discover new information but also the teachers,” commented Dianna Anderson, principal at Howe Elementary School. “This training has given teachers an opportunity to really dive in and dissect the curriculum and make connections between all of the subject areas.”

To help connect classroom learning to real life, both elementary schools have become part of the community arts-scene. Students have developed relationships with local artists who teach many art forms such as sculpture, dance and writing. The artists connect with the units of study, which makes learning more meaningful to the students. Regular field trips are scheduled to the Civic Center, Des Moines Art Center, State Historical Building, Living History Farms, and the Temple for Performing Arts.

“Last year, we took a group of first grade students to the Art Center and Sculpture and the docents at the Art Center were

impressed with our students’ knowledge of the artists, and also the insights they expressed as they were looking at different pieces in the museum,” said Anderson.

Teachers at Howe and Wright are breaking away from the traditional paper and pencil assignments and engaging students in projects that are kinesthetic, auditory, and visual. Students’ vocabularies have been increased as well, by the use of conceptual vocabulary and words such as transformation, consequences, dependence, and persistence.

Administrators already are able to see improvements in the abilities of their students after just three years. Results of student writing assessments are reviewed by teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching units.

“We have been using writing samples to gauge the effectiveness of the program and are noticing clearly improved cognitive levels of our students,” explained Cornwell. “Students are engaged in learning and higher order levels of thinking are being encouraged.”

Teachers at both schools agree that Artful Learning has made school more exciting for their students.

“Artful Learning has brought creativity, excitement, and life back into my teaching,” commented Erin Jennings, kindergarten teacher at Wright Elementary School. “My kids are more actively engaged and enthused about the things we are studying and experiencing together.” ■

Wright Elementary kindergarten students are using the arts-based strategy of “Flocking.” Like geese, students follow the leader of the group’s actions in movement to music.



The Great Escape

LONG, LONG TRAIL FROM RWANDA TO ROOSEVELT

By Mike Wellman

Roosevelt High School junior Liliane Iragena's life began like an eye opening at the center of a storm of death.

When she was born, her native Rwanda was wracked by a brutal campaign of genocide perpetrated by the Hutus upon the Tutsis. Members of her family were among the estimated 800,000 who were systematically slaughtered during a 100-day reign of terror, most of them either slashed with machetes or burned for lack of weapons more expeditious than blades and flames.

"Two of my uncles were killed by extremists using machetes," Liliane was told by her father, Didace.

Chopping and burning people down was so exhausting that the Hutus organized into shifts like laborers in a killing field. The closest thing to mercy in the land was that some Tutsis were allowed to pay for the privilege of death by bullet. The family's house was torched because it was a known haven for Tutsis.

"Our house was searched frequently because my father helped Tutsis to safety," she said.

Didace himself was stabbed and left for dead on the road where a neighbor found him and enlisted the aid of a priest to get him to a hospital. While he recovered, Liliane and her mother, Marthe, were targeted too, but neighbors managed to chase away the men that came for them.

Liliane's father was a teacher who reaped both privilege and sorrow from his political activism.



When he demonstrated in support of higher pay for teachers he became a marked man at a time and in a place where speech was anything but free.

By the time Liliane was 11, she was living at ease as the eldest of six children of a district Mayor in a reversal of fortune that's straight out of *Les Misérables*. That is, until a friend of her father's — who was an officer in the Rwandan military — called the mayor and tipped him that his dissenting politics had marked him again and strongly suggested he flee the country — immediately! The family fled the next day with little more than what was on their backs and in their pockets. Even their bank accounts were abandoned. Liliane's parents feared that emptying them might raise suspicion they couldn't afford. She remembers stopping at a checkpoint along the border between Rwanda and Uganda.

"We could hear the radio talking about the mayor who escaped," she recalled. "I saw in my father's eyes that he was very worried."

When she stands in the foyer at Roosevelt and poses for a photo next to a reproduction of the iconic cartoon Ding Darling penned on the occasion of Teddy Roosevelt's death, its title, The Long, Long Trail, takes on new meaning. And her bashful but gleaming smile belies what it took for her to get where she is today.

Now, three countries, six years, and what must seem like a couple of lifetimes later, Liliane is again finally at ease with her sights set on a summer school program she's been accepted for at Harvard University.

Not that she takes life easy, or ever did. She has always been serious about education and worked hard at it, even before her world turned upside down when she was a little girl. She learned about the program

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Taiwanese Students Visit Walnut Street School

Students and staff at Walnut Street School experienced a unique opportunity earlier this month when a group of students from Taiwan visited their classrooms and homes for 10 days.

Eight Taiwanese students and their principal from Jhuwei Elementary School (Walnut Street School's sister school) stayed with host families from the school, spent time learning from the students and teachers, taught the Walnut Street School students about the Taiwanese culture, and also scheduled time to tour the City of Des Moines.

For the Taiwanese students, this was their first visit to Iowa. Their principal, Howard Hu, and a teacher from their school were able to visit Walnut Street School last April. At that time, Craig Leager, Walnut Street School principal, and Hu signed a memorandum of understanding to become sister schools. A ceremony to celebrate the signing of this document was held at the Iowa Department of Education.

"As part of our International Baccalaureate curriculum at Walnut Street School, our students are learning Mandarin Chinese,"

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The Great Escape

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at Harvard by hanging around after school in the classroom shared by Tisha Carter and Joan Looker who teach ELL at Roosevelt High School. Carter was helping seniors apply. Liliane took the initiative to discover that there was an option for underclassmen and followed through.

When she stands in the foyer at Roosevelt and poses for a photo next to a reproduction of the iconic cartoon Ding Darling penned on the occasion of Teddy Roosevelt's death, its title, *The Long, Long Trail*, takes on new meaning. And her bashful but gleaming smile belies what it took for her to get where she is today.

The family did escape into Uganda but the circumstances that forced their relocation caught up with them and they had to move on – this time to Kenya. Two years

later a European refugee agency facilitated their journey to the United States in November of 2008. Almost right away Liliane got her first taste of winter in Iowa, a taste she hasn't yet fully acquired. That's the only thing about life here that feels cold to her.

She speaks three African dialects besides her impeccable English. Liliane won't yet claim fluency in French but that's next. She also wants to study economics and philosophy. Her personal philosophy in a nutshell is that it's better to learn from others than judge them. That's tempered with a healthy skepticism she absorbed from her father who counsels her to think critically.

"He told me not to just believe everything people say. I read a lot for myself besides what we have in class," she explained.

Besides climate, one thing she quickly noticed after coming

here that she does appreciate is what she considers a celebration of diversity. The turmoil she was born into stemmed from ethnic intolerance. She also appreciates that kids here have more say in what they wear and study than she had been accustomed to in Africa. And of course, she welcomes the widespread access to information via the internet. That was a luxury she'd heard of but not experienced until she came to Des Moines.

Much as she likes it here, Liliane's got a serious case of wanderlust just now.

"I can't really see myself staying in the same place for a long time," Liliane predicted.

Her next stop looks like summer school – at Harvard. Even though her improbable story began in an utterly foreign nation, it's become a very American one. ■

Celebrating Our Achievements

This regular feature of the *DMPS Community Report* highlights awards and achievements of district students and staff. Please let us know if you have a notable achievement to share by e-mailing Sarah Taylor at sarah.taylor@dmps.k12.ia.us. Here are some achievements from the past few months (Nov. - March).*

Central Academy junior **Luchang Wang** was named one of two Iowa state winners of the 2010 Siemens Award for Advanced Placement, a signature program of the Siemens Foundation administered by the College Board.

Traci Nalevanko, sixth grade literacy teacher at Goodrell Middle School, was named a 2010 Excellence in Education Award runner-up.

Perkins Elementary student **Velouria Helgerson** won first place in the K-3 division of the National Written Word Thanksgiving Expressions Competition.

Roosevelt High School student **Catherine Chiodo** was selected by the University of Florida Forensics program to compete in their special Extemp Round Robin and the National Extemp Round Robin at George Mason University.

Roosevelt High School's Debate program won the championship of the IHSSA State Debate tournament in January.

The **East High School** Debate team took home seven awards from the IHSSA State Debate tournament in January.

Clint Gadbury, East High School technology education and Project Lead the Way teacher, received the

Golden Apple award from WHO-TV in February.

Twenty-two students from Mike Schaffer's AP U.S. Government and AP Comparative Government classes at **Central Academy** were chosen as winners in the Young Lawyers Division of The Iowa State Bar Association's "Know Your Constitution" competition.

Lincoln High School business teacher **Sue Krantman** was selected to serve on the Quality Business and Marketing Programs Leadership Team of Iowa.

The **North High School** Drama Department, under the direction of Mark Rixner, received eight superior ratings out of their 10 presentations at the District Large Group Speech Contest.

King Elementary School ELL teacher **Jennifer Rose** received the One Classroom at a Time grant from ABC-5.

The **North High School** Academic Decathlon Team won first place at the Drake Regional Competition held on January 28 at Drake University.

The Academic Decathlon Teams from **East, Lincoln, North and Roosevelt High Schools** qualified to compete in the State Academic Decathlon in March.

The West Des Moines Elks Lodge #2752 selected **Meredith Middle School** eighth graders **Jordan Christensen, Timothy Kirchoff, and Kendra McGhee**; and **Merrill Middle School** sixth graders **Amy Iverson, Hannah Lyons, Griffin McLuen, Anna Owenson, and Max Techau** as winners of their annual Americanism Essay contest. Topics for the essay contest were "Why I Am Proud to be An American" and "Our Flag – What It Means to Me." Essays were judged on originality, development of theme, mechanics and neatness. Winners received \$50 Borders gift cards.



Meredith Middle School essay contest winners were (L-R): Timothy Kirchoff, Kendra McGhee, and Jordan Christensen.



Merrill Middle School essay contest winners were (L-R): Hannah Lyons, Griffin McLuen, Maxson Techau, Anna Owenson, and Amy Iverson.

* Only awards received before March 1, 2011 have been included here.

Educators Align Curriculum with Iowa's Common Core Standards

Approximately 50 Des Moines Public Schools educators spent a week together in February gaining expertise on articulating the district's curriculum to align with the revised Iowa Core Curriculum (which now incorporates the Common Core State Standards adopted by the Iowa State Board of Education on July 29, 2010). Educators from every grade level worked in teams to support Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies under the guidance of DMPS curriculum coordinators and consultants from the Dr. Doug Reeves Leadership and Learning Center in Denver, Colo.

"These teams provided excellent input to make great strides in this work," said JoEllen Latham, Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Title I for Des Moines Public Schools. "Continued

collaboration with teacher teams on professional development Wednesdays will provide additional opportunities to connect curriculum, instruction, and assessment to further strengthen quality learning opportunities for all of our students."

The Common Core State Standards Initiative was a voluntary state-led effort to develop common expectations among the states for what students should learn from kindergarten through high school. The standards cover the areas of English language arts and mathematics.

"The Common Core State Standards help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success," explained Latham. "These set of standards also help define the knowledge and skills students should have so that



teachers can locally build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms."

The Department of Education has reprinted the Iowa Core documents for Mathematics and Literacy. The Common Core State Standards and additions replace the essential concepts and skills for Mathematics and Literacy. They may be found at the following website: <http://www.corecurriculum.iowa.gov/>. ■

DMPS Releases FY 2012 Budget Proposal

The Des Moines Public School district is faced once again with having to make budget reductions to maintain a balanced fiscal year 2012 budget, but administration was able to propose a budget that keeps cuts away from K-12 classrooms and maintains current levels of programming.

The \$439 million fiscal year 2012 proposed budget released on Friday, March 4, 2011, works within the parameters set forth by the school board to keep student-teacher ratios and educational programming at current levels so the district can continue to increase the graduation rate and lower the dropout rate.

The proposed budget also includes recommendations from the volunteers

who served on the Citizen's Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC).

Recommendations include a property tax increase in Des Moines and consideration of outsourcing and other measures in the operations department. The CBAC also recommended wage concessions of district employees, including wage freezes and furloughs, but discussions regarding those topics must take place during collective bargaining and were not included in the proposed budget.

Contributions to balance the fiscal year 2012 budget include a total of \$7 million from three areas: federal, community, and district.

"Maintaining quality education for our children remains our number

one priority," said Dr. Nancy Sebring, superintendent of Des Moines Public Schools. "We are asking the federal and state government, the community, and also the district to share the responsibility so that we can continue to provide a first-class education for our students."

Since 2002, the district has endured about \$66.6 million in cuts, including an unprecedented 10 percent across-the-board cut in fiscal year 2010 alone.

The school board has scheduled six public forums to discuss the budget. Dates and locations for the forums, and the proposed budget in its entirety can be found on the district's website, www.dmps.k12.ia.us.

DMPS Sees Increase in Number of Graduates for 2010



The number of students graduating from Des Moines Public Schools increased by 5.6 percent from 72.7 percent in 2009 to 78.3 percent in 2010, according to the latest report released by the Iowa Department of Education.

The district's five-year goal is to raise the graduation rate to 95 percent and lower the dropout rate to below state average. Three years after implementing several supports

for at-risk students, the district is seeing steady improvements. The dropout rate for 2010 was 4.8 percent, a decrease from 5.1 percent in 2009.

A new mechanism called the Early Indicator System (EIS) was implemented in fall 2009 to help identify students who may be at risk of dropping out of school. The EIS tracks attendance, class performance, and discipline/behavior issues at the elementary and secondary levels. Each school's support team helps serve the students who are identified through the EIS as at-risk for dropping out of school.

"There are more opportunities and interventions provided for struggling students at every school," said Bryce Amos, Executive Director for the Northeast Region. "The implementation of Smaller Learning Communities and academic support labs as well as our Early Indicator System and re-engagement efforts at all schools have made a difference and helped to keep students in school." ■

Taiwanese Students Visit Walnut Street School

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explained Leager. "So the sister school relationship with Jhuwei Elementary School is a perfect match as we learn their language and their culture, and in turn, they are able to learn more about the American education system and our way of life."

Walnut Street School held a welcome ceremony on Feb. 28, 2011 to welcome their visitors from

Taiwan. Fifth grade students gave a speech in Chinese, kindergarteners and second graders sang songs in Chinese, and each Taiwanese student gave a personal speech about themselves in English. Hu and Rose Chen, Director of the Taipei Economic & Cultural Office in Chicago, presented gifts to the Walnut Street staff and Des Moines Public Schools.

2011 High School Graduation Ceremonies

East High School

Thursday, May 26 at 7 p.m.
Hy-Vee Hall

Hoover High School

Tuesday, May 24 at 7 p.m.
Hy-Vee Hall

Lincoln High School

Wednesday, May 25 at 7 p.m.
Hy-Vee Hall

North High School

Monday, May 23 at 7 p.m.
Hy-Vee Hall

Roosevelt High School

Saturday, May 28 at 7:30 p.m.
Hy-Vee Hall

Scavo Alternative School

Friday, May 27 at 10 a.m.
Hoyt Sherman Place

Ruby Van Meter School

Tuesday, May 31 at 7:30 p.m.
Callanan Middle School



District Prepares for Site Visit From Iowa Department of Education

The Iowa Department of Education will conduct a comprehensive site visit to the Des Moines Public Schools during the week of March 21, 2011. During the visit, an Iowa Department of Education team will meet with groups of staff, students, administrators, and parents from 30 schools in the district.

The Iowa Department of Education schedules Accreditation/Equity visits about every five years. The purpose of the visit is to examine programs, curriculum, teaching and learning, and many other components of the educational setting.

Accreditation and program approval focus on an ongoing improvement process for schools, school districts, and practitioner preparation programs. General accreditation standards (Chapter 12) are the minimum requirements that must be met by an Iowa public school district to be accredited. Districts are required to implement multicultural, gender-fair approaches to the entire educational program. The districts' practices must align with federal and state laws requiring that there be no discrimination in educational programs or in school hiring practices on the basis of race, national origin, color,

religion, creed, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and marital status. The Iowa Department of Education has the legal responsibility to monitor compliance with these equity-related requirements in school districts receiving federal and state funding. The Equity Review Process is one way the Department carries out this responsibility.

In May, Des Moines Public Schools will receive a written report from the Iowa Department of Education which will inform administrators as to whether or not the district has been accredited and also will include recommendations for improvement. ■

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ON THE AIR

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