



Elmsford Public Schools
Elmsford NY 10523

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RAIDER BITES

Jazz Ensemble Debuts for Black History Month, and it's 'Outstanding!'

Alexander Hamilton High School commemorated Black History Month in February with an African-American History Assembly that featured the debut performance of the High School Jazz Ensemble.

The ensemble is led by Harry Rios, AHHS music teacher, and the performance was, "Outstanding!" said Dr. Barbara Peters, Superintendent of Schools. "Students in the Jazz Ensemble are working to develop the fundamental skills needed to perform a wide variety of selections, and to engage in creative processes through improvisation."

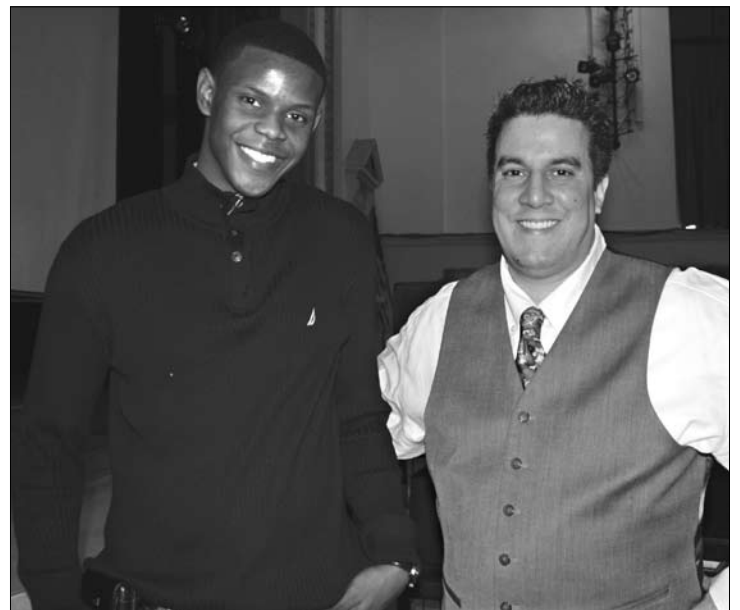
The program also featured stellar performances by students who danced, read poetry, and spoke on topics relating to African-American History. Senior and saxophone player William Cortez Young was master of ceremonies, and Mr. Rios read "Ode to a Drum," in addition to leading the Jazz Ensemble.

"I was very pleased with our first appearance as a jazz band," said Mr. Rios. "Hamilton has a rich musical tradition that I hope to explore and expand upon with these talented students. There is a ton of potential at this school, and we can do just about anything musically."

The assembly was coordinated by Fitzgerald Georges, AHHS Assistant Principal, who included an interesting fact in the program: In case you ever wondered, the month of February

was selected as Black History Month in deference to Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln who were both born in that month.

Kudos to all who took part in the program!



From L to R: William Cortez Young and Harry Rios.



From the Desk of the Superintendent

Dear Elmsford UFSD Parents and Community Members:

“The true harbinger of spring is not crocuses or swallows returning to Capistrano, but the sound of the bat on the ball.”

— Bill Veeck

As I write this to you, I am enjoying the view of the buds on the trees outside my office window — a sign that spring is here, and that we will indeed be hearing the “sound of the bat on the ball” very soon.

It has been a long, yet productive winter, and our talented teachers and staff are preparing for the remaining months of the school year, by readying the children for state and advanced placement tests, and by finding innovative ways to keep the spring fever from spiking too high.

They accomplish this through creativity in the classroom, (note that science teacher Rich Macleish was recently featured in The Journal News’ White Plains Express section for his lesson on weather and weather measurements, using a SMART Board, live Internet data, Google Earth, and live streaming video of weather conditions around the country, coupled with class demonstrations and experiments). If only we had learned about warm and cold fronts and storm movements that way!

Speaking of weather, this winter’s many snowstorms pre-empted our second Superintendent’s Community Forum, which we re-scheduled to March 18. The gathering was a productive exchange of ideas among school district personnel and community members ably hosted by our mayor at the Elmsford Village Hall.

This volume of the Elmsford Ed News highlights many of our students’ accomplishments, which brightened the dreary

winter days with the excitement going on within the walls of our school buildings.

The English Department hosted the local final rounds of the national Poetry Out Loud contest. Middle and high school students met with former world champion wrestler Nikita Koloff for an inspirational assembly.

Students honored the role of African-American civil rights pioneers through music, poetry, video and dance, with a special debut performance by the Alexander Hamilton High School Jazz Band. The FIRST Lego League came to our district for their regional competition, and our Robo Raiders were outstanding in presenting their creative robot based on the theme “Smart Moves.” Finally, juniors and seniors were given valuable college information to assist in the often-daunting process of researching and applying to post-secondary schools.

I hope you enjoy reading about these wonderful accomplishments and the richness that our teachers bring to their lesson plans and daily routines with your children.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barbara Peters
Superintendent of Schools



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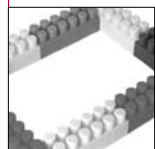
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The Not-so-daunting College Process and Beyond

With the help of guidance counselors and administrators, Alexander Hamilton High School students and their parents learned how to tackle the college application process through a step-by-step informational workshop on March 11.

College Information Night offered a chronological blueprint of junior and senior year tasks for applying to and selecting a post-secondary institution of learning.

Guidance counselors Monica Ahern and Stephanie Luccioni used a PowerPoint presentation to outline the counselor and parent roles; year-by-year timelines; what to look for in a school; what a school looks for in an applicant; the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and Internet resources.

Ms. Ahern spoke of the importance of maintaining good grades, participating in extra- or co-curricular activities, and requesting recommendations early in senior year.

AHHS principal Marc Baiocco also advised the upperclassmen in attendance.

“New York State requires 22 credits (for graduation),” he said. “When you get to senior year, it does not look good to remove a class from your schedule. Make sure your courses of study are rigorous. Be passionate about your education and willing to learn.”

Whether students submit the college’s own application form, or the Common Application — a generic form accepted by approximately 400 U.S. colleges, which can streamline the process for students — they must be organized in keeping track of their applications and deadlines, and get to work early on the all-important essay.

“The essay is the part of the application where the school finds out more about you,” said Ms. Ahern. “Make it stand out.” The English department at Alexander Hamilton assists students with selecting topics for and revising their college essays.

Sharing a personal story about her husband, who plays the bagpipes, and used his unusual musical talent to “sell” himself to schools, Ms. Ahern said an applicant’s uniqueness is what catches an admissions officer’s eye.

It’s not just the college doing the shopping, however. Students must use keen research skills to find the right fit in an undergraduate education.



Monica Ahern explaining what a student should look for in a college.

Size of the student body, campus location, competitiveness, specialization, cost, facilities, student life, and athletics are just some of the considerations to ponder when interviewing college representatives and visiting schools.

Perhaps the most anxiety-ridden part of the process is figuring out how to pay for it all. The counselors advised audience members to fill out the FAFSA, even if they think they might not be eligible for aid. The application is a tool for receiving federal loans as well. Using 2010 tax returns or estimates, parents should assist their children in completing this important document and submit it as soon after Jan. 1 as possible.

During the question and answer session, Ms. Ahern addressed concerns about accumulating sufficient volunteer hours and what type of volunteer work a student should do.

“Anything that interests them,” she said, and suggested that if a student is interested in medicine, for example, he should consider volunteering at a

hospital. Churches and community organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, offer opportunities for students wishing to accrue volunteer hours to enhance their profile.

The program then moved to a more somber discussion after the question and answer period.

Richard Julius, Student Assistance Counselor at AHHS and other area high schools, spoke of the dangers that often ensnare teens at this transitional time of their lives.



Rich Julius during a lighter moment in “Senior Year and Beyond”

In the presentation “Senior Year and Beyond,” he spoke about his role as a prevention education specialist, someone who runs interference between the student and “anything that might be a hindrance to his progress in school.”

He warned of how college administrators want to lower the drinking age to 18 again so they don’t have to deal with the legalities associated with underage drinking, which is prevalent in America’s colleges.

“There is a strong link between anxiety and alcohol and drug use,” he said. Teens bordering on adulthood commonly have a decreased perception of harm. Pro-drug messages assault them from everywhere, glamorizing the feeling of being high at a time when peers wield more influence than adults.

“The pre-frontal cortex is operating slower than the limbic system,” he

Elmsford School Hosts FIRST® LEGO League Regional Competition

Grady Elementary School hosted the regional competitions of the FIRST® LEGO League (FLL) on Jan. 30 to a packed gymnasium. Students representing 11 different organizations or schools participated in the competition, which involved 4- to 5-inch robots made from LEGO parts. Competing teams included: The Techno Girls Girl Scouts – Heart of the Hudson; The Porcupine-apples – Pleasantville Middle School; The Geek Squad – Port Chester Middle School; New Ro-bots – New Rochelle; New Ro-Bots 2 – New Rochelle; LEGOmaniacs – Private; Rockin’ Robots Home School Group; The Robo-Raiders – Grady Elementary School, Elmsford, NY; NanoBots – Hughes Elementary – New Hartford; Bricktron Lower Hudson Valley Challenger Center; and LEGO Masters – Briarcliff Manor Library. Competing teams came from as far north as Poughkeepsie.

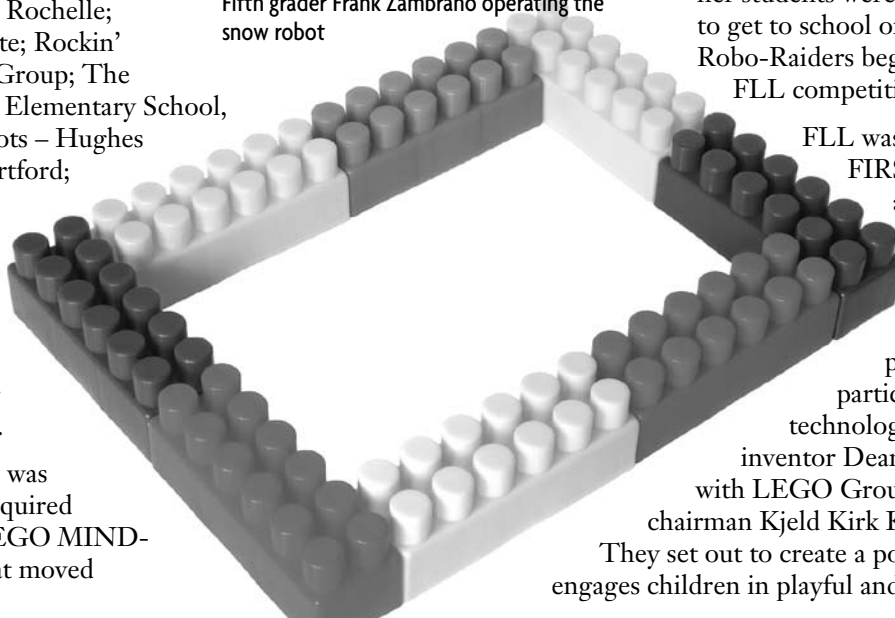
This year’s FLL theme was “Smart Moves,” and required contestants to build LEGO MIND-STORMS® robots that moved efficiently. Each robot was unique, and could be programmed to perform a different task related to safety and movement of things. In one of the exercises, the students hooked a test dummy onto the robot. If the dummy stayed intact while the robot traversed the course, the team could accumulate up to 400 points. Students who accrued the most points won the contest. Team-work, robot design, and a research



Fifth grader Frank Zambrano operating the snow robot

presentation were the other elements of the contest.

The 13-member Grady School Robo-Raiders designed a “snow robot” that could escort children to school on a snowy day. The proposed robot was equipped with a cell phone to alert the police in the case of an emergency, and could potentially clear away snow for the children as they walked to school. Dr. Pam Davis, Grady computer teacher and FLL organizer, was impressed that her students were thinking of a way to get to school on a snowy day. The Robo-Raiders began preparing for the FLL competition in October of 2009.



FLL was formed when FIRST®, (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, a 501 (c)(3) organization developed to inspire young people’s interest and participation in science and technology), founder and inventor Dean Kamen joined forces with LEGO Group’s owner and deputy chairman Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen in 1998.

They set out to create a powerful program that engages children in playful and meaningful learning, while helping them discover the fun in science and technology. Mr. Kamen and Mr. Kristiansen believe that FLL inspires student teams to research, build, and experiment, therefore creating ideas, solving problems and overcoming obstacles. There are currently over 140,000 children in 56 countries worldwide who actively participate in the FLL.



Grady School Robo Raiders

Wrestling With Success

World Champion Gives Sage Advice to Students

Looking vastly different than the days when he sported a 54-inch chest, and wearing a cast boot for a foot injury, former wrestling heavyweight champion Nikita Koloff addressed the students of Alexander Hamilton Middle High School with his four life lessons on success on Jan. 15.

As an introduction, sponsoring agent Pastor Rocco Dapice, of the People's Church in Tarrytown, showed a film clip of the hated "Russian Nightmare" — as Mr. Koloff was referred to during his wrestling career — growling at the audience, and declaring his sovereignty over all "Amedicans." Mr. Koloff, born Nelson Scott Simpson from Minnesota, later became a more benevolent figure in the wrestling world, with fans flocking to him for his "new-found love" of the U.S. and allegiance with wrestler Dusty Rhodes. World tag team-wrestling partners, Don Kernodle and Ivan Koloff, created the Nikita Koloff character, taking the American-born football player, and transforming him into Ivan Koloff's wrestling "nephew" from the former Soviet Union.

As the video ended, a slimmer middle aged man with a ponytail emerged from backstage. The rips were gone from his muscles, and so was the Russian accent, when he greeted the "good looking crew" whose lives he felt he was about to impact in a big way.

"This is what I believe," he said to his attentive audience. "That if only one of you takes something away today, perhaps five, ten or even thirty years from now, our paths will cross again, and you will say, 'Mr. Koloff, I sat in a school assembly in 2010, and something you said changed my life.'"

Using occasional attention-grabbing methods such as increasing the volume on his mega-decibel voice, or calling audience members

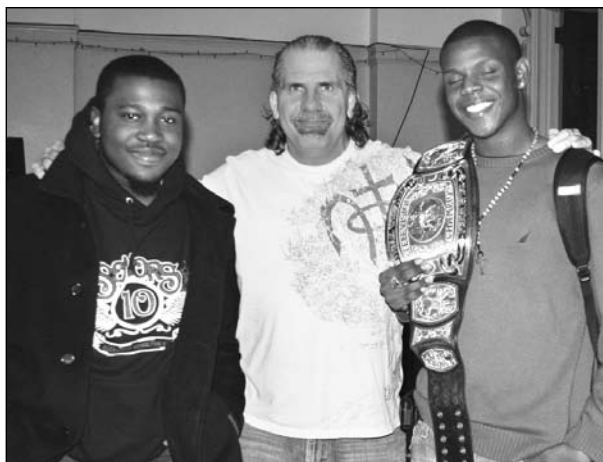
up to help him make a point, Mr. Koloff kept the packed house of 6th through 12th graders engaged during his 40 minute presentation. The wrestling information had to be dispensed first, he said, so he gave a little history to preface and underscore the real purpose for his visit.

"I was fortunate to have won five different world titles as well as many other accolades in professional wrestling." He held up the massive world television title championship belt he won for emphasis.

Mr. Koloff told of his youth in the projects of Minneapolis, where his single parent mother struggled to support him and three siblings after his father abandoned the family. "Just a quick mental picture," he somberly said to the students. "My beginnings started in the ghettos with no money and no dad. I began to realize, as many of you have even at this point in your lives, that life is filled with choices. Some choices we make are better than others; sometimes we make poor choices."

Thus began Nikita Koloff's "Success Lessons I've Learned While Smashing Heads."

Success lesson number one: "No matter what you do in life, give it your best effort." Mr. Koloff grasped that concept at the age of 12, while reading an Iron Man magazine. The wiry youth realized



Nikita Koloff, center, poses with seniors Tejan Edwards, left, and William Cortez Young, right.

that, to achieve the muscle volume of professional weightlifters, he would have to work very hard. By junior high school, he had pumped himself up sufficiently to squat 500 pounds.

His initial dream of becoming an NFL player led him to study playbooks and join a team, playing tight end for Moorhead State University— another example of how he "gave his best effort" to achieve success. When the wrestling opportunity came along, he wasn't satisfied to "just be a wrestler." He aspired to become a world champion.

"I challenge and encourage you," he said. "In order to truly be successful in life, to have real success, you've got to be engaged and become a player and not just a spectator, in the weight room, or on a football field, or even in the classroom."



Former world wrestling champion Nikita Koloff with 9th grader Robinson Berrio holding the champ's belt.

Success lesson number 2: "Laws of Association." Explaining that there are certain immutable laws that one cannot change in life, Mr. Koloff drove home the importance of disassociating oneself from people who are doing things to harm themselves or others. "Bad company corrupts good character," was the adage he repeated several times.

The room became silent when he told the story of his buddy and colleague, Curt Hennig, better known in the wrestling world as "Mr. Perfect."

Mr. Hennig was to make an appearance at a wrestling match in Tampa, Florida in 2003, when he was found dead in a hotel room from a cocaine overdose. "You see, the law of association caught up with Mr. Perfect," said Mr. Koloff. "So, I want to encourage you to hang around with people who have a dream

and a vision for their lives, who are going somewhere.”

Success lesson number three – “Role model.” The former world wrestling champion charged his listeners to be good examples to others, starting with their own siblings, and told them it is a responsibility they may or may not have signed up for. “Your words out of your mouth can be either TFC’s, Tools for Construction, or WMD’s, Weapons of Mass Destruction. He challenged them to set a higher standard than those who might be treating them badly, rising above to become positive role models for their peers and family members.

Success lesson number four – “To be able to forgive others as well as yourself.” Although his father left him when he was three, Mr. Koloff said, “I had to forgive him. I had to forgive myself, because I thought it was my fault, and that I must have been a ‘mistake.’” He then shared that his mother never told him she loved him until she was 76 years old. In a poignant portrayal of the inner turmoil and ultimate epiphany over the lack of love he experienced as a child, he gave the students food for thought about their own self worth. “I look around this place, and you know what I see? I see world champions sitting in this audience,” he said.

He closed the program instructing the students to believe in themselves even when no one else believes in them. “Never, never, never let somebody else’s opinion of you become your reality,” he said.

As a small crowd of middle and high school students gathered around him, Mr. Koloff posed for photos, draping his world championship belt around smaller shoulders.

When asked what he thought of the program, senior Tejan Edwards said, “We live in this world, we think everything is nonchalant. We’re just supposed to live life and die. But there’s plenty more to life than that, you know. Everyone has a purpose in this life, everyone has a divine purpose. I think it’s important that he reminded us that we’re not just here to live. We’re here to have a purpose, to accomplish something greater.”

Alexander Hamilton Students Compete in Final Rounds of Poetry Out Loud

Ten Alexander Hamilton High School students participated in the final local rounds of the national recitation contest, Poetry Out Loud, on Jan. 13. The event, held in the high school’s packed auditorium, determined who would go to the state regional competition.

Junior Sydney Bridges won first place, junior Ladora Cromwell took second, and sophomore Jennifer Glen came in third. All three students then competed in the regional competition on Staten Island on Feb. 8. “Although none of the girls advanced to the next round (of the state competition),” said English teacher, Keith Egan, “they had a great experience. There were about 20 contestants each of the three nights of the regionals, for a total of 60. Only two contestants were chosen per night to advance, for a total of six.”



Did I really just win? Ladora Cromwell taken by surprise.



Jennifer Glen reciting Doña Josefina...

The final rounds of the local school competition included two sets of recitations. Judges tallied the results between sets, scoring on physical presence, voice and articulation, appropriateness of dramatization, level of difficulty, evidence of understanding, and overall performance. A score of one signified “very weak,” while six was “outstanding.”

The first set included the mournful poems, “And Soul,” by Eavan Boland, and “O Captain! My Captain!,” by Walt Whitman, both of which deal with death. “Doña Josefina Counsels Doña Concepción before Entering Sears,” a poem by Maurice Kilwein Guevara, lightened the mood with cleverly intermingled English and Spanish text and expressions.

Recitations from the second set included “We Wear the Mask,” by Paul Laurence Dunbar, a lyric poem about oppressed African Americans forced to hide their pain and frustration; “A Red, Red Rose,” by Robert Burns, an 18th century poem expressing deep and abiding love; and “Richard Cory,” by Edward Arlington Robinson, a poem which describes a person who is wealthy, well educated, and admired, yet takes his own life.

“It took me two to three days just to memorize the words,” said Sydney, who recited “Richard Cory.” “After that, I would say it was about two weeks before I really determined exactly how I wanted to portray the poem. Each time I said it out loud, I found a different way to express each word.”

Eugene Bender, Mitchell Mirtil, Sydney Bridges, Ebere Anokute, Anish Thomas, Ladora Cromwell, Sheena Varghese, Jennifer Glen, Madeline Hirshan and Shaina Rajan were the ten finalists who recited their selections

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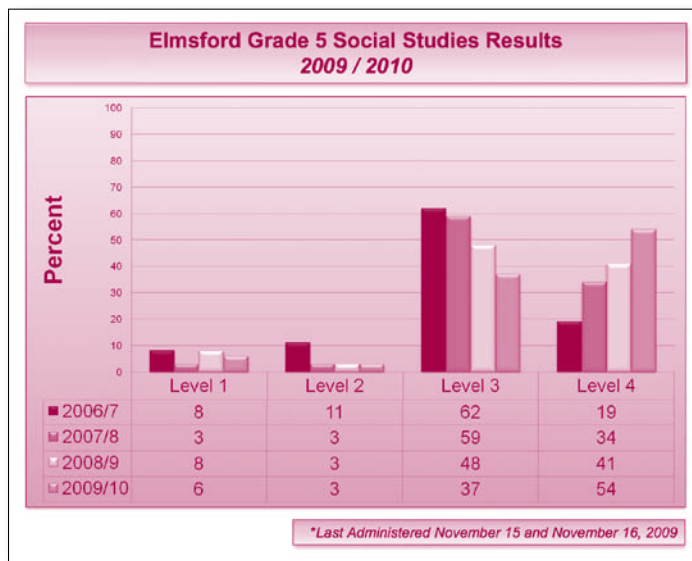
Superintendent's Community Forum Makes Second Round

You spoke, we listened.

Last October, the Elmsford UFSD held its first Superintendent's Community Forum, and many district residents turned out in support of this effort to bring change to our schools.

These meetings afford stakeholders an opportunity to contribute to and affect change in the workings of our school district.

While community members found much that is positive about the Elmsford UFSD during the fall meeting, the "Oh Nos!" – the term superintendent Dr. Barbara Peters uses for comments on areas that need improvement – were also duly noted.



Elmsford Grade 5 Social Studies results

School spirit was an issue. We waged a campaign to develop a new mascot, paint the entry hallway in vibrant school colors, increase our publicity in local media, and more.

Parents wanted to see more academic rigor. One example of our students performing better on N.Y. State Tests was demonstrated on the recent grade 5 social studies assessment. Fifty four percent of fifth grade students have now achieved a Level Four or "mastery" level on this assessment, compared to only 19% three years ago.

In October, concerns about the district's reputation were raised. We have since waged a campaign to increase newspaper coverage of all newsworthy events, and have been recognized regularly in The White Plains Express, (the Sunday and Thursday supplement to The Journal News); Hall Monitor, Lohud.com's education blog; and the education section of The Journal News.

On March 18, Dr. Peters held the second Superintendent's Community Forum, this time at the Village Hall in Elmsford. Hosted by Mayor Robert Williams, the event was attended by approximately 25 community members.

Dr. Peters presented information on Professional Learning Communities (PLC's); the strategic planning process for the district in general, and all three school buildings specifically; new grant writing endeavors, such as a 2009-2014 two-way bilingual education program, a bilingual ESL supplementary intervention program, and an Accelus grant from the National Institute of Science; athletics; the arts; technology; the District Art Show; and buildings and grounds updates.

Mayor Williams spoke about plans for Elmsford's 100th Anniversary Celebration, the Centennial Clock, the Veteran's Parade, the New Spray Park, and other village-related news.

Most noteworthy was the overview of academic improvement plans for the Alice E. Grady and Carl L. Dixon Elementary Schools, and the Alexander Hamilton High School.

Activities currently underway at Grady include the articulation and implementation of a consistent K-6 literacy program for ELL students and students with disabilities, and the promotion of parent involvement through workshops that support a proactive approach to academic success.

Dixon activities include the identification of ways to incorporate center and academic time, the recognition of the importance of play in the primary grades, and the development of further initiatives to improve literacy readiness of children ages 0-4.

The Alexander Hamilton activities include the implementation of a formal process to identify, track, and intervene with at-risk students, and the enhancement of academic rigor with additional opportunities for AP, college credit-bearing and honors classes.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to partner with members of our community and gain positive feedback through these meetings", said Dr. Peters. "Mayor Williams has been a phenomenal partner, and has helped us find collaborative ways to save money, time and other resources".

New Grants

2009-2014 Two-Way Bilingual Education Program

Total funding: **\$591,300**
\$91,300 for the 09 - 10 school year;
\$125,000 for each of the next four school years

Bilingual ESL Supplementary Intervention Program Grant
\$24,525

Accelus Grant from the National Institute of Science
\$11,785

College Process

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explained. Judgment is impaired, and adolescents make knee-jerk decisions.

With alcohol remaining the leading cause of death in young people ages 16–24, parents must consider one last feature of the colleges as they visit with their children.

Mr. Julius advised them to check out drinking episodes from the last three years, and talk to graduates and current students at the school. “Recognize signs of stress,” he warned.

He reminded those in attendance that colleges are largely unsupervised settings, and that parents cannot control who will be their child’s roommate. He suggested that parents do a little homework of their own in preparation for what can be the most exciting and enriching time of their child’s life.

Poetry Out Loud

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before the superintendent of schools, a panel of faculty judges, and the entire student body in the local competition.



From L to R: Poetry Out Loud winners Sydney Bridges, Ladora Cromwell and Jennifer Glen with English teacher Keith Egan.

“They started preparing in November of last year,” said Keith Egan, high school English teacher. “For three weeks, they worked on their poems in class, committing them to memory.”

Participants in the contest learned public speaking skills and gained an historical perspective on the works in order to perform them well. “There is a thin line between excellent recitation with a few embellishments and overdoing it,” said Mr. Egan.



RAIDER BITES

SMART Volunteers Help With Reading Skills

Bernice Schwartz has been volunteering as a reading partner for over seven years; she loves reading to and with children.

A retired college teacher, the spry senior citizen faithfully fulfills her weekly commitment to work as a SMART (Students and Mature Adults Read Together) volunteer at the Grady Elementary School.

On Jan. 7, Ms. Schwartz followed her usual Thursday routine of greeting the office staff, donning her name tag, and checking her assignment. She then headed toward the classroom where she met her student, and took him to a round table in the hallway for their private reading time.

The third grade boy was prepared for his session, and the two seemed comfortable with one another. “I enjoy working with my students,” said Ms. Schwartz, who has also volunteered at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers.

Pulling out a number of pre-selected books from his backpack, the eight-year-old chose “The Teacher From the Black Lagoon” as his first read.

“What’s a lagoon anyway?” queried Ms. Schwartz rhetorically. “Let’s see if we can figure it out through the story. If we can’t, we can always try the dictionary.”

As they read the book, the child and his mentor asked questions of one another, following a routine indicative of an intergenerational pair who often spend time together. SMART volunteers work with the same students once a week for one hour during the school year.

As the two studied the illustrations in the book, they laughed at the reptilian representation of the teacher in the story. “Have you ever had a teacher that reminded you of a crocodile?” asked Mrs. Schwartz. “Yes!” exclaimed the boy.

The grandmotherly volunteer sounded out words with her student, asked occasional reality check-type questions — “This teacher is like a dragon. Do you think maybe this is a dream?” — and assisted with creatively finding definitions for new words. Covering syllables of words with her hands, she asked her pupil to pronounce them individually until he had mastered each new word. “This is a hard word,” she said of the word “slithered.” “You ordinarily expect it to be ‘walked.’”

SMART is sponsored by JCY-Westchester Community Partners, a 91-year-old organization whose mission is to develop intergenerational programs to meet the needs of the community. JCY sends mature adult volunteers into schools to work one-on-one with students who need help with their literacy and language skills.



Bernice Schwartz reading to her student in the SMART program