



## From the Desk of the Superintendent

### Dear Elmsford UFSD Parents and Community Members:

I hope you are all getting through the winter months and looking forward to spring, as we are here in the Elmsford Schools, where students are continuing to have a productive, enjoyable and enriching educational experience.

We are working extremely hard to create a budget that meets the needs of our students while being cognizant of the economic situation within our community. The Elmsford School District will see a significant reduction in State Aid from what we have had in previous years.

This loss comes at a time when we are already hit with declining revenues and decreased assessments. We are examining a variety of strategies to reduce our costs so the end result will be a budget that the Elmsford families can support. However, these strategies will come with the loss of some programs and staff.

I encourage you to join us at any of our open forums or Board Meetings to hear what our plans are for the future. If you have specific suggestions, feel free to contact me in person via email at [bpeters@elmsd.org](mailto:bpeters@elmsd.org) or by telephone at (914) 592-6632.

We have many new initiatives that are tied to our Strategic Plan. One of them is related to The Dignity for All Students Act, which was signed into law by the former New York State governor, David Paterson. This Act ensures that students are protected from harassment, discrimination and bullying. We take that law very seriously in the Elmsford UFSD, regularly



reviewing district policies, student programs and staff development initiatives to ensure we are doing everything we can to provide a safe, nurturing and productive environment for all students.

In addition, each building has created a Character Education Committee to help support our Strategic Plan and to infuse a sense of right and wrong throughout our district and to encourage our children to understand and care about others.

Each building has an incredible staff and offers wonderful programs. We would love you to be a part of any or all of the ongoing activities. Please check our website at [www.elmsd.org](http://www.elmsd.org) for regular updates and news about upcoming events. We hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Barbara Peters*  
Superintendent of Schools

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# Elmsford Students Learn the Dangers of Abusive Teen Relationships

The 250 or so students seated in the Alexander Hamilton High School auditorium on Dec. 17 were attentive during an hour-long video on abusive teen dating relationships. The documentary-style feature highlighted some of the most troubling signs of this growing national epidemic, including jealousy, isolation from friends and family, controlling behavior, and extreme criticism.

The feature was produced by Paul LaVallee, an instructor at Hendrick Hudson High School, and Hope's Door, a private non-profit organization that provides a safe haven and caring services to survivors of domestic violence. Formerly known as the Northern Westchester Shelter, Hope's Door offers a teen dating abuse prevention program, also known as STAR (Students Terminating Abusive Relationships), which oversees a chapter in AHHS and several other schools in the region, including Hendrick Hudson, Maria Regina, Rye, Westlake, and White Plains high schools.

In addition, STAR has a Pleasantville chapter for students who don't have access to a chapter in their home schools. It currently serves students from Byram Hills, Horace Greeley and Woodlands high schools.

The event, which included a group of students from the Hendrick Hudson and Alexander Hamilton High School STAR chapters, was organized by AHHS health teacher Ryan Fisk.

The case involving Gabrielle Butler, a North Salem High School graduate who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend five years ago, was a focus of the documentary. Gabrielle was strangled, raped and stabbed by her Guatemalan ex-boyfriend because he was angry that she brought another boy to her senior prom.

Experts interviewed for the documentary said that finding someone to trust



Students discuss teen dating in a small group session after the STAR event held at Alexander Hamilton High School. At far left is AHHS senior Brianna Coombs, who led the discussion.

and talk to is an important step in preventing repeated abuse, and unfortunately in some cases, death. The video outlined the different forms of abuse that teenagers can be subjected to, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

Abusing someone online or through texting has become commonplace as teenagers spend more and more time online, the video cited. A recent trend, known as "sexting," which is the sending of explicit photos by cell phone, is a growing phenomenon. Unfortunately, such images are often forwarded to friends of the recipient in an attempt to humiliate the victim.

According to a report by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com, 21 percent of teen girls and 18 percent of teen boys have sent nude or semi-nude images of themselves to others.

The students also learned that an abusive relationship can be identified early on if teens know what signs to look for. Experts agree that a partner who wants to get serious early on in a relationship, who forces his or her partner to be isolated from friends and family, and who exhibits other controlling behaviors are all red flags.

Perhaps one of the most dangerous times in a relationship is when a partner tries to sever the ties. The documentary included footage of a confrontation that took place between a boy and his girlfriend in an urban space in northern Westchester. Passersby were shocked as the boy attempted to verbally and physically attack his girlfriend in public. The police were called and the boy was arrested.

After the video presentation, several groups of students, separated by gender, filed into various classrooms to discuss this sensitive topic. In one room, AHHS senior Brianna Coombs led the discussion along with Christina Di-Roma, an 11th-grader from Hendrick Hudson High School. Brianna began the conversation by asking participants if they could recognize the signs of an abusive relationship, and if so, what would they do in response?

"It usually takes seven tries to get out of a relationship," said Christina, adding that confrontation is not easy to initiate, but it is still something that must be dealt with. "Perhaps there is someone who can be trusted outside of school or somebody who will not judge harshly; someone who will listen," she said.

# Community Theater Troupe Acts Out Immigrant Experiences

A handful of students and their families turned out Jan. 10 to attend a unique display of improvisational theater in the gymnasium of Elmsford's Alice E. Grady Elementary School. The Hudson River Playback Theatre, known for its creative performances based on the real life stories of immigrants and other groups, provided a warm and inspiring interpretation of several stories told to them during the one-hour event.

Titled "Our Lives, Our Stories," the initiative, part of the theater group's Immigrant Stories project, was brought to the Elmsford Schools through a New York State Education Department EETT grant, a multi-district technology grant that focuses on the critical need to improve academic achievement in English Language Learners. One of the components of the community-based grant is to decrease the isolation of ELL students and families through outreach and engagement activities.

Elmsford was one of four school districts to receive the award. The others included Hendrick Hudson, Mahopac and Ossining.

"We are interested in your lives, especially the lives of those of you who immigrated to the United States," said Jo Salas, co-founder of Playback Theatre and the creator of the troupe. Any experience can become a playback story, explained Ms. Salas, be it funny or sad, or long ago or even yesterday, she added. "Every immigrant has a story, and it's a big story to come here and to live here."

The concept of Playback Theatre, which is now active in approximately 60 countries, is about creating a unique dialogue that builds understanding, connection and empowerment for audience members, together with highlighting both the differences and commonalities between various cultures. During each performance, participants are asked to recall a memory and then watch as actors and musicians make theater on the spot that captures those important recollections. Performances can take place in theaters, schools, conference centers, prisons, refugee camps, and festivals.

Take the story of Ruth, the mother of a Grady student

who came to the United States from Peru. Shortly after her arrival in the United States, Ruth found a job as a house cleaner. Lucky for Ruth, her boss was a kindly woman who provided her with a digital translator that allowed her to read instructions in Spanish and then see the corresponding English translation.

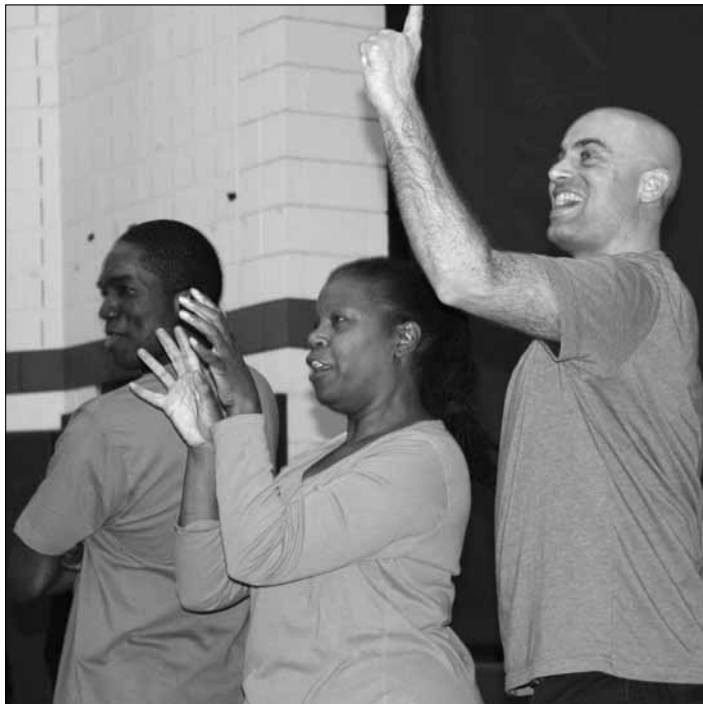
Ruth later took English classes at a nearby community college and with every passing year, she became more confident in her language skills. It was, however, her considerate employer who jumpstarted Ruth on her road to success, and she never forgot the kindness and generosity of that woman.

The story of Chris, a fifth-grader at Grady Elementary, was also highlighted by the troupe. Chris recalled the fear he experienced upon entering kindergarten. The son of Spanish-speaking immigrants, Chris felt that other children might laugh at him because his English was not as perfect as theirs. His kindergarten teacher reassured him that he would not be teased, and as a result, Chris felt more comfortable in class, and later became a mentor to other children who found themselves in similar situations.

In true Playback fashion, each immigrant's story is presented through a combination of drama, music and movement that reveals the flexible yet concise nature of the players. One woman's loneliness for her home country and her longing to somehow combine her native traditions with those of her adopted country were vividly displayed for all to see. Three

actors from the troupe told her story, one appearing on stage looking rigid and fearful of everything around her, a second character displaying a happiness that shows an acceptance of the new culture, and a third actor trying to bring the other two together, resulting in an acceptance, on the part of the original character, of her new life in the United States.

"We were so fortunate to have the Playback Theatre perform for our community," said Marina Kelly, district coordinator of ELL Services. "It was an excellent experience which showed the impact of the immigrant story in all our families' lives."



Actors from the Hudson River Playback Theatre troupe perform in "Our Lives, Our Stories," held at the Alice E. Grady School in January.

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# Entrepreneurship in the Making at AHHS

Students at Alexander Hamilton High School are getting the kind of entrepreneurial expertise that many struggling business owners crave for.

Robert Scharf, the business and technology education teacher at the school, has initiated a partnership with the Westchester chapter of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) so that students in his Entrepreneurship class can get first-hand knowledge of how to create and run a successful business. Mentors from the group will visit the school on a monthly basis to talk about a variety of business-related issues.

On Feb. 3, Charles Auerbach, a former management consultant, and a member of SCORE, spoke to students in a lecture titled “What to Consider Before Starting your Own Business.” Mr. Auerbach spoke to the students about the complexities of creating a business and the challenges they must overcome, together with the support that is needed from family as they go through the various phases of developing a business plan, a stage that is necessary, explained Mr. Auerbach, to attract investors and lenders.

On Feb. 11, William Brady from the Westchester County Planning Department spoke to students in Mr. Scharf’s Entrepreneurship class about zoning laws and how they affect business development, in addition to stressing the importance of business development’s relationship with the county as it relates to commercial zoning laws.



Robert Scharf, the business and technology education teacher at AHHS, far left, pictured with students in his Entrepreneurship class, along with William Brady of the Westchester County Planning Department.

The Entrepreneurship Program at AHHS, established by Mr. Scharf, gives him the opportunity to extend the parameters of the class curriculum. The program offers a wide range of information to the students, including how to become an entrepreneur by recognizing the opportunities that make successful businesses. Students also learn about the legal environment of commerce, marketing, management, accounting, financing a business ventures, risk management, social responsibility, and conducting a global business through e-commerce.

Mr. Scharf said he is continuously searching for businesses, organizations

and government agencies to help bring his curriculum to life for his students. “I hope that the integration of curriculum and knowledge that is shared by all of the guest speakers will provide the students with a learning experience that can become the foundation of their success in college and in their careers.”

SCORE is known for its mentoring of small businesses and non-profit organizations, and is dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and helping small business start, grow and succeed nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

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## Elmsford Students Learn the Dangers of Abusive Teen Relationships

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Asked what is important to strive for in a relationship, and several students responded. Some said maintaining separate identities might be best, while others lauded the value of an honest relationship and that equality should be the main focus of a relationship.

Dianne Prisco-DeFilippis, team program educator for Hope’s Door, said the Elmsford group is one of the most active and diversified in the region, with students meeting once a month to discuss topics both pertinent to boys and girls.

For more information on the STAR program, visit [www.hopesdoor.org](http://www.hopesdoor.org).

# Years of Writing Culminates in Published Novel for AHHS Teen

As a little girl, Alexander Hamilton High School senior Jasmine Johnson had a habit of scribbling tales into notebooks and private journals that she often shared with friends. Full of poems and stories, Jasmine would spend hours writing and rewriting, but never finished any of them. Three years ago, she made the commitment to complete one of those stories and today Jasmine (otherwise known as “Jaz”) is the proud author of her first book, “Sibling Secrets.”

The young adult novel tells the story of a teen who finds herself in a romantic relationship with the son of her father’s new girlfriend. Jasmine said she came up with the idea after seeing statistics on the country’s divorce rate and wondered how the children of divorced couples might somehow find themselves in romantic relationships that were thrust upon them as a result of circumstance.

While it’s true that Jasmine always liked to write, exposure to the real world of professional writing came about when she participated in the annual Writers Conference at Purchase College. The workshop gave Jasmine the momentum to finish the story and to expand it into something with more depth. After completing the first part of what will soon become a sequel (she is currently working on that), Jasmine chose to self publish the story “as a form of kudos to my personal accomplishment,” she said.

The road to publication was a learning process, to be sure, and one that required a lot of patience, understanding, and of course money, said Jasmine, who is also an accomplished artist. She researched various self publishing companies on the Internet, narrowing her choice down to three. She eventually settled on Author House, an Indiana-based brand and book publishing company, because it gave her the best deal in terms of price, and she was able to retain all rights to her book, in addition to maintaining editorial control.

When it finally arrived in the mail (two days before her 17th birthday), Jasmine said she was thrilled. “It was so exciting to see how something that was once in my notebook was now a hardcover book. I said to myself, ‘I did it; it’s finally here.’” She received 10 additional hardcover books as well as 30 paperbacks, along with posters, business cards and other marketing materials to help promote it.

AHHS Principal Marc Baiocco is proud to call Jasmine a student at the school. “Jasmine is a bright student who has demonstrated that with determination and perseverance, anything is possible. She is a model for students at Hamilton and surrounding high schools. Her message of following your dreams speaks volumes,” he said.



Senior Jasmine Johnson holding her newly released novel “Sibling Secrets.”

**“It was so exciting to see how something that was once in my notebook was now a hardcover book.”**

Her mother, Tanya, is elated to see Jasmine accomplish such an important goal. “She had a plan and went for it. She is a wonderful role model for youth in today’s society.”

Jasmine, who is interested in attending Edinboro University in Edinboro, Pa., has been busy reading to children throughout

the district and at various local venues. On Feb. 16, she participated in the African-American Read-In at the Lois Bronz Childrens Center in White Plains, where her mother once worked as a School Age/Special Programs coordinator. In April, she will read at a PTA-sponsored book sale, and a book signing is being planned at the Barnes and Noble bookstore in Greenburgh.

# RoboRaiders Compete in Lego Robotics Competition

The Alice E. Grady School gym was a veritable sea of motorized robots Jan. 29 as fifth- and sixth-graders from several regional school districts, including Elmsford's own RoboRaiders, competed in the annual Hudson Valley FIRST® LEGO® League Tournament.

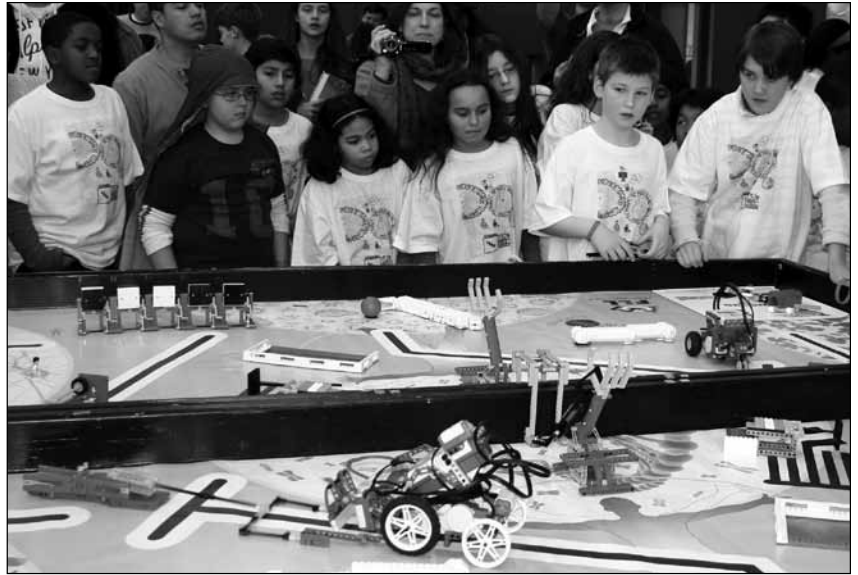
The qualifying tournament, held at Grady for the second time, was one of several competitions organized throughout the Hudson Valley region. Twelve teams usually compete in a single event, and are judged in a number of different categories, including robot performance, robot design, research presentation, and teamwork.

The Grady team consisted of: Akshay Alex, Luciano Aprile, Haleigh Brown, Treia Boozier, Gage Cuccia, Corey Field, Phani Gollamudi, Terrance Hitch, Brandon Hong, Daanyal Hussain, Sonia Lulla, Erin Malaver, Lowell Pierrette, Cassie Priano, Irving Rodriguez, Craig Rowe, Ellie Satin, Steven Semidey, Tanya Shaik, Jennifer Vargas, and Zachary Washington.

This year's theme, titled "Body Forward," was focused on biotechnology. Every team, including Elmsford's RoboRaiders, was assigned a series of challenges in order to score points. Challenges included pushing, pulling, lifting, or otherwise moving other LEGO objects as the robots navigated around a standardized competition table.

In addition, each team was required to build a LEGO diorama and construct a simple robot with moving parts. Corey Field, a fifth-grader, talked about the three-motion chassis he built in the after-school program, and Zachary Washington, also a fifth-grader, enthusiastically showed off the prosthetic arm he and his teammates also built.

All around the gym, students proudly displayed their dioramas and additional biotechnology-related research outlined on poster boards, much like the information in a science fair



Students from the RoboRaiders team, pictured at the recent FIRST® LEGO® League Tournament held in the Alice E. Grady School gym, getting ready to navigate their LEGO robot across the competition table.

project. The Elmsford group conducted their research on how prosthetic arms can help veterans who have lost limbs at war. Other interesting projects around the room included how robotics research is being used to treat color blindness and early cancer detection.

Dr. Pam Davis, advisor to the Grady group, who is also the computer coordinator at the Alice E. Grady School, said that while all of the competitors received medals, the RoboRaiders was the only team to win the "Team Spirit Award." The students also received the second highest score in the Research Project category and the fifth highest score overall in the competition. Teaching assistant Carin Pinsker also coached the students, as did Ravi Nair, an IBM worker who volunteered his time as a mentor.

The top scoring teams from each tournament advance to the regional championship tournament, which was held Feb. 26 at Dutchess Community College.

## Attention Parents of Pre-K and Kindergarten Parents

### Pre-Kindergarten Registration

To qualify for the Pre-K lottery, all packets distributed the week of Feb. 28 must be completed and signed by the deputy superintendent no later than April 27. The collection of packets will begin no sooner than March 14.

**Lottery Date: May 4, 2011**

**Where: Carl L. Dixon Primary School Cafeteria**

**Time: 6 p.m.**

Pre-K wait list will be formed after May 5.

### Kindergarten Registration

The distribution of Kindergarten packets will begin March 7. The collection of packets will begin no sooner than March 21, 1011.



# RAIDER BITES

## YouTube Channel to Promote Student Activities

A variety of musical performances and other activities are being aired on the Elmsford School District's recently created YouTube channel called "Elmsford Arts," with the intention of also airing the same videos on the Greenburgh Cable TV station in a series titled "Eye on Elmsford."

The initiative, which was spearheaded by Alexander Hamilton High School Music Director Harry Rios, is intended to inform parents about the activities that students are involved in at all three district schools, including arts, sports and community-related initiatives.

Mr. Rios has, with the help of several high school students, created a number of videos, which include scenes from several holiday recitals, band performances, and the recent Class Clash at the high school, to name a few. Mr. Rios hopes to add last year's "Little Shop of Horrors" performance and scenes from the high school's rendition of "Grease" to the line-up.

## Strong Season for Girls Varsity Basketball

The Alexander Hamilton High School girls varsity basketball team got off to a strong 2010-11 campaign season this past December by taking first place in the Eastchester Holiday Tournament, held Dec. 2-4. They followed up on that success by beating Riverside High School of Yonkers in the opening round of the Elmsford Classic Basketball Tournament, and then losing to a very tough Woodlands team in the final of that competition.

In their third tournament of the season, the North Salem Holiday Tournament, the girls beat Pelham High School in the opening round, but lost during the championship game against Pawling High School, taking second place. "We look to continue our success down the home stretch of the season," said Athletic Director Robert Pollok, "and earn a spot to compete for the coveted gold ball this year at the Westchester County Center."

Recent awards handed out to the AHHS players include Ashley Morris, All Tournament Honors - Eastchester Holiday Tournament; Maia Hood, Tournament MVP - Elmsford Classic Basketball Tournament; Maia Hood, Amani Lightbourne and Ashley Morris, All Tournament Honors - North Salem Holiday Tournament.



The Alexander Hamilton High School senior class at the 2010 Class Clash, to be aired on Greenburgh's Cable TV station, part of the "Eye on Elmsford" series.

He explained that a small group of students, most of whom are taking music technology courses, are acting as videographers, editors and reporters and are learning hands-on how to create videos in what he described as a "TMZ style format," referring to the popular tabloid/entertainment show that is aired nationwide. The students are using Flip video cameras, cataloging the material they shoot, and then editing the clips with the help of a professional editing software program. As a result, said

Mr. Rios, students are learning the many aspects of audio and video production, as well as taking a crash course in the intricacies of journalism.

"The Elmsford Schools are bringing fresh and relevant ideas to the table, with the Elmsford Arts YouTube channel and the 'Eye on Elmsford' series serving as wonderful platforms that allow us to reach out to the community and to the students," said Mr. Rios. "I am very happy to be involved and to contribute to the process."



Kindergartners, from left: Isabella Fajardo and Aeleen Salamea smile for the camera at the recent "Bundle Up with Books" event held in the Carl L. Dixon Primary School gym.



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Elmsford NY 10523

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## Fitness Fridays Get Kids Moving

While the childhood obesity epidemic continues to grow throughout the United States, physical education instructors Drew Watson and Kevin Tiernan are encouraging students at the Alice E. Grady and Carl L. Dixon schools to hop, run and jump their way to fitness by participating every month in the Fitness Fridays initiative.

The program, which takes place in both schools each month, was established by Mr. Watson, who runs the physical education program at Alice E. Grady, and Mr. Tiernan, the physical education teacher at Carl L. Dixon, as a way to promote wellness among the district's younger student population.

Both teachers continue to keep the program exciting for students by incorporating various themes each month. For example, around the time of last year's Winter Olympics, Mr. Watson incorporated elements from some of the sports events that were part of those Games, and in the past, he has included a walk-a-thon, a dance-a-thon and basketball into the hour-long activity.

At the Carl L. Dixon Primary School, students have had fun jump roping, performing jumping jacks and climbing, all under Mr. Tiernan's supervision.

During a recent Fitness Friday event held in the Alice E. Grady gym, Mr. Watson took to the stage, shouting into a microphone and moving to the beat of the music, all the time encouraging the students and their teachers to stay in motion. His usual routine involves several warm-up exercises, which then leads to the planned activity.

"I always like to throw out surprises and to get staff members to participate," said Mr. Watson, "because I think it allows the kids to see their teachers in a different light." Incorporating music into the activity is also important, he added, because it gets the students energized. Fifth-grade teacher Jeff Hopper assists Mr. Watson by selecting the appropriate music for each activity.



Both students and teachers get fit at a recent "Fitness Friday" event held in the Grady School gym.

While this is a true labor of love for all of them, there is no doubt the focus on wellness is an important part of their program. "It's really a great opportunity to maximize fitness and to collectively get all classes to the gym, and it also promotes school spirit," said Mr. Tiernan, who acknowledged that childhood obesity is a "huge concern," and that unfortunately only a small percentage of obese children will ever break the mold. However, he added, "Drew and I are not just leading our students to water when it comes to fitness; we're trying to show them how to take a drink."

For Mr. Watson, it's all about promoting a positive attitude and being upbeat at all times. "You have to come into this with a positive attitude; if you don't, you know that the kids will not buy into it," he said.