



May 2009

Core Team



**At the Core of Our Mission
Are Children**



**The School District
of Philadelphia Core Beliefs**

Children come first.

Parents are our partners.

Victory is in the classroom and facilitated
by a strong instructional leader.

Leadership and accountability
are the keys to success.

It takes the engagement of the
entire community to ensure the success
of its public schools.



**Do you know this person?
See page 7.**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“There is always one moment
in childhood when the
door opens and lets the
future in.”

Dr. Deepak Chopra,
holistic health expert

At the Core

With

Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman

The Promise of Summer Learning in Philadelphia



Let's take a moment and imagine. Imagine the difference we can make in a child's life by providing equal access to high quality summer learning opportunities! Imagine how this particular strategy can help to close the achievement and opportunity gap for Philadelphia students. And, imagine that by starting now—in the summer of 2009—what our students can achieve by 2014. Borrowing the words from a recent study, I am happy to say that our District is about to “turn on the faucet” of summer experiences aimed at increasing opportunities, accelerating learning, developing talent, and helping others to catch up.

Did you know that “two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities” during the elementary school years? Summer learning loss affects nearly all young people; it is real and it can result in long-term, life-altering consequences. **Why? The answer is inequality.** Students who experience the greatest loss in learning are students who have uneven or unequal access to summer learning opportunities.

The School District of Philadelphia

will soon mark the official end of another school year but not the end of learning. School doors and classrooms will be open for four weeks in July at 131 sites where students will have access to all kinds of summer opportunities. Academic enrichment classes as well as classes for remediation and credit recovery are planned for the morning sessions. In the afternoon sessions, students will be able to explore other interests or develop their creative talents in areas such as music and dance. The opportunity of a single summer can change a life. Thanks to the generosity of more than 200 community providers and partners, we will be able to offer an exciting menu of possibilities for as many as 45,000 students in the largest summer program ever—with a nutritional breakfast and lunch included.

We will offer Time Warp Plus and VMath by Voyager in elementary and middle schools and other learning experiences to help students improve their skills in critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. In addition, students will have opportunities to work on proficiencies that are essential in the 21st century workplace. Holt Summer

continued on next page

Summer Learning *continued from page 1*

Core texts will be used at 21 comprehensive high school sites, and an adapted curriculum is planned for eight sites selected for students identified through the IEP process.

As the word gets out, excitement and enthusiasm are growing across the District. Knowing the research has helped us to make data-driven choices and decisions. A quick review of the research highlights on summer learning opportunities shows us that expanding summer school offerings is both important and necessary for student success. The following snapshot of conditions across the nation tells a story much like our own.

- All students experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer.
- On average, students lose approximately 2.6 months of grade level equivalency in mathematical

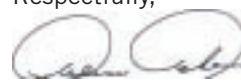
computation skills during the summer months.

- Low-income children experience greater summer learning losses than their higher income peers.
- Out-of-school time can be a dangerous time for unsupervised children. On average, 11 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 12 go unsupervised over the summer months.
- A majority of students (56 percent) wants to be involved in a summer program that “helps kids keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade.”
- Teachers typically spend between 4 to 6 weeks re-teaching material that students have forgotten over the summer.

What *Imagine 2014* proposes and what we are currently planning is Philadelphia’s pro-active approach to a

growing national concern. In addition to new and improved District programs, enrichment opportunities such as Accelerated Learning (at South Philadelphia High School), GEAR-UP (at 3 sites), full-day Freedom Schools (at 10 sites), and City-sponsored full-day summer camps (at 80 sites) will continue as scheduled. With such a wide range of opportunities and offerings, the summer of 2009 promises to be the first of many summers to remember. As staff at the National Center for Summer Learning have said: Doesn’t every child deserve a memorable summer? We believe so.

Respectfully,



Arlene C. Ackerman, Ed.D.
Superintendent

The School District of Philadelphia

Schools give back to the community

Students, parents, and District staff raise more than \$70,000 for March of Dimes

Thanks to the generosity and creativity of students, parents, and staff, The School District of Philadelphia has raised more than \$70,000 for the March of Dimes, thus exceeding the \$60,000 goal set by Superintendent Arlene Ackerman in January.

“I am grateful to everyone who made this achievement possible,” Dr. Ackerman said. “That includes our students who gave so that other children could have healthy lives, our school staff members who devised activities that rallied their school families behind this worthy cause, and our administration office school “adopters,” who helped the schools with much of the campaign legwork. I also thank the more than 350 students, parents and staff members who walked with me on April 26 as we conducted the regional March of Dimes March for Babies. As the regional honorary youth chair, I am proud of the District’s efforts and I know that we will build on this success in 2010.”

The schools with particularly noteworthy totals will be honored at the June 11 principals’ meeting.

\$3,000 or more in donations raised

Baldi Middle School
Shawmont Elementary School

\$1,000 to \$2,999 in donations raised

Childs Elementary School
Decatur Elementary School
Edison High School
Hamilton Elementary School
Junior ROTC Program
Mastbaum Technical High School
Mayfair Elementary School
Moffet Elementary School
Olney East and West High Schools
Overbrook High School
Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences
Spruance Elementary School
Ziegler Elementary School

You can change a lifetime!

May is National Foster Care Month

All children deserve a safe, happy life — including the 496,000 American children and youth in foster care. Young people in foster care especially need nurturing adults on their side because their own families are in crisis and unable to care for them.

Each May, the District will salute the compassionate people who make a difference by serving as foster parents, relative caregivers, mentors, advocates, social workers and volunteers. Thanks to these unsung heroes, many formerly abused or neglected children and teens will either safely reunite with their parents, be cared for by relatives, or be adopted by loving families.

People making a difference

With guidance and support from nurturing adults, children and youth in foster care are capable of overcoming the repercussions of previous abuse and neglect. Everyone has the power to do something positive that will change a lifetime for a young person in foster care. Decide to do something today and change a lifetime!

SEEDS OF SUCCESS

Office of Attendance and Truancy works to bring students back to the classroom

The Office of Attendance and Truancy is responsible for making sure each student is in every class every day. Yet in The School District of Philadelphia, this is not an easy mandate. “On average, there are 15,000 children out of school on any given day, and half of them are considered truant, which means they are absent without a valid excuse,” said Special Assistant Kelli Lofton-Oglesby. Moreover, historically as the weather gets nicer each spring, attendance erodes for some students in the District. “We know that children who are truant are more likely to drop out of school or be involved in violent crimes as either victims or perpetrators,” Lofton-Oglesby said.

The office works with nine community-based organizations to provide parent truancy officers (PTOs) in selected schools. If a child is reported absent without a valid excuse from school for between three and seven days, the PTO makes a home visit or calls the parent. This school year, the program worked with more than 11,000 students and families.

The Truancy Pickup Program is a joint venture of the School District and various law enforcement agencies. The program picked up 20,000 students this year. Children picked up during school hours are returned to their school if it is nearby. Those picked up at a location away from the school may be brought to one of the District’s two Truancy Support Centers; they served 2,375 children in 2008-2009. These centers are run by school principals, and center staff work to identify what issues contrib-

ute to each student’s unexcused absence.

Philadelphia City Council is also helping in the effort to end truancy, recently adopting a daytime curfew law. If a truant is picked up between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., the child’s parent or guardian is fined \$25. Each time the child is picked up the penalty may increase—to a maximum of \$300.

Project Start is for chronically truant children. This program is a collaboration between the School District, Family Court and the City’s Department of Human Services (DHS). Children up to grade 3 who are picked up are referred directly to DHS for family support services. “Children that age usually don’t play hooky,” Lofton-Oglesby said. From grades 4 to 10, the child goes to court where a DHS case worker, a school representative and a judge discuss with the child why he or she is not in school and work to address the problem. Older children—in grades 11 and 12—are referred directly to DHS, where programs can be developed to provide alternatives to complete their education or refer them to a program to develop life skills.

As an outgrowth of *Imagine 2014*, the School District’s five-year strategic plan, an additional anti-truancy initiative is in the works. The plan is to create attendance teams in each school consisting of three individuals. The new effort will be school-based rather than run from a central site. “The schools are far better equipped to deal with these issues,” Lofton-Oglesby said. “They know the children and may also know their families.”

Winning Ideas

Seeing their work in an original book spurs children on to creative expression

When the sample of a book created by children arrived in fourth-grade teacher John Raducz’s mailbox at Emlen Elementary School, the light went on in his head. “What better way to follow the core curriculum and teach his children realistic fiction than to collectively author a book?” he mused.

“My kids are very creative. They came up with the title, the story idea, the content and the illustrations.”

Through a series of homework assignments, the children wrote short stories, then the class spent time discussing them. “They voted on which topics to include and they chose the title, ‘*The Dancing Mr. R,*’ which is me,” Raducz exclaimed. “I didn’t like it at all, but I was outvoted!”

The story came together about a teacher who likes to dance, enters a competition, overcomes his fears and takes home first prize.

The book was produced in polished form in a limited edition by a professional publishing company, with some parents opting to purchase copies as keepsakes of their children’s learning.

Principal Richard Raisman was pleased with the outcome. “We are always looking for fun ways for children to express themselves and improve writing as part of our school improvement plan,” he said.



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Honor Roll

Philadelphia High School for Girls social studies teacher **Brendon-Jeremi Jobs** was one of two teachers in Pennsylvania to be awarded the prestigious James Madison Fellowship. He will apply the \$24,000 prize to a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, where he will begin part time in the fall; he was also awarded six credits for graduate study at Georgetown University next summer. The grant is given to a select group of individuals desiring to become outstanding teachers of the American Constitution who teach American history or social studies in a secondary school.

Alan Bronstein, a chemistry teacher at Central High School, is the 2009 winner of the Freida J. Riley Teacher Award presented by Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation. The award, which includes a \$10,000 stipend, goes to an exceptional American teacher who works with a physical disability. It is named for the West Virginia teacher who inspired the "rocket boys" immortalized in the movie of the same name.

Central High School's **Debra Cooperstein** is the recipient of the newly-established Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) Art Teacher Award of Excellence. The award comes with a \$500 cash prize, a tuition-free Academy continuing education course or workshop, a gift card for its art supply store or museum shop, and a family membership to PAFA's museum and galleries.

Emlen Elementary School raised \$3,656 to benefit the American Heart Association as students took part in the *Jump Rope for Heart Day*, which included exercise, nutritional education and other exciting activities.

Amy Guerin, director of policy development and analysis for the School Reform Commission (SRC), was recently elected to the nine-member Burlington Township (NJ) Board of Education, which governs a 4,500-student school district. She was also named chair of the board's policy committee and a member of its negotiations and student liaison committees as well as the board's liaison to the local foundation which raises funds for the school district.

Overbrook High School is celebrating the recent first-place victory of its robotics coach, **Vicki Baker**, and her team at the annual Greater Philadelphia Sea Perch Challenge, in which students build and operate under-water robots. The competition is co-sponsored by the American Society of Engineers, the Office of Naval Research and the School District.

Loesche Elementary School led a campaign for Autism Awareness Month, raising \$1,448 for Autism Speaks, a national organization for autism research and education. Students emptied their penny banks for *Pennies for Autism Day*, brought their families to dinner at *Loesche Night at Friendly's Restaurant*, and purchased the symbolic Autism Awareness ribbons at the school. In addition, *Elaine's World of Wonder*, a special sensory/therapeutic classroom, was dedicated in memory of Elaine Cardonick, Loesche's former autistic support teacher.

South Philadelphia High School recently held its first Annual Computer Fair. Teachers **Richelle Kamper** and **Valerie Howard** served as the coordinators. The winners were: Jevote Pressley, graphic design; Claudia Hutchful, computer fair logo design; Michael Hood and Porscha Whiteside, multimedia presentation; Ashley Maldy, Alexie Kumeh and Xiong Zhijaian, desktop publishing; and Wei Chen, web page

design. The computer fair was just one facet of the school's technology transition, led by technology leader **Audrey Nock**.

Another "first" is the **South Region's** First Annual "Schools on Parade" Art and Music Festival. This event, which will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. on Thursday, May 28, will showcase the music, art, dance, drama and culinary talents of students in the region. It will also give many members of the audience their first glimpse of the Girard Academic Music Program's new Performing Arts Center, 22nd and Ritner Streets, which is the venue for the festival.

Aliya Bradley, Hill-Freedman Middle School language arts and social studies teacher, and the school's Student Council developed a partnership with the The National Dairy Council and the NFL to encourage students to eat healthy and boost their activity by sixty minutes a day. The kick-off event for this pilot program featured singing and dancing fruits and veggies and an appearance by Philadelphia Eagles player Stewart Bradley. The students have begun planning a morning walking club and a vegetable and herb garden.

Strawberry Mansion High School Media Specialist Julie Davis accepted a special book basket presented by Anne R. Frazier as part of the school's recent The Big Read Assembly. This event was a celebration of literacy that involved over 400 students in poetry, art, dance, reading, writing and speaking activities. The Philadelphia chapter of The Links, Inc. sponsored a visit by former Mayor, Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, who told students that it was his thirst for learning—through any book he could get his hands on growing up—that propelled him toward knowledge and success.

Victory Garden

Students, parents, and teachers work together for smooth pre-K to kindergarten transition

As the end of the school year approaches, many thoughts focus on graduation, and high school students naturally come to mind. However, there is another group of students, among the District's youngest—those in pre-K and kindergarten—who also will be moving on and up. The School District's Office of Early Childhood Education plans year-round for this important progression in a child's education, working with parents, teachers and the students themselves, said Michelle Linder-Coates, kindergarten transition coordinator.

"Through each of our programs, we try to get the word out that the transition from pre-K to K is a critical milestone," she explained. "The research shows that when children embrace moving to kindergarten, the attitude they develop sets the tone to affect their future education."

One way in which the department builds this connection is through Building Bridges, a professional development program that brings together pre-K and kindergarten teachers. The focus is on continuity to ensure that the two environments are consistent. For example, both pre-K and kindergarten spaces have writing centers, each geared toward age-appropriate learning. In the pre-K writing center there may be stamps, alphabet cards, crayons and clay to help children as they move from gross motor skills to fine motor skills, while the kindergarten space may have markers, pencils and books.

Teachers at the pre-K and kindergarten levels also work together to create transition

programs, including parent orientations, visits to the new school by parent and child, and open houses for parents.

New offerings aid transition

New this year is a program for parents of pre-K children offered through the School District's Parent University. This five-week course familiarizes them with what their children will be learning in kindergarten. The course covers reading, math, science and social studies. "This is a great way to encourage parents to work with their children at home and to feel more confident as they do so," Linder-Coates said.

This summer will see the Kindergarten Learning Academy for those children who have already had a full year of kindergarten but have been identified by their teachers as needing additional support. This literacy program runs for four weeks, from 8 am to 12:30 pm.

Another highlight will occur on August 9 at the new Please Touch Museum. "This is our mixer for children going into kindergarten!" Linder-Coates explained. It is an afternoon program filled with tours of the museum, health screenings, book reading and treats.

Then, three days before the beginning of school, the Summer Bridge program—an initiative of the Superintendent's—will get underway. Through this initiative, all children who are eligible for kindergarten, and their parents, can attend a special series of activities, for an experience similar to what an older sibling might have at a college orientation.



Faces and Facts

A salute to our School District's unsung heroes and their work.

This issue spotlights:



Marjorie Bujack, classroom assistant for the hearing impaired, Hancock Elementary School, 3700 Morrell Avenue.

Marjorie Bujack partners with a classroom teacher in one of Hancock Elementary School's three classes for hearing-impaired children. She learned to communicate through sign language—or "to sign"—when her son, Matthew, now 25 years old, was born profoundly hearing impaired. Now, her personal story and experiences enable her to successfully move her students at Hancock past their frustrations and struggles, to break down concepts into pieces, and then have breakthroughs in comprehension. "Marjorie is a great team player and a super role model," said Hancock Principal Rosemary Cataldi. "She brings a level of sensitivity to situations that helps her understand the needs of her students. She treats the staff and children with a great deal of respect. And, she is always taking the initiative with students in the classroom."

Where in the world is Hee Young Yim, art teacher?

Spring is here, and that means that the District's art teachers, like Penn Treaty Middle School's Hee Young Yim, are helping their students bring many projects to their successful completion. Spring is also the time for the District's annual Young Artists Exhibit, currently spread out on multiple floors at the Education Center at 440 N. Broad Street. Continuing through June 13, the exhibit showcases more than 1,500 pieces from students at 170 District schools and is a feast for the eyes. This 53-year-old tradition highlights not only the talents of students, but also the excellent instruction their art teachers provide.

Clear expectations

Setting up for her class, Yim projects for all to see a list of the day's expected outcomes. The students will be absorbed in creating masks and posters.



Next project

Deon Sanders and Yim plot out the next project—a design for the school's talent show.



The voice of experience

Yim shows Gerald Moty that the paint will crack on his papier-mâché mask if it is applied too thickly.



Positive feedback

Shayla Thompson gets a nod from her teacher: "Good work!"

Where in the world are YOU?

In future issues, don't be surprised if our Core Team camera bugs catch you as you go about YOUR work on behalf of our children.