



THE EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER OF  
THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

November 2008

# 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 4.**

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“The kind of commitment I find among the best performers across virtually every field is a single-minded passion for what they do, an unwavering desire for excellence in the way they think and the way they work. Genuine confidence is what launches you out of bed in the morning, and through your day with a spring in your step.”

**Jim Collins**, Author of “Good to Great.”

## At the Core

With

Superintendent Arlene C. Ackerman

## Excellence, Equity, and Accountability 2014:

**A Strategic Plan for  
The School District of Philadelphia**

### District staff urged to participate on working groups setting strategies and priorities

Over the upcoming months, The School District of Philadelphia will be undertaking a tremendous challenge: to create a strategic plan to achieve excellence, equity and accountability for everyone within the District with the ultimate goal of providing every District student with a high-quality, 21<sup>st</sup>-century-ready, education.



During the previous five years, the District had been offering an excellent education to *some* but not *all* Philadelphia students. Although incremental progress had been made in terms of student achievement, a large percentage of students still do not complete high school within six years and persistent participation and achievement “gaps” remain between students of different ethnicities, home languages, areas of residence, and program placement. At the same time, adults within the District were not always held accountable for protecting the core mission of the District—providing every student with an excellent and high-quality education.

### Stage one: creating an agenda for excellence

This effort of creating an agenda for excellence, equity, and accountability by 2014 cannot be done without the

support of the entire District as well as the Philadelphia community. The first stage of this endeavor will be a series of community meetings conducted in multiple languages throughout Philadelphia. The goal of these community meetings is not only to share what the District has learned from its previous work but also to gather the experiences and recommendations from parents, students, and community leaders concerned about the future of our students.

### **Stage two: determining strategies and priorities**

The second stage of creating this plan will be to host a series of working groups with specific focus areas. These working groups will be charged with the task of determining a set of strategies and priorities to support the District in achieving its goals of excellence, equity, and accountability. Each of these working groups will include District leaders at all levels (central office, regional offices, principals, teach-

ers, and support staff), parents, students, and community partners. As a District, we serve a diverse student population; it is equally critical that our working groups represent this diversity.

### **Stage three: reporting back to the community**

The third stage of creating this plan will be to return the suggested strategies to the community to ensure that we have created an agenda to achieve excellence, equity, and accountability that will ensure that every student receives a high-quality, 21<sup>st</sup>-century-ready, education.

### **Community meetings to begin immediately**

We have scheduled numerous community meetings beginning as early as November 3. Working groups will begin their critical work as early as mid-November. We anticipate having a completed plan to deliver to the community in late January or early February. However, the completion of

the plan is only the beginning of this tremendous work. At least four times during the year for the next six years, we will provide updates on how the implementation of the plan is progressing and what challenges still remain.

### **We need your help**

We need your help in this process. If you would like to learn more about this work, participate in a working group, or schedule a community meeting, visit <http://www.philasd.org/strategicplan> or e-mail [strategicplan@philasd.org](mailto:strategicplan@philasd.org). We cannot do this incredible work alone; we need the help of the entire District and Philadelphia community to create a plan to achieve excellence, equity, and accountability in The School District of Philadelphia.

Respectfully,



Arlene C. Ackerman, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
The School District of Philadelphia

## **Real Deal**

### **A regular feature of Core Team**

Are you tired of hearing the latest gossip about the District in the office, the faculty lounge or café, or on the elevator, and do you wonder how much of what you hear is true?

“Real Deal” is designed to answer your questions and set the record straight.

If you would like to submit an item for “Real Deal,” please e-mail your question to [coreteam@philasd.org](mailto:coreteam@philasd.org).



**Core Team** is distributed monthly to employees of The School District of Philadelphia. Please send comments or questions to [coreteam@philasd.org](mailto:coreteam@philasd.org)

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# Honor Roll



The North Region is celebrating the fantastic work of two of its teachers who have guided award-winning student work selected for this year's Philadelphia Young Playwrights Festival. **Illene Poses'** students at **Morrison Elementary School** took three third place awards in the middle school division—two for individual work and one for a group project. At **Birney Elementary School**, one of **Kelly Compton's** students also won an individual third place. For the same competition, **CAPA** reports that teacher **Carol Pelligrino's** students racked up two second-place and two third-place awards.

In October, **Special Representative Dr. Victoria Yancey, Office of the Superintendent**, was one of three recipients of the Shepherds of Peace Award, presented by the Good Shepherd Mediation Program. The award goes to individuals whose dedicated and compassionate work helps to ensure the health and safety of Philadelphia's children, youth and families. One of Dr. Yancey's primary responsibilities is to be the District's liaison to the families of students who are the innocent victims of violence and, as a result, suffer serious injury or death.

Principal **Edward Hoffman, Conwell Middle School**, is one of five principals nationwide to be honored with the U. S. Department of Education's Terrel H. Bell award for outstanding school leadership. Principals chosen for this award reflect strong leadership in their schools. Hoffman was cited for his "open door" policy with parents and the community, the inspiration he provides to staff and students, and his leadership in setting the tone for quality

instruction and academic rigor. Conwell is one of two District schools named 2008 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools.



**Hilderbrand Pelzer III, Alternative Schools Region** Assistant Superintendent, the former principal of the Pennypack House School in the Philadelphia Prison System, is the winner of the 2008 Queen Smith Award for Commitment to Urban Education, presented by The Council of the Great City Schools, which represents America's largest urban school districts, and Macmillan/McGraw-Hill. The recipient is an urban school educator who has made significant contributions to education and to the community. This is the second consecutive year that a School District of Philadelphia educator has won the award. The 2007 winner was Strawberry Mansion High School Principal Lois Powell-Mondesire.

**J. B. Kelly Elementary School** teacher **Judy Willner** returned to school on November 3 following an 18-day trip to Japan, made possible through a Fulbright Memorial Scholarship. Willner was one of 160 American educators who were engaged in this adventure to learn more about Japan, its people, their culture and the education system.

Principal **Barbara Buckley-Deni, LaBrum Middle School**, was selected to participate in the Fulbright Administrator Exchange Program, which operates in over 155 countries. Deni will travel to Argentina in July, while an administrator from Argentina will spend three weeks in Philadelphia ending this month as part of the exchange. The program provides an opportunity for participants to observe

each other's political, economic, educational and cultural institutions, to exchange ideas and to embark on joint ventures benefitting the welfare of the world's inhabitants.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Red Cross recently honored **Franklin Learning Center** teacher and Red Cross Club advisor **Lynn Johnson** with the organization's Youth Advocate Award. Johnson also received a 2008 Lindback Foundation Distinguished Teaching Award.

Director of Customer Service and Parent Support **Karen James, Office of Parent and Family Support**, is the recipient of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Migrant Education Partner 2008 Award for Southeastern Pennsylvania. James was nominated by the Pennsylvania Migrant Program's Chester County unit, which also has an affiliate here in Philadelphia. She was selected for this honor from the 13 nominees representing Philadelphia, Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery Counties and is recognized for managing the District's successful immigrant student registration program.

**How to submit items for a future "Honor Roll" column**

*Honor Roll* is a forum to recognize the accomplishments and awards won by District employees, schools, administrative offices and programs/initiatives. If you have an item that you would like to be considered for the *Honor Roll*, please e-mail your information to [coreteam@philasd.org](mailto:coreteam@philasd.org) and write "*Honor Roll*" in the subject line.

We invite staff to submit the names of any employee, department, school or program/initiative that won local or national honors or awards from June 2008 to the present.

*Core Team* would also like to acknowledge staff members who have helped students achieve recognition or awards. Examples may include employees working with after-school clubs and academic and athletic teams.

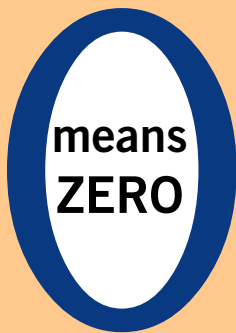
Please forward the following details: the name of the staff member, school, department or initiative to be recognized; the school or department where an individual honoree works; phone numbers where the nominator and the honoree may be contacted during business hours; and the full name (no acronyms, please) of the organization sponsoring the award. If you have a high quality, high resolution color photograph, please include it as an attachment to your e-mail message and identify by name(s) and title(s) the persons pictured.



The Central East Region Attendance Trophy for September 2008 went to **Moffet Elementary School**, with 97% attendance. Principal Olivia Dreibelbis (pictured on the left, with Community Relations Liaison Joe Pomales) accepted the award at the region's October principals' meeting. The trophy rotates monthly to the school with the highest attendance.

## Superintendent reiterates District's zero tolerance policy and reminds parents and students of the consequences of infractions

One of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman's top priorities is to make sure that schools and classrooms are safe for students, teachers, administrators, other school staff and parents.



To that end, last month at a School Reform Commission (SRC) meeting, Dr. Ackerman announced that the District would be vigorously enforcing its existing "zero tolerance" policy on violence of any kind by students in school, on school property or during any school-sanctioned activity. The announcement was immediately followed up with letters sent home to students and parents in various languages. Backing the Administration on the policy enforcement are Mayor Michael Nutter, who attended the SRC meeting and announced his

support, and Pennsylvania Department of Education Safe Schools Advocate Jack Stollsteimer.

"School safety is number one...and a lot of the nonsense that goes on and the danger that is created (in schools) must come to an end," the Mayor said at the SRC meeting. "Collectively, the City and the School District are essentially saying 'Enough is enough.' Bringing a weapon, bringing a knife, bringing a gun or any other tool or device that you intend to use to hurt someone is unacceptable behavior and you will pay a consequence for it."

Effective immediately, school administrators are required to suspend a student or group of students for 10 days with intent to expel when there is reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a student or group of students has:

- Assaulted an adult or another student;
- Committed or incited an act of violence;
- Possessed or has transported onto school property materials to utilize as potential weapons.

In her letter to students, Dr. Ackerman informed them that a student who commits any of the violent acts outlined will neither remain at the present school nor be transferred to another District school. Instead, the Superintendent will recommend that the student be immediately enrolled in an alternative school placement and, pending the result of an expulsion hearing by the SRC, not be allowed to return to a District school for a minimum of one year. In some instances, the expulsion may be permanent.

Dr. Ackerman referred parents and students to the District 2008-09 Code of Student Conduct for details. Copies were sent to schools this fall to be sent home with each student. The Code of Student Conduct is also available to be viewed on or downloaded from the District's web site, [www.philasd.org](http://www.philasd.org).



## Faces and Facts

A salute to our School District's unsung heroes and their work. This issue spotlights:

### Karen James, Director Office of Parent and Family Services

The School District of  
Philadelphia Education Center  
440 North Broad Street, Room 114



**Face:** Question: Who among us manages one of the District's busiest and most demanding operations, develops effective technology solutions to complex process issues and demonstrates unsurpassed

sensitivity and commitment when helping parents find solutions to complex and stressful problems? Answer: Karen James of the Office of Parent and Family Services. Karen is known at the District for keeping a lot of balls in the air and for maintaining her composure and a smile during the entire juggling act. During her six years with the District, Karen has built a reputation for going above and beyond to assist the District's parents and community organizations as well as her own colleagues. She has received countless written accolades from stakeholders, including the parent who wrote, "Your kindness and willingness to assist me renewed my faith in the kindness of people and for that I am grateful." Another parent wrote, "I would like to thank you so much for your support during my time of trouble..."

For Karen's efforts to assist immigrant families in connecting with vital services and support, she was recently recognized by the Commonwealth, earning the Pennsylvania Department of Education — Migrant Education Program Partner of the Year Award for Southeastern Pennsylvania.

**Facts:** The Customer Service and Parent Support Center manages the District's main switchboard operation, which averages 600 calls per day and reaches 1,000 calls per day during peak periods. The department also oversees the District's Parent Walk-In Center, the Bully/SAFE Hotline and the Spanish Hotline, provides telephonic interpretation in 175 languages, answers customer questions submitted by e-mail, and manages the District's school registration process tailored for immigrant families.

# Seeds of Success

## Transportation Services responsible for serving eligible public, non-public and charter school students in the city

**T**ransportation Services, a key education support operation in the District, knows buses and paratransit vehicles — inside and out. Transportation staff know interior configuration of the vehicles, and how many students can be carried in each. They also know routes — all 460 District yellow bus routes as well as 890 yellow bus routes provided on the District's behalf by contracted bus companies.

Together, these buses — District and contractor vehicles — transport students for 37,000 miles each school day. On any given day that school is in session, by Pennsylvania law the School District is responsible for the transportation of 16,500 eligible public school students, 10,500 charter school students and 8,900 non-public school students on District or District-contracted yellow school buses. Commenting on the provision of transportation on both District and contractor vehicles, John Lombardi, senior vice president for transportation services, says, "The combination works well. We don't have the capacity to run all of these routes in-house."

This year, an additional 60,000 students in 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades are eligible to receive free SEPTA student transpasses, and Transportation Services manages that program. It began in fall 2007 and replaced the District's long-standing free and reduced-price school token program. The initiative is a partnership of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the District and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA).

One hundred thirty of the District's yellow school buses are lift vehicles, used for special needs students. "We transport students with all exceptionalities," Lombardi explains.

The department's approximately 700 employees include 560 bus drivers, charged with the very important responsibility of getting children to and from school safely. Other department employees are responsible for assigning students to bus route schedules and maintenance of all District vehicles, including buses and "non-bus vehicles"—those used by plumbers, carpenters, electricians, school police and other employees. Vehicles are stored and

serviced in four School District garages: in the Southwest section, Northeast, North Philadelphia and the Ogontz area.

Both District and contract drivers must have a Commercial Drivers' License, pass an annual physical, and are subject to random drug and alcohol tests, among other recertification requirements. The department also offers a training program for people who want to become school bus drivers. Students learn how to drive the bus and how to obtain a Commercial Drivers' License.

While Lombardi is proud of his operation and its record of service to children and their families, he does have a fond wish: he looks forward to the day when his department has the resources to enable it to "go green." "Right now, a bus with all of the 'green' technology costs about twice as much as a standard vehicle. At the present time, we are priced out of the market. We are hopeful that as the technology is embraced, the price will eventually come down, since we would like very much to have such a program," he said.

## Study is snapshot of where our students live and go to school

### Results may help District plan for the future

**A**t the request of the School Reform Commission (SRC), Athenian Properties, a Philadelphia-based international real estate consortium, conducted a student population study for The School District of Philadelphia. The purpose was to look at the District's current and projected student population and classroom capacity.

Athenian Properties studied the District's student enrollment and classroom capacity for growth, migration and trends within school communities during the 2007-2008 school year. The study investigated classroom utilization, including crowding versus underuse; nearby availability factors,

such as shortage versus surplus; and students' commuting-to-school patterns.

Athenian representatives reported to the SRC at its October 15, 2008 meeting that:

- Philadelphia's overall population is decreasing in size.
- There is a growing surplus of classroom availability; the current surplus is more than 30,000 seats.
- This surplus of classroom availability is expected to grow to approximately 44,000 seats by the year 2012.
- Student commuting patterns are changing; many students commute from home in one District region to school in another region.

Athenian noted that the classroom surplus may be offset in the future by increasing high school student retention through decreasing school dropout rates, and/or by increasing Pre-K student populations District-wide. The consultants also noted that an option for the District is to redirect school resources from less populated schools to other school needs.

SRC Chairwoman Sandra Dungee Glenn stressed that the study is just one of many things that would be taken into consideration when the SRC evaluates issues such as the creation of new schools and educational programs and the expansion of quality existing programs.

# Where in the World is Betty Foster, School Bus Driver?

That is a particularly apt question for this woman, who is one of the District's approximately 560 school bus drivers. There is a good reason why Foster is a "special status driver" for the District's Transportation Services department. Instead of driving the same established route every day, this flexible woman is deployed where needed. It takes a particular temperament to rise to the occasion each day, but Foster does it with aplomb. She is "special" indeed!

## October 24, 2008



Foster checks the tires on her bus as part of the daily pre-trip inspection of the vehicle which is performed by all bus drivers. On this day, she is assigned to transport students in a lift bus to Northeast High School.



Their bus driver's smiling face is the first to greet students each day and the last one they see each afternoon. Foster has a big smile for students, family members, pedestrians and other drivers who pass by her vehicle.



Back at Foster's second home, the Widener Garage at Broad Street and Olney Avenue, she checks out the bus. At the end of each run, an important part of the District's protocol is for the driver to do a walk-through of the vehicle.



At one of the assigned stops, Foster and the private nurse, Sara Judge, help position student Anna Miller's wheelchair on the lift as Anna's mother stands by, ready to wish her daughter a "great day."

**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.