

Summer school, before kindergarten

By HANNAN ADELY
STAFF WRITER

Hackensack program lowers performance gap

HACKENSACK – Summer school is traditionally for students who haven't completed coursework, failed tests, or just didn't meet marks in their classes.

In Hackensack, summer school now targets a student population that doesn't even do homework: preschoolers.

The school district this summer began a program for children entering kindergarten who lagged behind their peers, because they didn't go to preschool, their preschool's standards fell short, or they simply needed extra help.

"We do have a number of children who come to us in kindergarten who have not had the opportunity to be in preschool," Superintendent Joseph Abate said in his 2013 address on the state of the district. "These children find themselves behind right away."

The summer school program is rooted

in the belief that early-childhood education is critical to students' success, can help close achievement gaps, and can put students on the right track.

Researchers also say high-quality early-childhood education is a long-term investment that pays off as students become adults and enter the workforce at a more stable starting place.

"If there's one thing we need to do, it's to invest in early-childhood years as much as possible and not cut back," said Rosemary Marks, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Hackensack school district.

President Obama has made universal pre-K a priority and this year unveiled a \$75 billion plan over the next 10 years for high-quality, full-day preschool for income-eligible families. It would be

funded with a new federal tax on tobacco products and cost-sharing with states.

The summer school program in Hackensack, which served about 70 students in half-day classes over four weeks in July, cost \$30,000. Parents who registered their children for kindergarten in the district were invited to apply and their children were given assessment tests. Those most in need of help were placed in the program.

Some had gone though the district's public half-day preschool program during the school year, which serves 120 students, but needed reinforcement of skills they'd learned or had poor attendance. Others never went to preschool or went where the standards weren't the same as those in the district.

The early education helps students catch up with classmates and helps lower the performance gap among children of varying income levels and race, Marks said.

"We spend an inordinate amount of funds and time trying to help students later in the middle-school years and even high school to make up for gaps," she said. "This is really about creating more equity across the board so more students have access to opportunity."

While a summer school program can help, it won't address a lack of, or inadequate, education, said W. Steven Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research.

"It's better than nothing," he said, "but it's too little, too late to impact the kind of things they're talking about

– language and social and emotional development, and not just simple literacy skills."

But that speaks to a greater problem – the lack of public preschool education and the inadequate education at most preschools.

"States need to be playing a bigger role so districts aren't doing this by themselves," Barnett said. "That's why, of course, the president proposed federal support for preschool for all kids."

New Jersey has been a leader in providing free preschool to at-risk urban children since passing the School Funding Reform Act of 2008. But thousands of children outside the state's 31 poorest cities don't get the education they are entitled to under the law, according to a survey released earlier this year by Advocates for Children of New Jersey.

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Tenafly woman refuses to lose a step

Crohn's patient runs to assist foundation

By DEENA YELLIN
STAFF WRITER

TENAFLY – You might say that when Jill Collado feels strongly about a cause, she goes the extra 13.1 miles.

The 39-year-old borough resident has Crohn's disease but hasn't let that stop her from running to raise more than \$20,000 for the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America.

During the past four months, the mother of two participated in three half-marathons and is supporting the New Jersey Team, whose members will run another half-marathon on Nov. 17.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are painful, medically incurable illnesses that attack the digestive system. They affect some 1.4 million American adults and children. The funds Collado raises as a member of Team Challenge, an endurance training program to benefit the foundation, will fund research, education and support services to help patients with inflammatory bowel disease, said Ashley Chandler, the Team Challenge endurance manager.

Diagnosed with Crohn's in her late 20s, Collado said she joined Team Challenge to raise funds and awareness while proving to herself that she could accomplish anything she aimed to do. Then, participating was just a matter of timing.

"My health has been up and down over the years, but last year I decided to finally do it," said Collado, a marketing director. "I wanted to challenge myself and send a message to my family and friends."

Although she had never run before, or trained for a race, she was motivated by the knowledge that hitting the road would make a difference. She surprised herself when she completed her first half-marathon, all 13.1 miles, last year.

"I put in a lot of time into the training. There was blood, sweat and tears," she recalled. When she announced her campaign to friends and family on Facebook, she was shocked by how much money



COURTESY PHOTO

Tenafly's Jill Collado helping raise money for the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America through Team Challenge half-marathons.

poured in, she said.

And she enjoyed the experience so much, she completed another half-marathon in June.

As a first-time participant in the Virginia Wine Country Half-Marathon in 2012, she quadrupled the minimum of \$3,000 fundraising all the way through event weekend and reached \$12,000, said Keri Ann Flacomio, the Team Challenge intern, and "When other top fundraisers were closing in, Jill's teammates were so inspired that they opened up their own wal-

lets to help secure her spot."

Collado was then selected to speak at Team New Jersey's pasta party dinner the night before the race, and moved everyone to tears, said Flacomio.

Chandler added that "The funds that Jill has raised are so important to our foundation, and it's volunteers like her who help CCFa to continue our fight for a cure, and to support the patients currently living with these debilitating diseases."

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Northern Valley adds drug abuse to Grade 9 health

Class time supplements assemblies

By GRACE KWON
STAFF WRITER

The Northern Valley Regional High School district is expanding its substance education-and-awareness program to the ninth-grade health curriculum at Demarest and Old Tappan.

During the summer, administrators reevaluated the schools' current program and recommended adding eight hours to the freshman curriculum, said Old Tappan Principal Bruce Sabatini.

The new curriculum will include a variety of topics on preventing drug use, such as: understanding social pressures; illegal prescription drugs; use and abuse of drugs and their impact on the self, families and communities; strategies to help treat substance abuse; understanding of an abuse of prescription drugs and supplements and short- and long-term effects associated with prescription and over-the-counter drug use.

Previously, the freshman health curriculum included a comprehensive "Sticks & Stones" program, which confronts harassment and bullying culture, and meetings with student assistance counselors, said district Superintendent Christopher Nagy.

Demarest Athletic Director

Greg Butler said he had strongly recommended developing the freshman health curriculum into a more effective program since 2007.

"We need a freshman health program that offers more continuity," he said. "We still need the continuity of a classroom setting, especially freshman year, so I think we're going in the right direction."

Sabatini said the district's focus has primarily been on conducting student assemblies, parent programs, and embedding substance awareness into the students' curriculum, and it is reviewing a variety of new programs to deter substance abuse.

Demarest Principal James Santana said the district's substance-education program not only deals with the physical impact of drugs, but also with their social and emotional effects.

"The culture of this district has significantly improved since 2005 and 2006," he said. "Are they perfect, no? But we can always improve."

Nagy said if the implementation of the additional unit is successful, the district will revisit its master schedule and hope to create a more expansive ninth-grade health curriculum.

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New year and a new assistant school leader for Ridgewood

RIDGEWOOD – The school district is entering the school year with a new assistant superintendent.

The Board of Education appointed three administrators, including Cheryl Best, who starts Oct. 1 as assistant superintendent for assessment, curriculum and instruction. Best will be paid \$160,000 annually.

Best, who had been working as director of curriculum for the Franklin Lakes K-8 district, takes

over for Regina Botsford, who announced in July that she had accepted a superintendent position in Connecticut.

Best has a master's degree in public administration and an advanced certificate in school administration and supervision from the City University of New York.

The board appointed Ojetta Townes human resources manager and Dara Gronau as English supervisor for Grades K-8 through 12.

— Chris Harris

Teaneck starting a sustainability advisory board

TEANECK – The township will establish an Advisory Board on Sustainability that would help research and recommend financially and environmentally sound green initiatives to the municipality.

The 15-member board will comprise of seven environmental commission members, along with eight additional members, five of whom would be appointed by the Township Council to ensure that all stakeholders – businesses, schools, and religious communities – are represented. The township manager will appoint three representatives.

The board will advise the governing body about ways to improve municipal operations "with green initiatives which make practical environmental and financial sense." They will serve as the township's green team.

Residents who are interested in becoming members of the advisory board can find an application on the township's website: teanecknj.gov. The application can be submitted to the township clerk.

— Denis R. Superville

Neighbor helps elderly couple escape fire



TARIQ ZEHAWI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Misuse of extension cords is being blamed for this trailer home fire in Mahwah. Firefighters stopped the blaze from spreading to other homes.

Three cats perish in trailer home blaze

By LINH TAT
STAFF WRITER

MAHWAH – An elderly couple were led to safety by a neighbor while their three cats perished in a fire that engulfed their trailer home shortly after midnight Monday.

Police received multiple calls around 12:15 a.m. about a fire at Bogert's Ranch Estates, a mobile home park at 600 Pulis Ave.

When police and fire personnel arrived, they found the trailer ablaze. The couple – Henry and Pauline Vriesema, ages 89 and 87, respectively – were helped out of their home by a neighbor, authorities said.

Investigators determined that the fire was caused by an improper use of extension cords inside and outside the home, police said.

"I heard a big explosion as I was laying in bed, and my whole trailer shook," said Beth Misischia, 46,

who lives a few trailers away from the scene.

A Bogert's Ranch resident the past two years, Misischia said this was the second fire in the mobile home park that she could recall. The first happened next door to her, she said.

The Vriesemas were taken to The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood to be evaluated for smoke inhalation. Police Sgt. Michael Blondin said he did not know if they had been released from the hospital as of Monday afternoon. He said the couple would stay with relatives. The trailer was destroyed and has been condemned, Blondin said.

Firefighters from Ramsey also helped to extinguish the blaze before it spread to other homes, police said.

Staff Photographer Tariq Zehawi contributed to this article. Email: tat@northjersey.com