

Christina School District • 83 E. Main Street • Newark, DE 19711 • 302-454-2570 • www.christina.k12.de.us

JANUARY 2005

Excel Program Redesign Will Increase Opportunities for Students



Poinsettia Business is Blooming at Two Christina High Schools

Students in the agri-science program at Christiana and Glasgow High schools in Christina School District spread some holiday cheer this season — as they do every year — selling thousands of poinsettias they have grown as part of their class work.

Christiana High School student Kevin Gobiell displays one of the poinsettia plants grown by students in plant science class. Both Christiana and Glasgow High students grow poinsettias for sale at holiday time.

According to Richard Ferenz, plant science instructor at Christiana High School, students there normally grow about 1,000 poinsettia plants each year. The tiny plants are delivered to the school in early September. Students are responsible for the majority of the plant care for nearly four months, including spacing, watering and fertilizing of the plants, which are sold each December mainly to school and District staff.

Glasgow High School students studying greenhouse I and II grow the popular poinsettia plant from cuttings. Students care for about 3,000 cuttings annually starting in July and ending at sale time in December. Students grow and sell potted plants, hanging plants and poinsettia trees along with cyclamen and Christmas cactus.

Students and staff who care for the plants grown in Glasgow High's three greenhouses also serve as test growers for two major poinsettia producers, Ecke in the United States and the German-based Dummen. The test varieties are plants that are not yet available for sale but are being evaluated for possible production and sale in the future, according to instructor Joe Stepnowski.

Starting in July, students begin growing the plants. They measure several factors on an almost daily basis to report back to the companies that have hired them. Data collected includes whether the plant varieties are temperature tolerant, if they repel insects and funguses, if the leaves are stretchy, how big the leaves are, and how the plants compare to other plants on the market. Growers are going for deeper reds and more vibrant whites, according to Stepnowski, and they test grow the plants to see what

Continued on page 8

The Excel Service Integration Team has been actively working to redesign the current Excel Program by building upon what is currently in place and expanding to include a greater focus on talent development.

Changes in the program will allow the District to extend opportunities to a greater, more diverse group of students. These changes will be accomplished by increasing program capacity through the hiring of additional Excel Facilitators, providing professional development for classroom teachers and utilizing resource teams which include the Excel Facilitators, Instructional Coaches, Library Media Specialists and Classroom Teachers to develop the talents and gifts of Christina students.



The redesign of the District's Excel Program will include a greater focus on developing the talents and gifts of Christina students through involvement in the visual and performing arts.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NEWARK POST

Key points of the new program include:

- Expanding the types of opportunities available to a wider range of students
- The inclusion of visual and performing arts in the talent development program
- Expanding the cluster model from the demonstration site to all elementary and middle schools
- Professional development in differentiated instruction and Gifted and Talented certification for classroom teachers
- Hiring additional staff and utilizing existing resources more effectively through a collaborative approach to student support

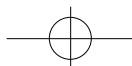
Parent Information Meetings were held in November in Newark and Wilmington. Twenty-seven parents attended and ten schools were represented — eight elementary schools, one intermediate school and one middle school. During the meetings the program staff provided a brief overview of the current program followed by a timeline for completion of the committee work. Next steps in this process include the completion of site visits, review of

program models for adoption by the District and the implementation of a professional development plan in preparation for implementation during the 2005-2006 school year.

Additional information about the Excel Program redesign and expansion is available on the Christina District Website at the following address: www.christina.k12.de.us/Transformation.

ECRWSS
POSTAL CUSTOMER, LOCAL

NON-PROFIT
ECRWSS
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #352
Newark, DE



Save-A-Friend® Hotline Introduced

The Save-A-Friend® Hotline educates and empowers students, staff and parents how to break the code of silence. Their anonymous tips, reported through a toll-free number dedicated exclusively to the Christina School District, provide information to school and District administrators regarding possible criminal and/or malicious activity. When the call is placed, the caller speaks to a trained counselor. Teaching students, staff and parents that it's okay to tell is another step towards not only maintaining a safe school environment, but also possibly circumventing a major, traumatizing event. The caller is given a reference number for future additional information. It is important to emphasize that sometimes it is better to break a confidence than to hold on to information that could ultimately threaten the safety of our students, staff, visitors or facilities.

The Save-A-Friend® program, a 24-hour anonymous reporting hotline, is available to every student, parent, teacher, bus driver, or staff member in our educational system giving them the ability to report a circumstance that threatens the safety, security, and well-being of themselves or others.

Students, parents and staff may not wish to speak to law enforcement, but they will have confidence in calling an anonymous hotline that the District has established. The toll-free number dedicated exclusively to the Christina School District is 1-866-776-4494.

A Message from Richard Strickland

Manager of Christina School District's Office of School Safety and Security



As Delaware's only district with an office that is dedicated solely to safety and security, I look to the future with great excitement as we follow Dr. Joseph Wise's vision to move this District from good to great. I am excited to be a part of the Christina family and to be the driving catalyst that will ensure the continuing safety of our students, parents, staff and visitors.

I am very proud of several initiatives my office has been able to put into place, the Save-A-Friend® Hotline being one of the foremost accomplishments.

This will prove to be a busy year as we develop and build the Office of School Safety and Security. I look forward to working with each of you.



Christina Board Approves School Safety Enhancements

On December 16, the Christina Board of Education approved the creation of new staff positions to support ongoing school safety and security efforts. Three new Security Associates will be hired for each of the District's three high schools, for a total of nine positions, to replace contracted security personnel. The new personnel will report to Richard Strickland, Manager of Christina School District's Office of School Safety and Security. The new Security Associates will join existing staff in helping to create safe and secure learning environments, including one School Resource Officer (SRO) in each middle and high school. SROs are members of the state police. Each high school will also have one Special Assistant to the Principal. The District will also train five current transportation employees per high school to serve as Campus Monitors. These staff members will support ongoing efforts of each principal and will provide positive and consistent engagement with students. The Office of Safety and Security will provide training. Funding will be provided through the reallocation of contracted security funds, preventative funding, and local funds. Since March 2004, when the Office of Safety and Security was created, the District has implemented the Save-A-Friend® Hotline, the ALERTNOW phone system, and ongoing security assessments. See the School Safety and Security area of the Website for more information: www.christina.k12.de.us/SchoolSafety/.

Christina Honors Seven New National Board Certified Teachers

The Christina Board of Education honored seven new National Board Certified teachers on December 14. A total of 48 teachers in Christina have achieved this certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which is the highest honor in the teaching profession.

In order to become National Board Certified, a teacher must complete a two-phase process. The first phase is conducted at the teacher's school where each teacher builds a portfolio that illustrates evidence of good teaching practice as well as demonstrating how their teaching meets the advanced standards in their fields.

The portfolio is prepared according to instructions provided by the National Board and contains videotapes of classroom teaching, lesson plans, student work samples and written commentaries by each candidate that explain in detail what he or she is doing and why.

The second phase of the process involves a series of written exercises conducted at an assessment center. Exercises are designed around challenging teacher issues and include simulations of classroom practices, evaluating other teachers' practices, designing curriculum, assessing student learning and a teacher's subject matter knowledge.

The entire assessment process takes almost an entire school year, with each candidate spending nearly 300 hours on assessment activities.

Teachers who received National Certification this year are: Mary Ciamaricone, Kirk Middle School; Karen R. Dipres, McVey Elementary; Kenneth Drier, Delaware Autism Program; Thomas Lundy, Christiana High School; Judith K. McCord, Marshall Elementary; Judi Lee Newman, Wilson Elementary; and Joan Rubens, McVey Elementary.

SCHOOL CHOICE APPLICATIONS ARE DUE ON JANUARY 12, 2005

You can access Choice information and applications on the District Website: www.christina.k12.de.us. You may also call the Education Options Office at (302) 454-2500 x2518.

Christina Honors Employees of the Year

Christina School District and the Board of Education honored the District teacher of the year, nurse of the year, building-level teachers of the year and five classified employees of the year at a special recognition ceremony held November 16 at Gauger-Cobbs Middle School. Several hundred guests attended the ceremony, which was followed by a reception. The event was held during National Education Week, a time for recognizing all educators for their contributions to schools and children. For profiles and photos of each building-level teacher of the year, see the District's Website at www.christina.k12.de.us.

Christina School District Teacher of the Year 2004-2005 Paula Henderson, Newark High School Teacher of the Year



Newark High School biology teacher Paula Henderson has been selected as the 2004-2005 District Teacher of the Year. Henderson has been teaching for over 25 years, and has been teaching at Newark High School for more than 22 of those. Currently, she teaches Honors and Advanced Placement Biology.

Henderson holds a bachelor of arts in biology and a M. Ed. in natural science biology. She was named Delaware Outstanding Biology Teacher in 1993, won the Verizon Education Award in 2002, and was a Delaware finalist for the Presidential Award for Science Teaching in 2003.

She also earned the Christina School District Teacher of the Year honor in 1989. Over 15 years later, the Board of Education, administration, family, and special guests celebrated Henderson's contributions once again at a special ceremony November 16. The repeat honor is a testament to how she has remained consistent in the quality of her instruction, how she connects with students, and how she has remained on the cutting edge of knowledge in her field.

These days, her students do research projects and investigations and then present their findings in a news report to the class. She also incorporates technology using Web searches, animations, and sites used by genetic researchers. Her students also use probe technology integrated with calculators and computers to collect data in the classroom and in field studies.

Henderson not only makes sure her own knowledge and skills are current, she has been involved in curriculum development at the District, state and national levels. She has worked on two major national curriculum projects, one on understanding the brain and neurobiology associated with drug addiction. The second was as a member of the advisory board for a multi-million dollar project to produce video, Web, and text-based materials for a graduate level in-service program designed to update classroom teachers with content and teaching methods in biology.

Henderson also served on the Delaware State Advisory Committee for Science and Environmental Education for over 15 years and was the secondary science teacher on the Delaware State Testing Program Science Advisory Committee.

To Henderson, teaching is not just a profession — it's a way of life. As a young child, she admired how her father influenced students through his teaching and coaching and how his current and former students looked to him for guidance as well as information.

Her biggest asset as a teacher is that she cares, said Henderson. "I take my job very seriously and want to provide an atmosphere that is stimulating intellectually, yet emotionally healthy," she said.

Henderson has taught classes ranging from below-grade level seventh-graders, to AP Biology and a university heredity course. "The curricula may vary, but the needs of the students are very much the same," she said. "The most important things that a student can gain from me are self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth."

Her goal, she says, is for students to leave her classes with an enthusiasm for science, a firm foundation in the subject, an ability to communicate clear-

ly, and an ecological perspective of how they fit into and are responsible for the world in which they live.

She shares her own real-life experiences that lead to extra, teachable moments. This includes papering her classroom walls with photographs of plants and animals taken from trips to such diverse environments as Australia, Scotland, Arizona, Washington state, and a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon.

Her success is owed to the fact that she truly enjoys what she is doing and her enthusiasm carries over to her students. "I am passionate about my subject, my students, the environment, and life in general," said Henderson. "What better way to be a teacher than to use that passion to pass the information on to others."

Christina Board Member Constance Merlet describes Henderson as a leader in the truest sense of the word. She leads by example and hard work and everyone wants to emulate her, said Merlet. One of those is Merlet's daughter Johanna who majored in biology at Brown University after having Mrs. Henderson for two years.

"I have witnessed her work with her students as they discover solutions to problems together," said Christina Superintendent Dr. Joseph Wise. "She embraces the best practices of student engagement. She also makes learning fun and interesting for her students."

Of great pride to Henderson is the fact her daughter is also a science teacher, making her the third generation to do so. Former students have gone on to science teaching careers as well.

Stephen J. Franks is a former student of Henderson's who went on to earn his Ph. D. in botany, and receive several teaching awards of his own. He is currently a research scientist with the United States Department of Agriculture. Franks was valedictorian of Newark High in 1989, and chose to honor Henderson at graduation as the teacher that most impressed and inspired him. This is an honor that has been repeated many times by many students over the course of the years.

Franks said he attributes his motivation to enter the vocation, and a large degree of his success in the field, to Henderson, who supported and nurtured his early development as a biologist. He praised all the characteristics that make Henderson a great teacher, saying she is well organized, prepared, thorough, clear, fair, and has both a deep and broad knowledge of the wide field of biology. "I am still thrilled by the deeper awareness of the biological world that I achieved in her class," he said.

Christina School Nurse of the Year 2004-2005 Kaye Snook, RN, BSN, Christiana High School



Kaye Snook has been a public school nurse since 1991. During that time she has served thousands and thousands of students at Christiana High School, tending to illnesses, helping students manage chronic conditions, responding to emergencies, helping teens deal with a host of health and wellness issues, and more.

Prior to becoming a school nurse, Snook was a postpartum unit instructor at Christiana Hospital, postpartum staff nurse at Wilmington General Hospital, and a labor and delivery nurse and childbirth instructor before that.

Snook served as president of the Delaware State Nurses Association (DSNA). She has been on the advisory board of the Christiana Wellness Center since 1991, serves on the school START team, and is a member and treasurer of the Site Council, among other duties. She is also a CPR/AED instructor.

Snook has given presentations at the local and state level. She's shared information with Christiana High staff on such topics as seizures, organized a presentation to the PTSA from the American Lung Association on understanding asthma, and presented a program to school nurses throughout Delaware on "Gangs, Tattoos and Body Piercings."

Continued on page 4

Teacher, Nurse, Employees . . . Continued from page 3

Respect for Snook and her expertise extends beyond the local and state levels. This past spring she gave presentations both at the National Association of School Nurses annual conference and the National School Based Health Centers conference.

For this and more, Snook is recognized as a leader in her field, a cherished member of the Christiana High community, and friend, advocate and care provider to the young adults she serves.

"Ms. Snook has touched our school community universally," said Carol Phipps, social studies teacher at Christiana High. "Students are at the heart of her program, as she treats the whole student. She knows so much about each of her students, even beyond their immediate medical needs. The most remarkable strength lies in the way the students respond to her."

Phipps says she has observed firsthand how Snook has helped students, some whose circumstances were so desperate and tragic that those who live so-called normal lives could hardly imagine. She's helped in smaller ways too, once buying a prom dress and accessories for a student so she could go to her senior prom. She also purchased a yearbook as a gift for another child.

"Kaye met their needs with dignity and compassion," says Phipps. Snook also keeps after staff as well. She even helped Phipps through a difficult pregnancy with twins — using her lunch break and visiting after school to monitor her. "She was so supportive," said Phipps, "and knowing she was there and hearing her words of encouragement turned a terrifying experience into one of excitement and hope."

Snook says she "stepped out of her comfort zone" when she was asked to run for the president position of DSNA several years ago. "I was very reluctant," she said. "I'd never held an office in my life, but the experience has allowed me to grow both personally and professionally." In her role as president of the DSNA, she led the successful effort to put the association's newsletter online and now communicates via e-mail to the membership.

Communication with other staff is key to helping students stay well, says Snook, who confers with the cafeteria manager regularly. She works closely with physical education teachers to make sure students are able to participate — with accommodations if needed. Snook also checks emergency cards for students and notifies the teachers in writing for any student that has a chronic condition such as diabetes or seizure disorders.

In an age where health care is non-existent for many families due to finances or circumstances, the school nurse is often the one person a child can count on for treatment and prevention of a host of ills. Even those children with regular access to quality medical expertise can sometimes have chronic conditions that require close monitoring and intervention, like asthma and diabetes.

As a school nurse, Snook's day is filled with many teachable moments — from showing a student how to perform self-care for treating a cut, to helping families stay healthy and seek proper medical care, to offering prenatal education. Snook uses pamphlets, bulletin boards, in-service days, her newsletter and frequent communications — in person, via phone and e-mail. She stays involved and connected with those she serves and the other staff who are instrumental in alerting her to any abnormalities in students that may require care.

Christina Honors Five Classified Employees of the Year**Maryon Norvell — Transportation**

The 2003-04 employee of the year for Transportation is bus driver Maryon Norvell. A fellow driver nominated Norvell for this honor, saying she shows a terrific interest in the students who ride her bus. "The minute you step on the bus, you can tell how much she cares and how interested she is what the students have to say and what is going on in their lives," wrote the fellow driver.

Although Norvell has many years of service under her belt as a driver she always comes up with new ways to engage her students and make them feel welcome. Norvell also makes each holiday special for her students. At Easter,

she held a coloring contest and made up a candy and prize basket that she awarded to the first-place winner.

Norvell makes a point to get to know the children who ride her bus. She happily greets them in the morning, setting a positive tone to the start of their day. She makes the ride home safe and enjoyable. She goes out of her way if a child seems to be drifting or disruptive, and helps to get them back on track.

Her involvement, dedication, concern, and caring approach make her a true asset to the school system. She is a shining example of what it means to be part of a team that makes sure students come to school ready to learn. For Norvell, being a bus driver is more than a job — it's a way for her to make a difference in the lives of the children she serves.

**James McKelvey — Custodial/Maintenance**

Jim McKelvey is a member of Christina's Facilities Maintenance Department team. He is described as an outstanding craftsman with exceptional skills and talents. A very conscientious person, McKelvey works proactively to keep the District's boilers running to provide heat and hot water to each building.

On many occasions, he has been known to work through breaks and lunch periods to resolve difficult and complex problems. He works hard to keep the systems online to provide a comfortable, conditioned learning environment in each building for students and staff.

Just before the start of the heating season last year — the busiest time for boiler technicians — the second boiler tech retired. McKelvey not only filled the void, he increased his responsibility from handling 18 buildings to ensuring all the District's boiler systems were maintained. Although a demanding, time-intensive and difficult task, McKelvey managed to achieve a zero percent boiler down time during the heating season last year.

While performing these additional tasks, he again went above and beyond duty, working directly with the Major Capital improvement group to evaluate renovation prints and make suggestions for heating system renovations and upgrades.

His input led to systems being selected that are more efficient and easier to maintain. He worked with the design engineers and helped work out existing problems in the systems to improve future installations.

McKelvey is described as being a pleasure to work with, helpful, well liked and respected by fellow employees as well as District customers. Providing a comfortable learning environment is key for students and staff to be able to concentrate on lessons and activities. Thanks to McKelvey's dedication, expertise and commitment the systems and schools were well maintained.

**Perla Acevedo — Paraprofessional**

Perla Acevedo is a Spanish-speaking paraeducator at Wilson Elementary School who serves the students and parents in Room 24, taught by Stephanie Saggione. Wilson hosts a sizeable bilingual program, and Acevedo's involvement and outreach are invaluable in the school's effort to communicate with Spanish-speaking families.

In her role, she instructs reading groups, assists the teacher, and translates. She is a good teacher and manager, and extends herself to parents to strengthen the home-school connection — all with an unparalleled sincerity and warmth. She has shown a high level of dedication and integrity in her work and is constantly available to help teachers and students in any way she can.

Acevedo translates at conferences for her class and volunteers to assist other teachers as well. She also translates on Open House nights, for parents visiting the school, and has even made calls to parents from her own home. She translates homework assignments and letters to parents. She also helps Hispanic families make cultural adjustments to life and schooling in an English-speaking school.

Continued on page 5

District Moves Forward on Plans to Expand Grade Configurations

The Christina Transformation Plan calls for the study of current District feeder patterns and options for student assignment. The study will be conducted by the Hartford, Connecticut-based consulting firm Jeter, Cook & Jepson Architects, Inc., which has extensive experience working with school districts throughout the country on similar planning projects. The firm will be conducting interviews with key staff and Board members throughout January, and will provide a report to the Board in February. Families and community members were invited to attend four informational sessions held on December 13 and 14 to provide input on the Guiding Principles that will assist the District in developing these options. Further public input will be sought in March and April, and a recommendation will be made to the Board in April.

The District's effort to expand education options for its residents is part of a mission to embrace a commitment to achievement gains for all students while also creating meaningful school choices for District families. In addition to raising the level of academic rigor for all students, Christina is committed to improving grade configurations and school assignment patterns throughout the entire District to support student achievement, and to better meet the needs of students, families, and community members. To achieve these goals, changes will be implemented in the District that will provide improved school choices, improved grade configurations that support instructional and social continuity, and expanded opportunities for families to be engaged in the educational process.

Teacher, Nurse, Employees . . . Continued from page 4

"Her warmth and sensitivity make the parents feel welcome and validated," said Mrs. Saggione. "I have come to trust her judgment and rely on her instincts. She has been invaluable to me."

Acevedo arrives at 7:30 a.m. to help the teacher prepare for the day. She teaches small reading groups with an obvious awareness of best practices and classroom management skills. She also helps with breakfast duty and standardized test administration.

Reading teacher Mary Cleary says the second-graders love Acevedo, and so does the Wilson staff. Cleary notes the many hours Acevedo has volunteered to help parents of Hispanic children stay informed about their child's progress and needs. "She has helped us become a true community school," said Cleary.



Arlene LaPointe — Food Service

Arlene LaPointe is a cook in Thurgood Marshall Elementary's Café. According to her coworkers, she is a key ingredient in a well-run kitchen that serves hundreds of students and staff each day.

Cafeteria Lead Diane Hodgkinson says LaPointe caters to all students and staff alike, and greets each with a smiling face and friendly "good morning."

LaPointe never balks at special orders from children with food allergies, and she goes out of her way to serve them herself, according to Marshall staff. On top of that, her homemade sauces and soups are the greatest, according to Hodgkinson, who says LaPointe has a personal touch and puts her heart into all the meals she prepares and serves.

Shirley Sevy, a general worker in the Café, notes that LaPointe is a very special friend and person, as well as a wonderful cook who goes out of her way to make birthday cakes for all the cafeteria workers.

Others remarked that LaPointe prepares well-balanced and nutritional meals for the children and makes sure there is enough food prepared each day. In addition, she takes great pride in presenting the food well. Her coworkers and Marshall staff say she does a great job, never misses work unless it is absolutely necessary, and that she works well with others. LaPointe is described as dependable and always friendly and reliable.

Providing meals that are not only nutritious but taste good are key to making sure students are ready to learn. It's clear that Marshall's recipe for

maintaining a well-run school and creating a superior learning environment includes a generous dash of everyone's favorite cook, Arlene LaPointe.

Guiding Principles for Expanding Grade Configurations and Student Assignment

- Adhere to the District's Belief Statements about equity and excellence in education, as approved by the Board of Education on November 18, 2003
- Fully implement grade configurations approved by the Board on April 7, 2004 (Pre-K/K-5; 6-8; 9-12)
- Establish stability and longevity with student assignment patterns
- Demonstrate a commitment to diversity and support diverse communities
- Allocate space in middle and high schools for themed program options
- Expand programmatic options for our students and families in high schools
- Maximize the use of existing facilities



Missy Ross — Secretarial

Missy Ross is the main office secretary at Newark High School. She is described as a very caring, hard-working and personable team member who keeps things flowing in the busy, high-traffic office.

She does the work of two or three people say some, and the teachers and staff at Newark are in awe as to how she does it — and how she maintains a pleasant and agreeable manner on top of it. Ross is admired for her positive attitude, enthusiasm and working well with others.

Her colleagues say she does a remarkable job juggling student needs, welcoming visitors, addressing parents, and generally keeping the all the cogs going in the machine. She gives each equal and constant respect: students, teachers, parents, visitors and administrators alike. Ross works extra hours, doesn't take much time out for herself, and would often eat at her desk to help others get things done.

Teacher Kristine Weber-Hood says Ross takes care of "everything imaginable with a smile and a word of cheer — plus her designated duties."

In the midst of her busy day she also takes time out to talk to troubled students, showing that she genuinely cares. Ross has been known to give a student lunch money with no guarantee she would be reimbursed.

She goes above and beyond her duties in other ways as well. For example, when teacher and co-op coordinator Alvin Cain Jr. needed help to publicize a schoolwide co-op program, Ross volunteered to assist. She also helps write messages from coaches to players and sends them over the intercom. She forwards assignments from absent teachers to the substitute. One of her greatest contributions is her understanding heart and lending an ear to those who need it, say friends.

Teacher Ruth Forese said Ross models efficiency and attention to detail on a continuous basis. She juggles multiple phone lines, walkie-talkies, administrator and maintenance needs, and a whole host of people with questions and other needs. "Mrs. Ross elevates multitasking to a fine art," said Forese.

