



Bulletin



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St. Christopher's, GNC Ready to Take Over McQuade Center in Orange County

St. Christopher's and the Greenburgh-North Castle Union Free School District are poised to take over the recently closed McQuade Children's Center in New Windsor, near Newburgh, extending their innovative special education programs to Orange County.

The New York State Education Department shuttered the McQuade Center last December, including the Kaplan School, citing conditions unfavorable to students' health and safety. McQuade was also removed from the state's list of private schools approved to receive public funds for the education of students with disabilities.

McQuade board members disagreed with some state findings, saying they had worked diligently to make improvements. Though disheartened over the loss of their school, its officials are working to enact as seamless a transition as possible for their students.

In seeking the best options for both the welfare and education of



The Kaplan School on the McQuade Children's Center campus sits empty awaiting new management under St. Christopher's and the Greenburgh-North Castle UFSD

the children, McQuade board members agreed that St. Christopher's and GNC had the expertise, reputation and sense of commitment that would best meet the needs of their students.

"These are very special children and they need special attention," said Pamela Kelly-Day, chairwoman of McQuade's board. "At St. Christopher's, they know how to reach our children, and that's

what we need. They have quality education and quality personnel. It's the whole package."

During a visit to St. Christopher's, Kelly-Day said she was struck by the fact that Dr. Robert Maher, the agency's executive director, and Dr. Edward Placke, GNC school superintendent, knew the youngsters by name.

And it didn't stop there. They also knew what was going on in their lives – one was learning the piano; another had taken up cheerleading. "I was amazed at that," Kelly-Day said. "They know who these children are, and how to engage them. "Their focus is on the child as a whole. They really care, and it shows. They have a personal touch."

NYSED and the state's Office of Children and Family Services had asked St. Christopher's to consider running the program. Dr. Maher said the school was approached for several reasons: its

(See MaQuade Center, page 2)

St. Christopher's Hosts AmeriCorps Volunteers For Six-Week Spring Stay

For the third time in four years, St. Christopher's is hosting to a team of volunteer workers from AmeriCorps, the national service organization run by the federal government. The team is taking part in a variety of local projects managed by Groundworks Hudson Valley, an environmental group (www.groundworkshv.org).

For six weeks spanning May and June, nine volunteers and an AmeriCorp team leader are calling the cottages at St. Chris home as they assist with clean-ups, community gardens, educational programs, and other activities in southern and mid-Westchester County.

In appreciation for St. Christopher's hospitality, the AmeriCorp team will be constructing a new patio on the Dobbs Ferry campus, said Ralph Herrera, the assistant director of buildings and grounds. "We all cooperate, and we all benefit," he said.

According to Emily Eder, Groundworks' outreach and volunteer coordinator, this year's AmeriCorp team has already assisted in a large Saw Mill River litter clean-up and a ground-clearing project in Yonkers, most likely to make way for a new community garden. It will also be involved in installing a "green roof" on the Hudson River Science Barge, used as educational facility by area schools.



In May, AmeriCorps volunteers hosted by St. Chris helped with major clean up and planting efforts along the Saw Mill River from Yonkers to Pleasantville.

"It sets a good example for our kids to see young adults, not much older than themselves, cheerfully and enthusiastically volunteering to work in communities where they don't even live," said Cristian Correa, Assistant Executive Director of Program Operations. "The volunteers get a lot of respect and appreciation for what they do, and that's something our kids take in as well," he said.



Officials Launch Statewide "Listening Tour" With Conference At St. Christopher's



All Ears: Gladys Carrión, NYS commissioner of Children and Family Services, with (l-r) Bob McMahon, president of SCO, Dr. Edward Placke, Bill McLaughlin, assistant commissioner of OCFS, and Dr. Robert Maher during a Listening Tour presentation.

Continuing with a multi-year plan to improve child welfare services throughout New York State, the Office of Children and Family Services recently kicked off a statewide listening tour to get ideas and feedback for initiatives in 10 areas that officials have identified for action this year.

First stop on the "10 for 2010 Listening Tour" was St. Christopher's, where dozens of officials from area agencies met in a series of small group meetings with OCFS executives to offer their insight and opinion on how the state could best achieve its goals.

As evidence of the importance the OCFS is placing on the program and the participation of stakeholders, Gladys Carrión, commissioner of the NYS OCFS, personally led the team of state officials conducting the meetings at St. Christopher's.

"We're honored that the commissioner's office asked us to host the first meeting," said St. Christopher's executive director Dr. Robert Maher. "State officials wanted to be sure their tour got off to a strong start, so the fact we figured so centrally in their plans means a lot."

"That's a compliment to everyone associated with St. Christopher's and GNC schools," Dr. Maher said. "It was an inspiring day. The sessions produced a valuable exchange of ideas among some of the state's most dedicated, talented child welfare professionals."

According to conference materials, some of the key issues that the state aims to address are:

responding more effectively to family needs through targeted services; fulfilling the promise of stable, secure, and nurtured lives; supporting community partnerships; and addressing complex needs and expectations of foster care.

McQuade Center...

highly innovative special education services for adolescents and their families; an emotionally supportive and clinically effective environment with a high ratio of staff to children; and recognition that St. Christopher's students thrive both personally and educationally. The high school graduation rate was 90 percent last year.

"We feel that it's definitely the place where our children will be best served," Kelly-Day said with confidence.

Smart Boards, 21st-Century Teaching Tools, Come To GNC Classrooms

While many of us went to school in the days of chalk boards, and some of us may have even used white boards, today's students live in the era of "smart boards," high tech teaching tools that let teachers add interactive computer technology to their classroom presentations. Educators – of all ages – attest to their value in instruction, lesson planning, and collaboration.

This school year, at the direction of school superintendent Dr. Edward Placke, the GNC district acquired its first smart boards, purchasing four for the Clark Academy. When classes begin again in the fall, Dr. Placke intends to have smart boards in as many as 10 classrooms, including two at the Greenburgh Academy.

The *Bulletin* recently met with Dr. Placke to find out why he has placed a high priority on getting smart boards into GNC schools.

The Bulletin: Dr. Placke, tell us a little how smart boards work and why they are so valuable to both teachers and students.

Dr. Placke: The smart board has two parts, an interactive white board that looks like an ordinary white board, mounts on the wall, and links to a computer, and a video projector that also gets connected to the computer.

There's actually a third element, too, and that's software for the computer to run the smart board system. Each system costs about \$2,500, not including the computer.

The first benefit of the smart



Gala Raises \$70,000 For DF Campus Arts Center

Marilyn Dimling, president of the Thursday Club, the venerable Westchester philanthropic organization, spoke recently at the Club's 87th Annual Gala, which raised \$70,000 for St. Christopher's renovation of the old Dobbs Ferry campus gym into a new Visual and Performing Arts Center. The Club's gift will be used to build the center's new dance studio.

board is a simple one: anything written on the white board can be saved on the computer – in color – and it can be printed, emailed, saved as an image, or even re-opened later for review or revision. This makes it easier for students to review exactly what they learned in class.

Smart boards have another clever feature. With the computer connected to the projector, teachers can project an image on the board, write notations on the white board relating to the image – for example, showing how to solve a math problem – and then save the image and notations for review, printing, emailing, etc.

Teachers can also use smart boards for making interactive presentations, where the projected image and white board work like a touch screen, offering a series of menus that follow from the actions of the teacher or student.

Smart boards also let teachers bring the Internet into the classroom, but in a very controlled way. This is valuable not only for research, but it also provides a way for teachers to create, save, and share lesson plans online, which is especially beneficial for special education.

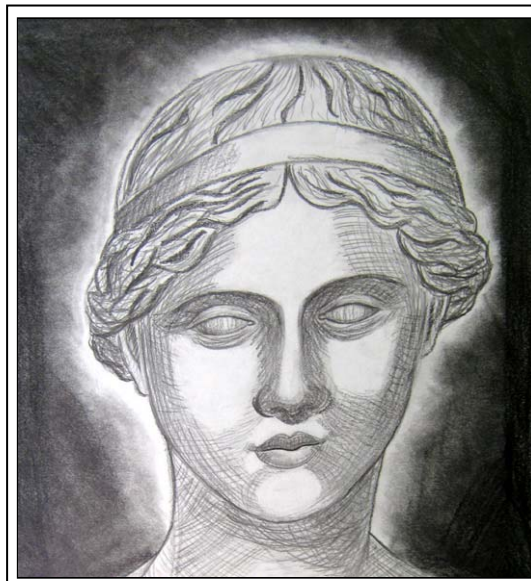
TB: What's the reaction been in the classroom? How are teachers adapting?

DP: The reaction has been excellent, and teachers like having them. The only complaint is that we don't yet have smart boards in as many rooms as we would like. But we're getting there.

TB: Will the tight budget affect the number of boards GNC buys? What percentage of classrooms will have them?

DP: We will need donor support to purchase all the smart boards we want. Our goal is to have systems in more than half of our 40 classrooms by September 2011.

TB: Thanks very much, Dr. Placke. Have a great summer!



Student Talent Shines At Annual Arts Festival

The 5th Annual Student Arts Festival in May featured artwork and performances by GNC students attending the Clark Academy, the Greenburgh Academy and the REACH Program. The work shown at left, a detail taken from a pencil drawing by 11th-grader Amanda Ocasio, was one of dozens of illustrations and paintings on exhibit. Students, parents, faculty, and clinical and residential staff attended the festival.

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