



# Newsletter



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## Dr. Edward Placke Named GNC District Superintendent

NYS Education Dept. Asst. Commissioner, A Recognized Leader in Special Education, Starts April 7

Dr. Edward Placke, a nationally-acclaimed educator and the Assistant Commissioner for the New York State Education Department since 2004, has been named Superintendent of the Greenburgh-North Castle Special Act School District.

His term will start April 7 when Dr. Robert Maher retires from the position. Dr. Maher, also the Executive Director of St. Christopher's, Inc., will remain in that post.

"It's a coup for our district to have gained a recognized leader like Dr. Placke," Dr. Maher. "He is talented, devoted, and charismatic."

"It has been a tremendously rewarding experience for me to have served as GNC Superintendent, and I look forward to collaborating with Dr. Placke as he takes on this new role." Dr. Maher has been the GNC district superintendent since 2004.



*Dr. Edward Placke will take over as GNC UFSD Superintendent in April*

Dr. Placke, 50, is known for his leadership in vocational and educational services for the disabled. As Assistant Education Commissioner, Dr. Placke was responsible for management of the New York State Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the

state-operated schools, and spearheaded the initiative to return students with disabilities from out-of-state residential programs.

He has a strong personal interest and professional expertise in the areas of employment and integrating disabled individuals into the mainstream. Dr. Placke has an extensive and distinguished education background dating to the early 1980s.

"Dr. Placke is an exemplary professional who has played a critical role in advancing the Board of Regents agenda to close the gaps in both academic performance and employment for individuals with disabilities," said Dr. Rebecca Cort, New York State Education Department Deputy Commissioner for Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities.

"It has been a privilege to

work with him and we wish him every success in his new role as Superintendent," Dr. Cort said.

Dr. Placke earned his B.A. at Marist College in Poughkeepsie and his Master's and Doctorate degrees at SUNY Albany.

## Arts Festival on May 20

St. Christopher's will hold its 4<sup>th</sup> annual Visual & Performing Arts Festival, May 20, from 11:30-2:00 in Clark Academy Gymnasium. Admission is free.

The event features artwork and live shows by students from the Clark and Greenburgh Academies and the REACH Program.

*Join us for a great afternoon!*

## REACH Program Adds Classrooms And Increases Female Enrollment

New Sign at Valhalla Campus Signals Program Expansion



There's good news to report about the innovative REACH program, which was initiated in the fall of 2006 by Dr. Catherine Morrison, Assistant Executive Director for Clinical Services at St. Christopher's.

"The program was originally designed for a growing group of youth who had needs beyond our existing program, but for whom there were no in-state alternative settings," said Dr. Morrison.

"We tried to refer a few of the initial boys to other settings but

we couldn't find anything suitable, so REACH was specially designed to meet the needs of fragile, vulnerable boys with more specialized treatment needs. Many of them also have developmental issues and autism spectrum symptoms."

St. Christopher's is pleased to announce the creation of four new REACH classrooms at the Valhalla campus, and a beautiful new sign (shown above) has been

*(See "REACH" on other side)*





*May I Have Your Attention, Please?* Students in ACE/HOP make visual and verbal presentations about learning workforce skills

## ACE/HOP Students Show Off Progress to Parents, Staff at Eventful Dinner

In February, St. Christopher's students participating in the Academic Career Endeavors/Hands-on-Program (ACE/HOP) held a dinner to present administrators, teachers and parents with examples of their work in the program.

ACE/HOP is an instructional program that provides students with real world experience in the automotive, carpentry and business fields. Last fall, St. Christopher's General Services Division and Greenburgh-North Castle School District joined to create the program, which is coordinated by Lorraine Galluzzo of the Kenneth Clark Academy.

Teachers at the Clark Academy supplied students with the classroom models, which they then experienced with professional staff members from the General Services Division.

"The seven presentations were impressive, and I salute the stu-

dents and faculty for working so well together to implement the classroom instruction and real life experiences," said Russ Gilmore, St. Christopher's director of general services, and a key member of the program.

"ACE/HOP is preparing students for a productive lifetime in the workforce."

One student's presentation, a live demonstration, highlighted how she learned to become good at filing folders of documents.

She invited people at the dinner to file information alphabetically and to see how quickly and accurately it could be done. A good time was had by all.

Other St. Christopher's staff participating in the program all deserve recognition and thanks: Barry Watson, Transportation Supervisor; Gloria Ferrufino Purchasing Manager; Melissa Lopez-Robles, Services Coordinator; Kwadwo Odura, IT Supervisor; Jonelle Ballard, classroom teacher, Michael Lewis and Paul Cimmino, teaching assistants with the ACE/HOP program.

The diligent Academic Advisory Committee extends a heart-felt thanks to all the members of the ACE/HOP team and committee members for truly making a difference in the lives of our students!

Committee members are Dave Gaultiere, Jean Maier, Alberto Espinosa, Scot Edmonds, Anthony Gaines, Susan Olshan, Denise Rivera, Marcia Manzuetta, and Kerry McKenna.



*Hands on experience, gloves required:* learning auto servicing

## Clinical Services Dept. Plays Key Role In Helping Students Succeed

Students arrive at St. Christopher's with a variety of challenges to their social and educational success, and it is the job of the Clinical Services staff, made up of psychologists, social workers and mental health counselors, to work with students, as well as educational and residential staff, to put in place programs that foster positive change in students' lives.

Dara Caputo, Director of Social Services, and Dr. Catherine Morrison, Clinical Director and Assistant Executive Director, lead the clinical and social services department, providing effective strategies for the clinical staff to interact closely with students in cottages and at school.

spirits, and relationships are critical to the success of any student, whether in conventional home and school settings or at St. Christopher's."

According to Dr. Morrison, CS staffers typically spend 7-14 hours a week in the school building where the students spend so much of their time. Clinicians observe students, consult with them and provide related services, as well as make themselves available for consults and meetings with teachers, teacher assistants, administrators and support staff.

Dr. Morrison also said that several initiatives are noteworthy, including Rites of Passage, which helps young men build character and avoid harmful street life, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy, which focuses on helping youngsters grow in emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and mindfulness. (There is currently a DBT group running at Valhalla.)

These programs, and others, will be examined in more detail in future issues of this newsletter.

"St. Christopher's has worked to increase the presence of the clinical staff in the natural settings for our youngsters, so they can provide more support and encouragement. It also helps staff better understand students."

Looking to the future, Dr. Morrison said the department remains committed to its students and to continuous program improvements. "Our goal is to help students improve their chances of success in all areas of their lives through greater self-knowledge and by acquiring more skills."



Dr. Catherine Morrison, St. Christopher's Asst. Executive Director of Clinical Services

"The average member of the department spends about six hours a week in the cottages, observing youth in a residential setting, working with youth care counselors and students, and in some cases participating in groups with students or in leading a group activity," said Dr. Morrison.

"Time in the cottages often includes reviewing with students and youth care staff the student's progress and the specifics of their behavior over the course of the week."

"As the department develops its programs and revises its structure, we remain committed to an approach that focuses on young people's strengths rather than their weaknesses," Ms. Caputo said.

"Many adults tend to view troubled youth as 'problems' to be solved, rather than as assets who can contribute to their communities' well-being. The department is working on turning that kind of view around and moving toward the integration of a positive psychology perspective within the program.

"This translates into framing programs around the promotion of health and wellness and positive youth development," said Ms. Caputo "Healthy minds, bodies,

## REACH....(from Page 1)

unveiled. The program has 30 beds for boys and is now expanding openings for girls. There is currently one girl in the program, and two more have been accepted, with the expectation of more to follow soon.

The new classrooms are allowing St. Christopher's to expand academic and vocational offerings at the Valhalla site. Most REACH students attend the Valhalla school, while others attend the Clark Academy or the culinary program at Dobbs Ferry.

## It's Not Easy to Give...

*But in these trying times your donations mean even more to our youngsters. Donate now or anytime at [sc1881.org](http://sc1881.org)*

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