

A School Community Coming Together to Plan

by Miguelina Lopez



I serve the North Rockland community as principal of Gerald F. Neary Elementary School. Neary is a K-2 school building located in the village of Haverstraw. My goal is to give you some insight on why we believe that intentionally merging our Family Resource Center Advisory Board and School Improvement Planning Team is a win-win strategy.

Allow me to begin by giving you some background on our school and Family Resource Center. Our student population numbers around 470. We are blessed to have an active and effective Family Resource Center (FRC), one that is highly valued by our parents, students, staff and district. Myriam Saravia, our FRC coordinator, has been with us since June 2004. She is bilingual and bicultural, and her own life experiences give her a firsthand understanding of what families in crisis need. As a young widow and mother of five, she was able to cope with the struggles of raising a family on her own. Her children are all grown now, and Mrs. Saravia is happily remarried. She has a broad and generous vision of what an FRC fashioned after the Yale model should offer its children, parents and community as a whole.

When our center started, we had an active advisory board. During the first several years, it became evident to us that the goals of the Family Resource Center's Advisory Board (FRCAB) and the School Improvement Planning Team (SIPT) were inextricably connected. Both bodies sought to create an enriching and fertile environment in the same school building, where families and students could thrive. Specifically, the SIPT is required to develop and implement a plan that ensures all children reach proficiency, and revise it when appropriate. It seemed only natural that both bodies be merged so that we could combine our resources and support each other's efforts. The two bodies became one in September 2004, and have been meeting monthly during the school year ever since.

Since then, more members participate in FRC events, in part because they help put the events together during SIPT meetings. An example of this collaboration can be appreciated in our Neary's Reading Adventure program that takes place at our local public library. This program runs monthly with five to eight first- and second-grade students who are selected to read for their peers. Students, teachers and families come to enjoy themselves. The program also features guest appearances by Cindy, a trained therapy dog owned by one of our teachers, and other teachers who prepare skits or other special events for the children.

The following is another example of the benefits of having the FRC coordinator sit on our SIPT, which also includes PTA representation. At one of our recent meetings,

the PTA president learned that our FRC needed additional financial support to obtain books for our Parent-Child Home Program. On the spot, the PTA president committed to help with that effort. These are just two examples of how we have come together

countless times to plan, organize, and collaborate to help our families meet their needs and raise children who will be more successful.

A direct result of combining advisory initiatives is that the school staff understands the mission and the vision of our Family Resource Center, and our FRC coordinator understands the context of where she operates and how together we can help each other be more successful. As a professional learning community, we continue to move

forward to encourage families to become actively engaged in their child's education and develop connections to the school. Our priorities are to provide support and develop strategies to maintain

active participation in all of our programming. Together we use creative ways to reach more people who need our services. We establish partnerships with local business owners, certified caregivers, clubs and agencies. We collaborate to promote awareness of what the 21C schools are and the importance of all FRC programs, especially those related to early childhood.

It would have been difficult for us to have reached the point where we are in the timeframe we did without the collaboration between our SIPT and FRCAB. We do not perceive ourselves as separate entities with similar goals, but rather as intricate parts that together make our school community richer and better!

Editor's Note: Every person who visits Neary, comments on its climate of welcome, warmth, and purpose. That the staff is wholly committed, under Mrs. Lopez's leadership, is tangible.

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The Parent-Child Home Program:

A Gateway to Family Resource Center Supports

If you were to peek into the Nanuet Family Resource Center’s office window recently, you would see a family of five and two other women surrounded by boxes of baby clothes, blankets, toys, a bassinet, and a portable crib. In one corner of the room stand Maria and her two sons, four-year-old James and five-year-old Mike.

“Oh, this is beautiful,” says Maria, referring to a knitted blanket made by a Nanuet middle school teacher.

Max, Maria’s husband, glances at the blanket while assembling the portable crib with Marta Renzi, a home visitor to James. “We could use this,” says Max, pointing to the crib.

“And you can use these sheets to cover the baby mattresses in the crib and bassinet. And don’t forget these diapers,” says Rose Ann Mercado, Director of the Nanuet Family Resource Center (FRC), who is carefully going through each box.

“Do you think we’ll be able to fit everything in the van?” asks Marta.

“Yes!” says Evelyn, Max and Maria’s eight-year-old daughter.

Max and Maria’s family are among the many families who have been recipients of the FRC’s program, Donation Station, but they have welcomed much more than these welcomed items.

When Evelyn began first grade at George W. Miller Elementary School, Maria was eager to help her succeed

in school, so she started participating in the parent support classes offered in Spanish at George Miller by Rose Linsalato, then the Department of Social Service’s school preventive caseworker. Rose felt that Maria’s family could also benefit from the programs and supports offered through the Nanuet FRC, and so she introduced Maria to Rose Ann.

“When I met with Maria, I knew she and her two sons would be a perfect match for PCHP [the Parent-Child Home Program],” says Rose Ann, referring to the home-visiting program offered by the center that helps engage parents and their young children in intensive reading and play.

At age three, Mike started PCHP. “He was quiet in the beginning but opened up more each time his first home visitor, Crucy, met with him,” says Rose Ann. By the end of the two-year program, Mike recognized most letters and their sounds. “Mike is more ready for school than Evelyn was,” says Max, as Maria points out that Evelyn did not participate in PCHP. “He knows how to write his name and

Marta describes a later home visit in which James made text-to-text connections: “I introduced a new [bilingual] book to him called *What’s in Grandma’s Grocery Bag?* / *Que hay en la bolsa de abuelita?*, and in it was a pop-up strawberry. James said, ‘Leave it! Leave it!’ and then ran to the bookshelf to get his favorite book, *El Ratoncito*. He opened it to the page with the strawberry. He made a big leap that day.”

His vocabulary also soared. “One afternoon he compared one picture in the *El Ratoncito* book to a picture in his kitchen using very descriptive words. His English vocabulary steadily increased as he was exposed to rich verbal interaction,” says Marta.

Max and Maria said they also learned “a lot” through PCHP. “I now know the real impact of how reading with your children, when they’re young, practically babies, prepares them for school,” says Max. “Yes, yes,” says Maria, agreeing with Max.

But the Parent-Child Home Program is not all the FRC has offered to Max and Maria’s family.

When Mike turned four, Maria wanted him in preschool. The FRC staff helped Maria fill out an application for universal prekindergarten and explained the application

process. “We crossed our fingers and held our breath. We were so happy when he got picked from the UPK [universal prekindergarten] lottery,” says Rose Ann.

As PCHP sessions with James came to a close, Max and Maria’s seventeen-year-old daughter, Clara, a native of Ecuador, arrived in Nanuet to reunite with her parents. Maria wanted Clara to start high school. Rose Ann and Marta helped Maria start the enrollment process, only to discover that Clara’s immunization records could not be found. She could not begin school without them. But what seemed more important was Clara’s need for prenatal care. Clara was five months pregnant and had not yet seen a doctor. Rose Ann asked Rose, the former preventive case

PCHP is “research-proven” and recognized by many scholars, including Dr. John Silber, President Emeritas of Boston University, who says that PCHP is “the most cost-effective, proven initiative available today preparing at-risk children and their families for success in school.”

understands more concepts than she did. And his English is far better than hers was.”

James learned alongside of Mike, but officially started the program himself two years ago at the age of three, and recently graduated. “James loves books. He brings his favorite book, *El Ratoncito, la Fresa Roja y Madura y el Gran Oso Hambriento* [*The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear*], to bed with him almost every night,” Max says, as Maria nods in agreement. “That explains the dog-eared pages!” says Marta, the second home visitor, who first introduced Spanish-language books to James. After three home visits, “James had *El Ratoncito* practically memorized,” says Marta.

PCHP has operated in the county for the last seven years, thanks to support from the County of Rockland, Senator Thomas Morahan, and the United Way of Rockland County. Infrastructure is provided by Rockland 21C, acting with the Rockland County Youth Bureau’s AmeriCorps Program, and the school districts: East Ramapo and North Rockland, plus Nyack which runs a similar program, and the nonprofit Nanuet Family Resource Center.



The Brito Family

worker and now the school counselor, if she would refer Clara to the Prenatal Clinic operated by the Rockland County Department of Health near Nyack Hospital, and she did. Now Clara is about to give birth. “We knew Clara needed baby essentials, so I sent an e-mail to Nanuet’s [school] staff and families and asked if people could donate items. The response was overwhelming,” says Rose Ann. “Now Clara has what she needs, and a little more.”

Max and Maria’s family has also been participating in the PCHP playgroup sessions offered at George Miller thanks to a grant from United Way of Rockland County that was awarded to Rockland 21C to use to expand the number of families receiving PCHP home visits and to offer continued support to the parents and children who have graduated from PCHP. “It’s a great time for our Spanish families to connect with one another,”

says Rose Ann. “They often have questions about their child’s homework, or about field trips or other school-related activities. These sessions help them get answers to their questions while enjoying a family meal. This support for families, among other FRC supports, has helped fill some of the gaps of the work our preventive case workers did,” says Rose Ann, referring to the unfortunate recent pull-out of the Department of Social Service’s school preventive case workers.

After pizza and salad, parents can even opt to go to the “free shopping room,” where they can choose from a number of donated items they might need, like clothes for their children, or books and toys. “I often overhear parents saying, ‘Oh, your son or daughter could probably use this.’ They are always thinking about their friend’s needs first,” says Rose Ann.

Each session offers an activity for
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Rockland 21C Welcomed Three New Board Members in January

Erik Simon is a freelance writer and the Assistant to the Chair of the Rockland County Legislature. As a former teacher and administrator for an all-purpose after-school program in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, Erik brings an understanding of the many complexities involved in educating economically disadvantaged children.

Julie Kassel, FRC coordinator of Valley Cottage Elementary School, worked as a Special Education teacher for seven years and then coordinated Family Resource Centers in the Nyack district since their inception twelve years ago. Julie brings a wealth of experience in her understanding of the needs, challenges, and resilience of families as well as critical experience in providing resources, family engagement programs and support for children and families.

Kim Cross, Executive Director of the Nyack Center, has been with the Center for seven years. She has twenty-four years of experience in working for social service organizations doing vocational counseling, needs assessment projects, program development, and facilitating workshops and trainings on a variety of topics. She works with low-income women, parents and children, has a leadership role at numerous Nyack institutions, and participates in several countywide task forces and initiatives.

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Why Childhood Obesity Matters

What Rockland Schools Are Doing to Combat It

In the United States, obesity is not only epidemic, but arguably the gravest and most poorly controlled public health threat of our time.¹ Some 65-80 percent of adults in the United States are overweight or obese, and the number of children ages 6-11 who are overweight or obese is more than four times higher than it was four decades ago.²

"Today, nearly one-third of all children and adolescents in our country (more than 23 million youth) remain overweight or obese," testified President and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Risa Lavizzo-Mourrey at a 2009 House Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee hearing on childhood obesity, which "plac[es] them at heightened risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and a host of other serious diseases."

In a 2007 youth survey, the Rockland County Department of Health uncovered some alarming statistics about Rockland's high-school

get sixty minutes of exercise on most days."³

People need to understand that "this is not just about the health of children, [but] that those children are going to grow up and ... eventually many of them are going to wind up on Medicaid or Medicare or public programs and we are all going to be



"Each useful policy, program, or strategy implemented will function like one sandbag in a levee. When we have stacked enough strategies together, the flood tide of obesity will be turned." —Dr. David Katz

Dr. David Katz, an internationally-recognized authority on nutrition, weight management, and the prevention of chronic disease, was the keynote speaker at the 3rd annual Rockland School Symposium: Connecting Health with Learning in April 2009.

paying the bill," says Susan Dentzer, Editor-in-Chief of *Health Affairs*.⁴ And it will be a stiff bill: "childhood obesity carries a huge price tag - up to fourteen billion [dollars] in healthcare costs per year," says Lavizzo-Mourrey.⁵ By 2018, she observes, "if obesity rates continue to increase at their current levels, the U.S. will spend an expected \$344 billion on health care costs attributable to obesity—21 percent of the nation's direct health care expenditures."⁶ Dr.

state that children should "expend fifty percent of their daily energy in school."⁸ Many principals even connect physical activity with learning. A recent Gallup poll of two thousand principals found that four out of five principals report that recess has "a positive impact on academic achievement," and two-thirds of principals report that "students listen better after recess and are more focused in class."⁹

While schools can offer many opportunities to help prevent obesity by creating environments in which children eat healthfully and engage regularly in physical activity, they cannot be left to bear this responsibility alone.

But what can communities and schools do to combat this tidal wave? Dr. David Katz, an interna-

tionally renowned authority on nutrition, weight management, and the prevention of chronic disease, and founder and Director of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, offers hope: "Each useful policy, program, or strategy implemented will function like one sandbag in a levee. When we have stacked enough strategies together, the flood tide of obesity will be turned."¹⁰

"Nearly one in three teens is dangerously overweight" [27%]. Other results infer youths' lack of knowledge about some basic health behaviors: "90% don't know how many fruits and vegetables they should eat each day and 61% don't know they should get sixty minutes of exercise on most days."

students, reporting similar statistics when compared to the national childhood obesity average: "Nearly one in three teens is dangerously overweight" [27%]. Other results infer youths' lack of knowledge about some basic health behaviors: "90 percent don't know how many fruits and vegetables they should eat each day and 61 percent don't know they should

Joan Facelle, Commissioner of the Rockland County Department of Health, takes Dentzer's and Livizzo-Mourrey's thoughts further: "Treatment for obesity is challenging and difficult. If we invest now in effective obesity prevention strategies, we will help our children lead healthier lives and reduce medical costs over time."

Most health experts agree that

¹ See for instance; Tillotson JE. Pandemic Obesity: What Is the Solution? *Nutrition Today* 2004;39(1):6-9; Mascie-Taylor CG, Karim E. The burden of chronic disease. *Science* 2003;302:1921-2. Jeffery RW, Utter J.; The changing environment and population obesity in the United States. *Obes Res* 2003;11:125-225

² See <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20091216rlmobesityhearingtestimony.pdf>

³ See http://rocklandsteps.org/files/2007_Youth_Survey_Report.pdf

⁴ See <http://www.rwjf.org/files/newsroom/profiles/rwjf/>

⁵ See <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20091216rlmobesityhearingtestimony.pdf>

⁶ See <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20091216rlmobesityhearingtestimony.pdf>

⁷ See <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=56748>

⁸ See <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=48108>

⁹ See <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=55248>

¹⁰ Katz, David. Obesity Be Dammed... What It Will Take To Turn The Tide. *Harvard Health Policy Review* Vol. 7, No. 2, Fall 2006.



Above: Harriet Cornell addressing two hundred attendees at the 3rd annual Rockland School Symposium: Connecting Health with Learning in April 2009.

At Left: Carrie Steindorff, School Health Coordinator for the Rockland County Department of Health, addresses attendees at the Rockland School Symposium: Connecting Health with Learning.

And Rockland has begun to do just that.

The health department has invested a significant amount of its resources to turning Rockland's obesity curve for the better. Since 2004, schools, the health department, and community organizations have been collaborating on a host of projects, in many venues, from child care centers to parks. Schools were equipped with the tools, technical assistance, funding, and professional development needed to help increase access to physical activity and better nutrition for Rockland's children and youth. This multi-year partnership was initially funded primarily by a state Steps to a HealthierNY grant which was secured by the department of health.* The Steps Program supported eighty percent of Rockland schools as their health teams assessed their schools' health environments by using the Centers for Disease Control's School Health Index (SHI) tool. After schools completed the SHI, they received Steps funding to support school health initiatives in areas that the SHI analysis had pinpointed as important to address. (Aggregate SHI results indicated strengths in the areas of physical education, and health and safety policies and programs, and challenges in the areas of health promotion for staff, as well as family and community involvement in

developing school safety policies and programs.) Rockland 21C played a lead role at this stage, due to its strong presence in the districts, helping to inform district leaders and providing training to school health team leaders and support for their implementation projects. "With 21C's help we were able to successfully complete the School Health Index in our schools," says Dr. Facelle.

As health teams convened to complete the SHI, a federal mandate

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was given to districts participating in the National School Lunch and/or Breakfast programs to establish wellness policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity for the start of the 2006-2007 school year. "School health teams that had completed the SHI were able to inform districts about their schools' strengths and weaknesses and consequently aided districts' efforts in establishing a school wellness policy," says the health department's School Health Coordinator, Carrie Steindorff,

who, with the support of partners, provided guidance to school leaders responsible for writing and implementing school wellness policies. A case study on North Rockland's existing district-based health committee, which Rockland 21C had prepared before the federal mandate was instituted, "demonstrated how a strong, viable committee functions and that it could be done," says Steindorff. The study discussed the role of a district-level health committee, its structure, who to ask to participate, and the keys to success, all of which better prepared leaders to create district health committees.

Districts invested many hours in developing health and wellness policies that have helped improve the nutrition and physical activity environments in schools. Policies cover topics such as nutrition education, what vendors supply to districts, the amount of time allotted for physical activity, and many others.

Steps funding and the technical assistance provided to schools through Rockland 21C and the health department fueled enormous efforts by schools, resulting in over two hundred healthy school changes, all of which have increased access to physical activity and better nutrition. Going from school to school, a visitor can see that school health climates have changed for the better.

Rockland schools have established nutrition standards, particularly for competitive foods - which are those foods sold in schools that typically have little nutritional value. They have made more healthful foods available to students by adding salad bars, fresh fruit, whole wheat pizza, and other

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* and was one of only five awarded in the state

¹¹ See <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20091216r1mobesityhearingtestimony.pdf>

¹² Wharton CM, Long M, Schwartz MB. Changing nutrition standards in schools: the emerging impact on school revenue. *Journal of School Health*, 78:245-251, 2008.

Why Childhood Obesity Matters

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offered at the school. Additional schools have limited or eliminated the use of food as a reward in the classroom, and quite a few have initiated gardening projects and health fairs. One middle school now offers health education classes to its youngest students. PTAs, with the schools, have re-vamped their fundraising activities by having a walk-a-thon or book sale instead of selling candy. And some districts have taken the federal wellness policy mandate further to address staff wellness development and nutrition, and parent and community involvement.

Surprisingly, “research shows that schools do not lose revenue when improved nutrition standards are implemented,” says Livizzo-Mourrey.¹¹ A research review found that, in six of seven studies, selling competitive foods that meet improved nutrition standards did not result in revenue loss. Moreover, there was also increased participation in the National School Lunch Program after healthier competitive foods were introduced.¹² More families chose to participate.

Most health experts agree that while nutritional standards in schools are key to anti-obesity efforts, they must be paired with improved access to physical activity. Many of Rockland’s schools have taken this idea and acted on it. For example, many schools have designed new fitness centers and offered fitness challenges for students and staff; some have created outside walking trails for students to access during the school day; and many have instituted pedometer programs which encourage students to take more steps each day. Others have introduced walking and

get-fit clubs for students and staff, or staff weight-loss programs, and some have incorporated recess programs that increase children’s time at play by one hundred minutes a week or more!

after movement, and I have less behavior problems. This course changed my life and how I teach.” Students respond favorably as well: “I was surprised when my biology teacher got us up to do an activity. I thought it was silly at first but it helped me remember the answer on the test.” Initially a Steps-funded program, Learning

in Motion courses continue to be offered to Rockland’s teachers through RTCI.

CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) - an evidence-based physical activity and nutrition program - was piloted in the 2006-2007 school year to students participating in Nanuet’s after-school program run by the Nanuet Family Resource Center. With seed money from the Steps grant and additional funding and technical assistance from Rockland 21C, CATCH was an investment worth making: Students not only reported increases in knowledge about healthy behaviors but also increases in healthy dietary decisions and physical activity, and decreases in media use. The FRC Director, Rose Ann Mercado, says that the students went from being uninterested in going outside or playing, to counting on having regular time to be active. Mercado described one afternoon in which the students were participating in a lengthy group project. “One student asked, ‘Are we going to have time to go outside?’ We need to go outside to do the CATCH program.’ I realized everyone, even students who are not the most fit or athletic, had come to value their opportunity to move,” said Mercado.

During the CATCH program, students wore pedometers and recorded the number of steps they

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Two Rockland programs that focus on physical activity are Learning in Motion and CATCH. Learning in Motion, which incorporates brain research, movement education, and differentiated instruction, gives teachers strategies for using physical activity to teach any academic topic. It is quite innovative and was developed by the Rockland Teachers’ Center Institute (RTCI). A

For more information about the Learning in Motion courses offered through RTCI, contact Joleen Murray jmurray@rockteach.lhric.org 845-942-7603

Rockland elementary school teacher characterized the impact the program has had on her classroom: “I now re-think how I can put motion in all my lessons - even stretching. My students who have ADD [learn] much better



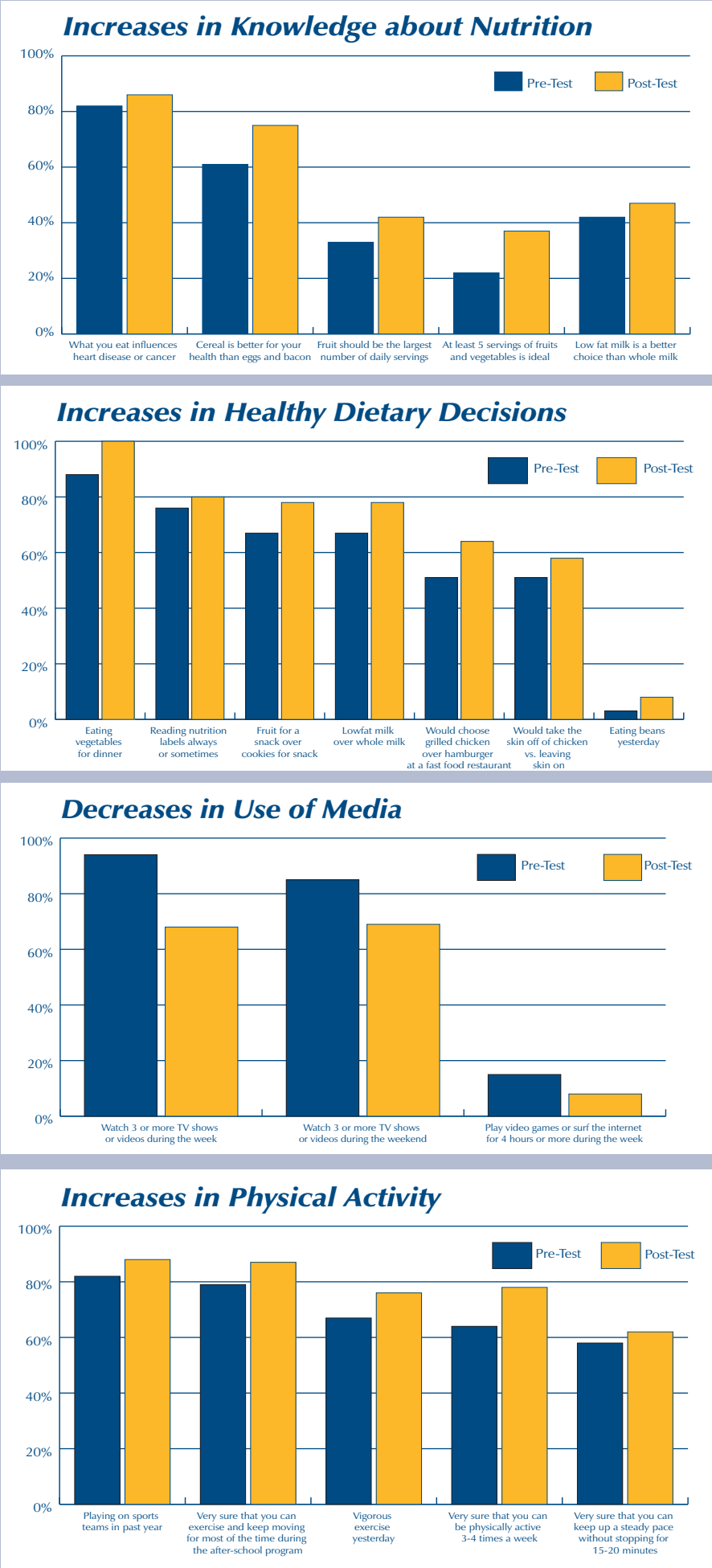
School Health Index leaders representing B.O.C.E.S., Clarkstown, East Ramapo, Nanuet, North Rockland, Nyack, and Ramapo Central complete three days of training in 2005.

took each day next to their name on the parent sign-out sheet. Parents became aware of their child’s physical activity and conversation about it grew. “I often heard parents comparing the number of steps their child took from the day before, saying statements like ‘Wow, you did 100 steps more today than yesterday!’” said Mercado. “Parents also had questions about their child’s activities, like ‘You look so sweaty. What were you doing today?’

It was great to watch the interaction between parent and child.” Nearly all the parents (98%) welcomed the addition of CATCH to the after-school program. An Eat Well Play Hard grant secured by the Rockland County Department of Health helped provide additional funding to programs that reached families and supported the work of Steps. Eat Well Play Hard is an initiative charged with helping reduce obesity

and helping prevent obesity-related conditions in the communities in East Ramapo, North Rockland, and Nyack. With Family Resource Center coordinators at the helm, schools developed several healthy initiatives. For example, Hillcrest Elementary School added a walking program for families, which takes place in the school’s hallways for six weeks in the evening during the springtime. “The real impact here is educating the children and parents about nutrition and physical activity,” said Hillcrest’s Family Resource Center coordinator, Joanne Robinson-Silas, who coordinated the walking initiative. “I’m really proud to be a part of a school that invests in its children’s health.” At the end of each evening walk, healthy snacks were provided for families to enjoy. “Parents were surprised that their children liked the healthy snacks offered,” concluded Robinson-Silas. Hillcrest plans to pair their walking initiative with their new

CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) Results



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Farm to School initiative – a program that connects the school and local farms with the objective of improving student nutrition, and providing agriculture, health and nutrition education opportunities for students while supporting local and regional farmers. In addition, Neary Elementary School changed its school lunch menu to incorporate more tossed salads and whole grains and made the switch from whole milk to serving only 1% or fat free milk. Valley Cottage Elementary School in collaboration with the Nyack Middle School offered a six-week cooking class for families that did not normally attend programs offered at the school. Educators and community members have been the recipient of many professional development activities supported by the Rockland County Department of Health, Rockland 21C, The Rockland Teachers’ Center Institute, and other community and school entities. These agencies have coordinated and hosted symposia, bringing speakers of national significance to the county such as Dr. David Katz from Yale University’s



What 21C has been doing...

Offered Cultural Competency workshop to FRC coordinators and staff of public agencies

New FRC Coordinator trainings given to East Ramapo coordinators

Participated on Complete Count Census committee and worked with districts to distribute or post Census flyers

Coordinated booth at YouthFest for 21C and FRCs – Census theme

Prepared information on the Earned Income Tax Credit for districts to distribute to families

Trained and helped place AmeriCorps members in schools

Participated on the Rockland Children's Advocacy Network and helped coordinate the event, Rights of the Child

Participated in the Rockland County School Health and Wellness Coalition meetings

Participated in the Rockland County School Health and Wellness Coalition symposium planning meetings

Helped coordinate the 4th annual Rockland County School Health and Wellness Symposium

Helped to organize the Haitian Support Project of Rockland, with the assistance of East Ramapo staff, gathering registration and school lunch materials

Worked with East Ramapo and Rockland County AmeriCorps to develop a Haitian School Success Corps

Convened a Rockland team to attend the national Coalition for Community Schools conference

Actively looking for federal and local grant opportunities

Participated on the Better Baby Care Campaign committee and helped distribute packets in 2009-early 2010

Ordered and distributed books and toys to families participating in districts' Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) as part of our project to expand the number of families whom districts provide home-visiting services

Interviewed a family participating in PCHP

Prepared for annual audit

Completed a report titled Looking Back at a 1998 Strategic Plan

Prepared spring newsletter

Provided technical assistance and support to FRC coordinators

Provided fiscal sponsorship services as a pilot

And more.



***In 2009,
Rockland 21C
spent 88 cents
of every dollar
received on
programs.***

Valley Cottage Step Into Spring Health Fair

by Julie Kassel

Students, parents and staff were literally walking a tightrope to health at the Valley Cottage Elementary FRC Step Into Spring Health Fair on March 18th. The fair featured the Amazing Grace Circus, yoga sessions, Thomas Clifford Karate classes, Good Sports Mentoring program, YMCA gym games and 13 other non-profit vendors, all promoting good health.

The fair was planned by the VC Health committee, an offshoot of the FRC, to encourage families to take advantage of physical activity opportunities in the community. There were also vendors promoting good nutritional health such as Nyack Hospital, local nutritionist and Nyack School board member Claudette Clark, and Hudson Health Care. Yogurt and granola snacks were provided for all. Principal Andrea Coddett, who participated with her son said, "Health and fitness are essential components to maximize student learning. This fair is about encouraging the kids to be involved in physical activities and encouraging the parents to get involved with them."



Why Childhood Obesity Matters

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School of Public Health, Dr. Patrick Cooper, former Superintendent of the McComb, Mississippi, school district, and Mark Doody, Superintendent of the Hudson Falls, New York, school district.

Even without ongoing funding, school health initiatives continue across the county. Forty percent of the school health teams that first convened to complete the SHI, have developed into formal ongoing school health teams. They continue to help identify school health problems and concerns. Many of the district-level School Health Advisory Councils meet quarterly to set priorities and design solutions based upon their schools' needs. And a School Health and Wellness Coalition consisting of twenty-five members representing community organizations and schools (including Rockland 21C), meets bi-monthly. Its focus is on

supporting schools and the greater community in creating healthier environments for young people and their families in the school, home, and community.

"The greatest achievement of Rockland's school health initiative is that school administrators, faculty, students and parents have taken the school health movement seriously. Schools have engaged in self-assessment, wellness policies have been written, and now those policies are being updated. Schools are evaluating how well they are implementing those policies, and administrators are changing the status quo to improve the learning environment. This dynamic process of change has resulted in sustainable improvements to the health and wellbeing of all of our school communities," says Steindorff.

"We are doing well," adds Dr. Facelle, "but we want to do even better." Although the recent county health ranking system released by the University of Wisconsin ranks Rockland eighth out of sixty-two counties in New York in health outcomes and fourth in the state in health factors, researchers only reviewed so-called "blunt measures" of health, which give just a snapshot of the county's health. "If we look at the whole picture, we still have work to do," says Facelle, "but we have made great strides for the better in Rockland, and particularly in our schools. The collaborative work of Rockland 21C, the Rockland County Health Department, our community partners, and ultimately our schools, has made a real, tangible difference in the lives of our children."

Join the Rockland School Health and Wellness Coalition

The Rockland County School Health and Wellness Coalition's mission is to educate and facilitate collaboration between schools, local agencies and businesses to support, optimize and sustain the health and productivity of our students, school staff and community.

The Coalition educates the community about issues critical to child health and creates opportunities for community organizations and schools to collaborate. Collaboration between schools and business and non-

profit sectors enhances communication, cooperation, sharing of resources and problem-solving.

The Coalition has three workgroups: Protective Factors, School Symposium (how to create healthier schools), and Field Trip Guide (connecting schools and community resources through local school field trips).

To participate in workgroups or to attend School Coalition meetings, e-mail Carrie Steindorff, School Health Coordinator at the Rockland County Department of Health at steindoC@co.rockland.ny.us.

The Nation's Leaders in Support of Community Schools

As the federal budget tightens and economic uncertainty clouds the nation, there is one federal department whose budget is slated to be doubled, since it is key to eventual “economic prosperity,” in the view of President Obama. During a February White House press conference, he said his wish was to allocate \$49.7 billion in 2011 to the US Department of Education to improve the nation’s education system.

Proponents of this budget increase agree that children should not suffer at the cost of the nation’s economic crisis. “Our students have stagnated educationally, putting our long-term economic security at risk,” said Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in an August 2009 press release. Duncan explained the President’s education priorities for which funds will be used: to “bolster early childhood education, work with states to develop rigorous standards and assessments, support effective teaching, invest in best practices, and improve student achievement.”

As educators and national leaders meet to discuss strategies to education reform, we are pleased to note one strategy that is gaining real traction. President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and the President of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, are giving their strong support to the community schools model. The Coalition for Community Schools defines them as: “schools [that] actively address factors that impact learning such as health and mental wellbeing. They focus on creating the conditions for learning and providing supports needed to prepare children and youth to graduate ready for college, career, and citizenship. Community schools are built on five pillars: comprehensive services for students and their families, early childhood development opportunities, after school and other extended learning opportunities, parent and community involvement, and an engaging, real world curriculum. Health services at community schools provide a public health safety net that

reaches students early to address issues like obesity through nutrition classes after school programs. Other health services include dental checkups and immunization shots.”

In other words, a community school supports the whole child.

Before Mr. Duncan became Secretary of Education, he led Chicago’s community school program in his role as CEO of Chicago’s public school system, and greatly increased the number of community schools in the city (150 and counting). The results: Community schools raised test schools and grades more than their non-community-school counterparts;

serious behavioral incidents decreased at Chicago’s community schools; and some communities saw a decrease in crime in the areas immediately surrounding the schools.¹

In a speech given at the Children’s Aid Society’s Practicum in October, 2009, Duncan spoke about the need for extended learning opportunity in schools by lengthening the hours a school is open and filling it with a variety of afterschool activities such as arts, sports, debate, and academic enrichment. “The more our schools become community centers – not just open for children but their older brothers and sisters, their families, GED classes, ESL classes, whatever it might be, the more families are engaged, the more schools become the heart of family life – the better our students are going to do.”

In speaking at the April Coalition for Community schools conference, Randi Weingarten was crystal clear about her support for the community schools model: “Community schools are an essential piece of any school

President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and the President of the American Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten, are giving their strong support to the community schools model.



Rockland leaders invited by Rockland 21C to attend the Coalition for Community Schools conference in April 2010. Top row from left to right: Miggy Lopez, Principal at Neary Elementary School; Harriet Cornell, Chair of Rockland 21C; Debi Thomas, Director of the Rockland Teachers’ Center Institute. Bottom row from left to right: Martha Iglody, East Ramapo Central School District’s Vision Coordinator; Julie Kassel, FRC coordinator at Valley Cottage Elementary School; and Anne Nissen, Administrator of Rockland 21C.

¹ See http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Turning_Around_Schools_CS_Results.pdf#xml=http://pr-dtsearch001.americaneagle.com/service/search.asp?cmd=pdfhits&DocId=111&Index=F%3a%5cdtSearch%5ccommunityschools&HitCount=12&hits=198+19a+19c+19e+1a5+1ba+34c+34d+34e+34f+851+8a4+&hc=830&req=arne+duncan+and+Chicago

reform effort. This was the first proposal I made when I became president of the American Federation of Teachers.” Weingarten made the case that we need to replicate strong models across the country, even citing Rockland 21C. Supporting community schools is her top agenda item of the year, she said.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius also spoke at the conference, articulating her view of the community schools strategy. “School buildings should be a cornerstone of the community, housing health clinics, afterschool programs and family activities,” said Sebelius at the conference. “These are tax-paid institutions. We need to open them up. Community schools will make it easier for families to access the service they need to succeed... If a child is not healthy, they will not learn, they cannot

Community schools are built on five pillars: comprehensive services for students and their families, early childhood development opportunities, after school and other extended learning opportunities, parent and community involvement, and an engaging, real world curriculum.

learn, they are not equipped to learn.” Rockland’s schools with Family Resource Centers are somewhat different, but fit under the community school umbrella. Thanks to its roots in the Yale School of the 21st Century model, Rockland’s FRCs make strong connections to community and to families, especially young families. The community school model has focused on working with partner organizations to provide services and supports to students. The Obama administration’s Investing in Innovation grant program for schools working in consortiums with nonprofits came to focus on improving academic achievement in very low-performing schools, so Rockland 21C is focusing instead on whether it can be part of a county application for Full-Service Community School award, which would – if we were successful – help us broaden what we achieve.

The president’s health bill included funding for home visiting, to be administered by states, so perhaps more funding will be forthcoming for programs such as Parent-Child Home.

Although funding is by no means definite for Rockland County, we are part of shifting priorities that bode well for community building and education.

For more information on the Coalition, go to www.communityschools.org

Contact Your Local FRC

BOCES
@ BERC Campus – Nyack
131 N. Midland Avenue
Nyack, NY 10960
845-348-3504

CLARKSTOWN
The Clarkstown FRC Partnership
@ New City Elementary School
60 Crestwood Drive
New City, NY 10956
845-639-5619

EAST RAMAPO
Early Childhood Center
Ramapo Freshman Center
845-577-6585

Eldorado Elementary
5 Eldorado Drive
Chestnut Ridge, NY 10977
845-577-6150

Elmwood Elementary
43 Robert Pitt Drive
Monsey, NY 10952
845-577-6160

Fleetwood Elementary
22 Fleetwood Avenue
Chestnut Ridge, NY 10977
845-577-6170

Grandview Elementary
151 Grandview Avenue
Monsey, NY 10952
845-577-6260

Hempstead Elementary
80 Brick Church Road
Spring Valley, NY 10977
845-577-6270

Hillcrest Elementary
32 Addison-Boyce Drive
New City, NY 10956
845-577-6180

Lime Kiln Elementary
35 Lime Kiln Road
Suffern, NY 10901
845-577-6280

Margetts Elementary
25 Margetts Road
Monsey, NY 10952
845-577-6190

Summit Park Elementary
925 Route 45
New City, NY 10956
845-577-6290

NANUET
Nanuet FRC
@ George Miller Elementary
50 Blauvelt Road
Nanuet, NY 10954
845-627-4889

Highview Elementary
24 Highview Avenue
Nanuet, NY 10954
845-627-4889

A. MacArthur Barr Middle School
143 Church Street
Nanuet, NY 10954
845-627-4889

NORTH ROCKLAND
Gerald F. Neary Elementary
20 George Street
Haverstraw, NY 10927
845-942-3469

West Haverstraw Elementary
71 Blauvelt Avenue
West Haverstraw, NY 10993
845-942-3180

NYACK
Liberty Elementary
142 Lake Road
Valley Cottage, NY 10989
845-353-7247

Valley Cottage Elementary
26 Lake Road
Valley Cottage, NY 10989
845-353-7291

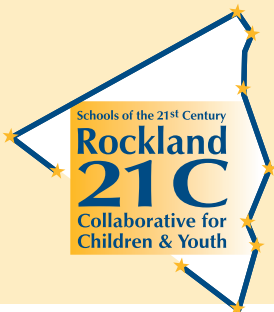
Nyack Middle School
98 South Highland Avenue
Nyack, NY 10960
845-353-7214

Upper Nyack Elementary
336 Broadway
Upper Nyack, NY 10960
845-353-7268

RAMAPO CENTRAL
R.P. Connor Elementary
13 Cypress Road
Suffern, NY 10901
845-357-2858 X129

Sloatsburg Elementary
11 Second Street
Sloatsburg, NY 10974
845-753-2720 X127

SOUTH ORANGETOWN
@ William O. Schaefer School
140 Lester Drive
Tappan, NY 10983
845-680-1314



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The Parent-Child Home Program

cont'd from page 3

families to do together. Participants have made puppets, created volcanoes, and have had books read to them by the center's AmeriCorps members. Recently, eight-year-old Evelyn took a turn reading a book during playgroup. "She could have kept reading all night," says Rose Ann. "She did not want to stop."

The Nanuet Family Resource Center also held a baby shower for Clara during one of these sessions, with a cake and "a bunch of fun little things" for the baby. Although Rose Ann would characterize Clara as shy, "she came out of her shell that night. She felt special. The group has embraced her."

Clara has received other supports as well. To help her improve with her English, Marta connected her to a

South Orangetown high school student who visits with Clara once a week. "They talk about anything and everything," says Marta. "What's great about this arrangement is it is teenager-to-teenager, despite the language barrier."

Max and Maria are very thankful for all the supports offered to them through the FRC, but Rose Ann and Marta are even "more thankful for Max and Maria's family," says Marta. "Maria is an incredible mother who will do anything for her children. She's so committed to helping them succeed."

PCHP is "research-proven" and recognized by many scholars, including Dr. John Silber, President Emeritas of Boston University, who says that PCHP is "the most cost-

effective, proven initiative available today preparing at-risk children and their families for success in school." Anne Nissen, Administrator of Rockland 21C, could not agree more. "When Nanuet's young PCHP graduates enter school, their teachers won't know they're there because they will be indistinguishable from their fellow incoming kindergartners. They won't need teachers' or specialists' support to catch up – they will be thriving."

As for the children, they have high aspirations. "I want to be a children's doctor," says Evelyn. "I want to be Batman," says Mike. James says, "I want to be a singer."

Clara is looking forward to raising her baby and completing high school, and then eventually going to college.

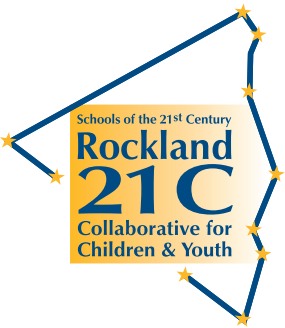
For more information about community schools, see the article on page 10 or visit the Coalition for Community Schools website at www.communityschools.org Sign up to get news and updates. View conference videos. Get free resources.

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Participate in Rockland's own listserve, CATI (pronounced "katie").

*Occasional information about events in Rockland,
national developments in community schools, nonprofits, job openings.
To subscribe, visit Rockland 21C's website and look for the image of a fountain pen.
On the right side of the page that opens, you will see subscription information.*

Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth is a pioneering countywide partnership with children as our priority. Our mission is to ensure the best possible future for every child by building a comprehensive support system that links family, school and community together.



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