

## The nature of learning

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DeBerry Elementary School student Kaalen Williams fishes for tadpoles at the Environmental Center for Our Schools (ECOS) at Forest Park.

PHOTO: KATIE MORRISON

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Dual-language learning, Page 3

## A quest for higher education

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

There's only one thing better than getting accepted to one of the top schools of your choice—being awarded a full scholarship.

Springfield Renaissance School graduates Quinn Angell, Kevin Kupeli and Michelle Santiago have each earned a QuestBridge Match Scholarship. Angell, the valedictorian of her class, will attend Yale University to pursue engineering. Kupeli will be going to Boston University to study computer science. Santiago, the salutatorian, will attend Williams College to study economics.

Recipients are granted admission to one of QuestBridge's college partners with a full four-year scholarship worth more than \$200,000. College partners use a

combination of their own funds, as well as state and federal aid to fund the scholarship, which is offered as part of a generous financial aid package that also covers room and board, books, supplies and travel expenses. The program looks for students who have shown outstanding academic ability, despite financial challenges.

Angell, Kupeli and Santiago were three of only 1,755 seniors nationwide awarded full scholarships to top colleges through QuestBridge this year. More than 17,900 students applied.

"It's pretty exciting, given the numbers that apply, that five of our students matched over the last two years—and especially three in one school year," said Allison

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Kevin Kupeli, Michelle Santiago and Quinn Angell earned full college scholarships through QuestBridge.

PHOTO: KATIE MORRISON

# Creating a Portrait that supports students



DANIEL J. WARWICK

If you stop to think about your personal support system, it is likely that a face and name quickly comes to mind. We believe the same should hold true for students as they navigate school. While students have many teachers, counselors, interventionists, coaches, and other caring adults whom they interact with throughout the course of a

school day, the Portrait of a Graduate initiative will ensure that every student has a *primary person* who acts as their go-to for all things school.

This model exists in several schools across the district already, making phrases such as “crew” and “morning

meeting” familiar to students and families. These programs are designed to pair small groups of students with an adult during designated times. These groups form a bond that is unlike those developed in academic classes or even extra-curricular activities because the focus of their time together is entirely different. It allows room for relationships to be built and connections to be made on a level that extends beyond teaching and learning.

A *primary person* plays a key role in monitoring student progress, identifying when additional support is needed, and marshaling resources to provide students with appropriate support as needed. In short, a *primary person* in a student’s school life would serve as a confidant, ambassador and tactician for their students.

We know that thousands of these relationships currently exist throughout the district formally and informally and we know the critical role they have played in student success. Certainly, working towards a formalized, comprehensive

district-wide support system such as a *primary person* model requires a great deal of careful reflection, creative thinking and structural design that will be unique to the climate and culture of every school.

We believe it is an investment worth making and have already begun that work, though we still have much more ahead of us. We look to schools such as White Street and Renaissance and many others to share their best practices districtwide and we also look forward to the innovative ideas that we know our schools will put into successful practice.

When I recall my own school days and the adults who took a vested interest in my success, I am excited about ensuring that all students have access to that kind of support. As we look to implement the community’s vision, hopes and dreams for Springfield youth, we believe the *primary person* model will help students find optimal success as they graduate high school and advance to college or career.

*Daniel J. Warwick is superintendent of schools.*



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PUBLISHED BY:  
SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DANIEL J. WARWICK, SUPERINTENDENT  
WWW.SPRINGFIELDPUBLICSCHOOLS.COM

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## Warwick recognized for leadership

The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) has awarded Springfield Public Schools Superintendent Daniel Warwick the 2023 President’s Award, citing the district’s vast improvements in graduation and dropout rates, among other achievements.

The district’s graduation rate was 56.6 percent when Warwick took the helm in 2012, compared to 84.6 percent today. The dropout rate has been slashed from 10 percent to 3.9 percent over that same period.

“Dan has been strategic in his use of state and local resources to bring innovative practices into the district. His more innovative leadership style has resulted in significant improvements of opportunity for the children of Springfield,” said M.A.S.S. President Dianne Kelly. “Dan has demonstrated himself as a supportive colleague, champion of children and respected education leader in the Commonwealth.”

Warwick began his career as a special education teacher in Springfield Public Schools more than 40 years ago. His tenure has included teaching in the district’s alternative schools and the distinction of earning national Blue Ribbon distinction as principal of Glenwood School. In addition to teacher and principal, Warwick has served as assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent, before taking over as superintendent.

Under his leadership, student achievement has improved in every student category, including English Language Learners and special education; more than \$750 million has been invested in building new schools and upgrading existing ones; SPS became the first district in the Commonwealth to offer free universal pre-k to 3- and 4-year-olds; the Springfield Conservatory of the Arts and the Springfield Virtual schools were created and launched, and a new Professional Development Center for staff was opened; the district moved to a 1:1 technology model, which greatly eased the shift to remote education during the pandemic; teacher compensation has become its most competitive; the Office of Family and Community Engagement was created; and



the district built and opened the Culinary and Nutrition Center, in partnership with Sodexo, where scratch meals are prepared daily for students.

Warwick said he is currently entrenched in the work of his third Strategic Plan, the Portrait of a Graduate, with a focus on re-imagining school so that students are engaged in an education that is rigorous, relevant, and culturally relatable.

“There could never be a more noble profession than teaching, in my opinion,” said Warwick. “In Springfield, we are blessed to have the best educators in the world and, working together, we’ve been able to make great advancements in the best interest of the thousands of students entrusted to our care every day.”

# Learning in two languages at Gerena

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Springfield Public Schools is now offering an opportunity for students to learn in both English and Spanish.

Starting in the fall, Gerena Community School will be offering a dual-language program for students in pre-K and kindergarten. Gerena Principal Cynthia Escribano said there will be nearly 100 students, split between four classrooms. A third of the students will be dominant in English, a third will be dominant in Spanish and another third will be bilingual. The school will add an additional grade each year as the students advance. The district is working to identify and recruit more biliterate teachers for the next cohort.

“As a Latina, I’m excited about the opportunities it will give our students,” said Escribano. “Language is such a part of their identity, and I want them to be able to celebrate their culture. I hope it helps our families feel more connected.”

Gerena is the first elementary school in the district to offer the dual-language program. Students will spend half their day learning educational content in one language, and then

swap to learn in the other language. The 50/50 model is designed to foster biliteracy and an appreciation for different cultures.

“Community leaders wanted to explore this and get this started,” said Rosa Rodriguez-Pion, the district’s supervisor of multilingual learners. “There were a lot of pieces, looking at administration and demographics and magnet status, but Gerena really stood out.”

Participating teachers have enrolled in bilingual endorsement programs at either Boston College or UMass, and are excited to launch the program.

“It’s important to start at an early age, because it’s the best time for students to learn a second language,” said kindergarten teacher Desiree Garcia. “Participating in a dual-language program is a commitment. It takes a few years to build language proficiency in both languages, and it’s important for families to know we’re committed to providing a quality academic experience.”

Rodriguez-Pion said the ultimate goal would be for students to continue their dual-language learning through high school and earn the Seal of Biliteracy by graduation, helping them to become “global citizens.”



Gerena teacher Nadine Awkal reads to pre-schoolers.



Teacher Desiree Garcia works on letters.



Kindergarten teacher Sol-Ivette Santiago is pleased with students' progress.



Teacher Michelle Cruz reads to pre-schoolers.



From left, Gerena teachers Nadine Awkal and Sol-Ivette Santiago, principal Cynthia Escribano, and teachers Desiree Garcia and Michelle Cruz are preparing for a new dual-language program. PHOTOS: KATIE MORRISON

## Sci-Tech serenades governor

The celebration of the inauguration of Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey at TD Garden in Boston included a rousing performance by the Sci-Tech Band. Once the band completed its performance, which drew a standing ovation, they joined in the audience to witness the inauguration.



## Putnam takes AIM at workforce award

The Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM) has awarded Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy the 2023 John Gould Education and Workforce Training Award.

The Gould Award was established in 1998 to recognize the contributions of individuals, employers, and institutions to the quality of public education and to the advancement, employability, and productivity of residents of the Commonwealth. In 2000, the award was named after the late John Gould, upon his retirement as president and CEO of AIM, to recognize his work to improve the quality of public education and workforce training in Massachusetts.

AIM presented the school with the Gould Award at the organization's Annual Meeting on May 4 at the Seaport Hotel in Boston.

Past recipients of the Gould Award include the late Jack Rennie, chairman and founder of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education; Middlesex Community College; Gordon Lankton, president and CEO (retired), NYPRO Inc.; William Edgerly, Chairman Emeritus, State Street Corporation; Northeastern University; The Davis Family Foundation; Intel Massachusetts; EMC Corporation; IBM; David Driscoll,

commissioner (retired) Massachusetts Department of Education; State Street Corporation and Year Up Boston; Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center; Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership; Brockton High School; Manufacturing Advancement Center – MACWIC Program; Christo Rey Boston High School; CVS and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission; Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, SnapChef and The Base.



Putnam Principal George Johnson proudly displays the AIM award.



## A Springfield star

Springfield Public Schools congratulates Ruth E. Carter on winning her second Oscar. The Springfield Technical High School graduate won Best Costume Design for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" during the 2023 Oscar Awards ceremony. In 2019, she won in the same category for "Black Panther." Ruth Carter's story is an illustration for Springfield youth of what is possible when one believes in themselves, works hard and reaches for the stars.

# Students' voices are heard at summit

Just before winter break, Springfield Public Schools hosted a Portrait of a Graduate (POG) Student Summit with more than 140 high school students sharing their thoughts and ideas about school.

Hosted at Springfield Technical Community College,



the full-day summit was designed to engage students in conversations to help drive the POG initiative. Students were broken into small groups for two breakout sessions facilitated by 24 teachers and district leaders.

"Hearing from students has always been ingrained in the work of the POG," said Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick, "but this summit was special because it was the first time we assembled students from various schools together as one to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions in such a concentrated way. It was powerful."

Breakout sessions ranged from topics about mental wellness to ideas about life after high school. Provided with the menu of topics, students chose the top two that appealed to them the most.

"The level of thoughtful engagement on the part of the students provided us with a wealth of information and insight that, honestly, we could not have gotten anywhere else," said Michelle Balch, senior administrator of Performance and Evaluation, who organized the summit and serves as the district's POG point person.

Student conversations revealed, among other things, that students desire more electives, internships, and dual-enrollment classes; that students are concerned about their own mental wellness and the wellness of the entire student body and community; that they desire a school setting devoid of adult and student biases; and that they require maximum support early in their education to help them identify post-



high school aspirations and a plan to achieve them.

This month, a second student summit at American International College informed students how their input is shaping the district's POG work and further engaged them in the work.

"It is important that they know they have a voice, and their voices are being heard as we move the district forward in a way that transforms the student experience," said Warwick.

# Grant geared to increasing diversity

Springfield Public Schools has been awarded \$122,016 in grant funding through the state's Teacher Diversification Pilot Program.

Launched in April 2019, the grant program provides approximately \$2 million in competitive funding to support efforts to strengthen and diversify existing teacher recruitment and retention programs.

The district was notified of the funding last December. "We want to thank you for your commitment towards

continuing to improve the educational experience for students," wrote then-Gov. Charlie Baker in a letter to Superintendent Daniel Warwick. "Through this funding and your continued support, we hope to expand access to great educational opportunities in the Commonwealth."

The grant provides tuition assistance to support enrollment into an approved-educator preparation program, as well as Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) preparation and examination

vouchers for paraprofessionals with bachelor's degrees, district graduates and other college graduates, and provisionally licensed teachers. Schools and districts may also use grant funds to enhance teacher recruitment and retention efforts. Specifically, the program supports high school education pathways, loan repayment reimbursement, relocation allowance and signing bonuses.



There are several school-based resources available to support students' mental health. To learn more, talk to your student's principal, counselor (for in-school counseling resources) and/or City Connects coordinator (for out-of-school referral resources).

For further information about community-based resources, visit [morethanmood.org](https://www.morethanmood.org)

# Students experience the ECOSystem

By MEAGHAN CASEY

For more than 50 years, Springfield students have been finding a little slice of nature on Porter Lake in Forest Park.

Former Springfield Public Schools educators Lorraine Ide and Clifford Phaneuf realized the necessity of educating students to appreciate and understand their role in nature. Working in collaboration with the district and the Parks Department, the teachers opened the Environmental Center for Our Schools (ECOS) in 1970. The program has since been providing an exciting environmental education program for generations of Springfield residents.

It is estimated that the program has served more than 200,000 students. In April, ECOS celebrated its 50th anniversary—three years late, thanks to the pandemic—with an open house, welcoming former teachers, alumni and fans of ECOS from across the community for some outdoor fun.

“Everyone always speaks of their

recollections of attending ECOS as a child, and the school district recognizes its responsibility in developing an appreciation for the school in our environment,” Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick said.

“It’s such an institution,” said science teacher Paul Terkelsen, who staffs ECOS along with teachers Maureen Keating and Catherine Orellana. “If you stop any Springfield resident, they all have similar memories of their time at ECOS.”

Orellana, who grew up across the street from Forest Park, remembers attending ECOS in her youth. She has taught at the center for 29 years.

“I really enjoy meeting new kids and showing them the special things our park has,” said Orellana. “I love that it’s an urban park, made to escape the urban noises. It can be eye-opening for them to see we really have nature all around us.”

ECOS is designed for students in grades 4-7. Classes rotate throughout the year,

with students spending two days visiting the 750 acres of Forest Park and the newly renovated center, also known as the Clifford A. Phaneuf Environmental Center. Thanks to a \$4 million investment, the former rustic log building was transformed into a state-of-the-art facility for learning in 2016. The improvements include increased classroom space, additional outdoor classroom space, restrooms, life safety equipment, a kitchen facility, landscaping enhancements and improved access to Porter Lake.

“To have a fresh new building is wonderful,” said Orellana. “In the old days, the program was more camp-like, but now we have proper tables and chairs and reliable heat. We even have SMART Boards and a top-notch kitchen, which is used to finish off maple syrup in the spring. Outside, our outdoor classroom has been a haven for bird-watching and connecting with nature.”

“Cliff Phaneuf would be proud that this

program is still strong and carrying out his mission started in 1970,” Warwick said. “ECOS has played a significant part in teaching the importance of and understanding of our urban environment.”

Students are transported from their school to Forest Park each morning and returned to their school in time for dismissal. The program takes place rain, snow or shine. Students first do prep work in the center before heading outside to go on hikes, fish, learn about ecosystems and habitats, study weather and erosion and more. The sixth-graders take part in a survival program where they learn to build a fire and roast hot dogs, and seventh-graders complete an orienteering course.

“As teachers, we sometimes get overly focused on the knowledge we’re passing on, but we really want them to leave the experience comfortable with and loving nature,” said Terkelsen. “You can’t have a bad day here, watching kids in wonder of the outdoors and loving it.”



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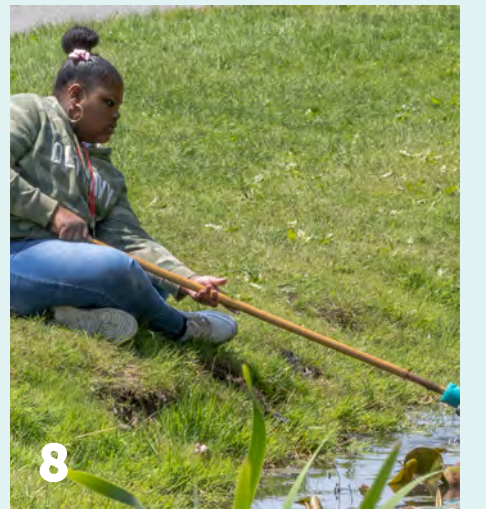
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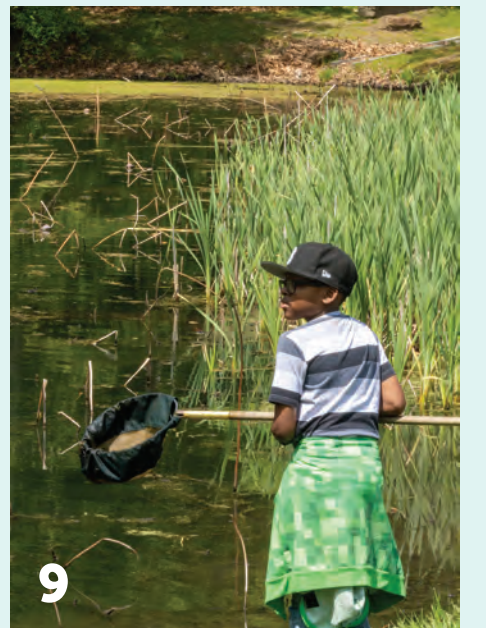
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1. The environmental center at ECOS, which was renovated in 2016, sits right on Forest Lake. 2. DeBerry Elementary School student Jayannaliz Colon and ECOS teacher Catherine Orellana look at wildlife. 3. DeBerry students fish for tadpoles. 4. Landon Dawson and Dereck Santiago test out binoculars. 5. DeBerry students fish for tadpoles. 6. Yarell Mitchell checks out what's in his net. 7. Antonio Ortiz shows off tadpoles he caught. 8. Kaylane Boyd fishes in a small pond. 9. Jeremy Durley fishes for tadpoles.

PHOTOS: KATIE MORRISON

# Meet some of Springfield's amazing seniors



Carina Aguilar

## Carina Aguilar, Springfield Honors Academy

Carina was the unsung hero of the Commerce soccer team. That level of perseverance and precision on the field was matched only by her work in the classroom. Ranked fifth, Carina is a quiet, but diligent student with a generous and kind spirit. She pursued a rigorous schedule of AP courses while working outside of school and being a two-sport athlete. She earned the Seal of Biliteracy, which recognizes her high level of proficiency in both English and Spanish. She will be a first-generation college student, attending Smith College to study psychology.

## Adriana Baez, High School of Commerce

Adriana is the valedictorian of her graduating class, having consistently worked hard to maintain a 4.0 GPA and challenging herself with rigorous coursework. As a dual enrollment student, she has earned college credit for history, English, business, criminal justice and finance. She also served as captain of the softball team.

"It's been such a pleasure building new relationships with the girls I've met and the coaches that have become so important in my life," she said.

## Kemmie Evans, High School of Commerce

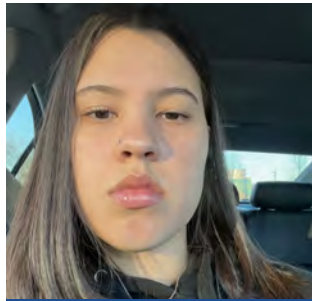
Finishing her year with a demanding course load that included honors and dual enrollment classes, Kemmie ranks in the top 20 percent of her class. She is an intelligent, compassionate and motivated student with a strong work ethic. Her pursuit of academic excellence, motivation to improve her community and her drive to direct change has led her to venture into the study of psychology.

"Find something you are passionate about and fight for what you love," she said. "When you apply your full self, school will come easy to you."

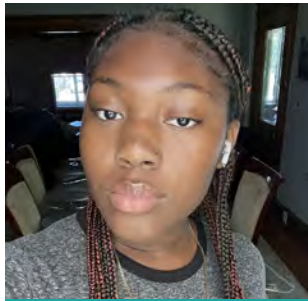
Kemmie served as captain of the basketball team and class president of the Student Government Association, as well as a student ambassador to middle school students. She has volunteered with the Council of Churches of Western Massachusetts for the past five years, and during the holidays, she has assisted with the distribution of blankets to the homeless, Thanksgiving dinners, Toys for Tots and donations of hygiene products.

## Leissa Frias, Putnam Vocational Technical Academy

Leissa is a first-generation immigrant. Her father was deported when she was just six years old, and her mother



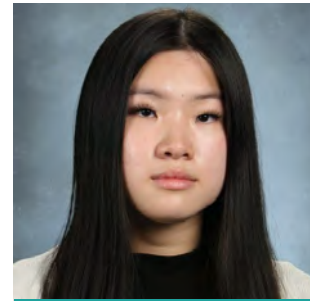
Adriana Baez



Kemmie Evans



Leissa Frias



Yuki Li



Cristina Lopez

worked multiple jobs to support her family. Her family later suffered a tragic house fire and the death of her father. "Grief never 'gets better,' you just adapt," she said. "I started taking notes from my mom and kept fighting. I took notes from my dad and always tried my best. No matter how high the water got, I was going to make him proud."

## Yuki Li, Springfield Honors Academy

Yuki, the class valedictorian, shone bright not only as a strong student academically, but as a student always looking to serve her school community. Instead of seeking the limelight, Yuki prefers to do the hard work behind the scenes. She was instrumental in the planning and execution of the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month celebration and events. Yuki always sought out academic challenges, including a rigorous AP schedule, while working outside of school. A first-generation college student, Yuki will attend UMass Amherst to pursue nursing.

## Cristina Lopez, Springfield Honors Academy

A dual student-athlete in volleyball and softball, Cristina managed to keep her academic standards high and meet them. She served as a member of the National Honor Society and yearbook staff. She also served as a House Captain, which is the top leadership position a senior can obtain. In this role, she helped to lead the school culture, including student celebrations, special events and academic contests. She plans to attend WNEC.

## Elizabeth Mickens, Springfield Renaissance School

Elizabeth is a top student in the senior class at Renaissance. She has taken all AP classes and earned a GPA of 4.4, while also taking dual enrollment courses at Springfield Technical Community College and American International College. A member of the National Honor Society, she was a LEDA Scholars Program participant at Princeton University last summer, designed to support top high school students in the college application process. Elizabeth has been awarded a \$20,000 annual New Hagan Scholarship, as well as the Springfield/Holyoke Scholarship, a full tuition scholarship to Smith College.

## Alexander Ovalles, Springfield Honors Academy

Alex is interested in going on to study music (possibly composition and arranging) in college next year. As a member of the SHA Jazz Band and student of AP Music Theory, he was the music department teaching assistant this

year, writing and arranging music for the SHA Orchestra and Jazz Band. Alex is also a member of the Springfield Symphony Youth Orchestra, an all-star group of teen musicians from around western Mass.

## Leala Samuel, Springfield Honors Academy

Leala leaves her mark at Springfield Honors Academy and The High School of Commerce for her amazing athletic achievements as a tri-athlete. She has been a four-year league all-star in soccer and three-year all-star in basketball, as well as a three-time All Western Mass Selection in soccer and basketball. She passed her 100-point mark and 100 goals in soccer, setting a record that future athletes can aspire to. She was recognized as a Super 7 in 2022 and achieved recognition as a D-1 Western Mass Champion. She holds track and field records for the High School of Commerce for the 55m, 100m and 200m races. Going into states, she was seeded 9th and finished out her senior year placing 5th for MIAA D4. In the fall, she will be attending American International College, where she will join their soccer team.

## Tia Tillman, Springfield Central High School

Tia will attend Cornell University in the fall, majoring in biomedical engineering. She was also named a NIH Esteemed Leaders Scholar in the College of Engineering and Computer Science at Syracuse. Tia was ranked fifth in her graduating class and participated in Key Club, National Honor Society, National Math Honor Society and Upward Bound throughout high school.

## Catherine Thompson, Springfield Central High School

Catherine was awarded a number of scholarships, including the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Dr. Carlton Pickron Scholarship. She was accepted into the honors programs at Suffolk University, Hofstra University and WNEU, and she received presidential/merit scholarship for George Washington University, Hofstra University, WNEU and Suffolk University.

## Amy Zheng, Springfield Honors Academy

A first-generation American whose parents emigrated from China, Amy will be a first-generation college student. The salutatorian of her class and an Upward Bound participant, she has been a genuinely caring and thoughtful force in her class. Having been offered multiple full scholarships, she is planning on pursuing a business major at New York University.



Elizabeth Mickens



Alexander Ovalles



Leala Samuel



Tia Tillman



Catherine Thompson



Amy Zheng

# Renaissance trio are QuestBridge scholars

## SENIORS from page 1

Stoddard, chair of the guidance and counseling department at Renaissance. “On top of their GPAs and classes and extracurriculars, all three of them have persevered, and their articulation through their writing is incredible. They’re all leaders in our building.”

Kupeli said he “ugly cried” the day he found out about the scholarship, and Santiago said she sobbed.

“It didn’t feel real,” said Santiago.

“I think I was the most emotional that day, but I remember my mom screaming,” Kupeli said. “My family is so proud. I’m happy to be able to contribute to my education and relieve my family of that expense. I wanted to go to a highly-ranked university and it’s just mind-blowing, not just that I got in, but that I got in with a full ride. It’s one of the craziest things, but it feels like all the hard work I put in really paid off.”

“This was a huge relief,” said Angell’s mother, Megan. “We couldn’t handle \$87,000 a year for four years. Quinn’s worked so hard for 13 years, and I’m so grateful that she’ll be going to a school where she’ll be meeting other great minds and expanding her world even more. We just have a tremendous amount of gratitude.”

During her time at Renaissance, Angell served as class president and a member of National Honor Society, and played volleyball and tennis. She took five Advanced Placement (AP) classes and dual enrollment classes in technical math at Springfield Technical Community College.

Even as a young child, Angell had a deep interest in math and science.

“I remember in second grade getting a CD and book on physics activities to do over the summer and I was

so excited,” she said. “And I’ve always loved space. In elementary school, there was a supermoon and I brought my sketchbook out to write down my observations. In high school, I got even more interested in chemistry and physics.”

Angell is still deciding between studying environmental or chemical engineering, but she knows she eventually wants to apply her skills to solving social issues—describing it as the “ultimate application of both heart and mind.”

“Renaissance really encourages social awareness... and I hope to encourage my future community to embrace personal and social advocacy,” she said.

Angell, Santiago and Kupeli were notified of their QuestBridge matches in December, and Renaissance held a special event to honor their achievements.

“To be an adult in the room, I was so impressed to see all of the other students cheering and showing their support,” said Angell’s mother.

“I think we all really embraced the idea of achieving things, not in spite of, but with others,” said Angell.

She added that she and Santiago have always supported and motivated each other, trading off rankings as the top two in their class.

Like Angell, Santiago pushed herself academically, taking AP courses as well as dual enrollment classes in psychology and the fundamentals of oral communication at Springfield Technical Community College. Her success in AP Statistics earned her the National Hispanic Recognition Award through College Board. Additionally, she was recognized as a Wellesley College VOICE college access program participant during her junior year. Santiago served as class secretary and a National Honor Society member, and played volleyball and tennis. She

credits her high school experience for getting her to where she is today.

“Renaissance was critical to this moment in my life,” she said. “It was the best choice I made, staying there through high school. The teachers really had an impact—just with their level of attention and focus on my success. I always felt like they were encouraging me, telling me ‘we’re here for you, just try it.’”

The first in her immediate family to go to college, Santiago said that Williams hadn’t even been on her radar, but after visiting the school, it quickly became her first choice.

“Once I saw it, it was amazing,” she said. “I walked away thinking ‘this is where I want to go.’ It’s smaller and the students are really close to the professors there, so I’m looking forward to that.”

Kupeli, whose family hails from Puerto Rico and Turkey, is also a first-generation college student. He said the scholarship is a huge motivator for him to do well in college. He hopes to pursue a career in software engineering and development or cybersecurity.

During his time at Renaissance, Kupeli took AP classes and dual enrollment courses in technical math and sociology at Springfield Technical Community College. A strong leader, he has been involved in the community with Project Coach at Smith College, where he works with elementary school students. He has also participated in research through the Springfield Participatory Action Research Crew (also known as Project SPARC) to explore how emerging adults in Springfield experience the transition to adulthood after high school.



Quinn Angell



Kevin Kupeli



Michelle Santiago





# Teachers of Excellence

Twenty-one Springfield Public Schools educators were selected to receive the 2023 Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award. The annual awards program honors outstanding Western Massachusetts educators and seeks to motivate teachers at all stages of their careers. Congratulations to the SPS recipients:

- Dr. Dana Gronbeck | High School of Science and Technology**
- Jacquelyn DeCosmo | Gerena Community School**
- Garth Bariffe | John J. Duggan Academy**
- Melissa Rosenberg | The Springfield Renaissance School**
- Rachel Riley | Lincoln Elementary School**
- Kelly Flahive | Beal Elementary School**
- Margaret Blais | John J. Duggan Academy**
- Vianni Gomez | John J. Duggan Academy**
- Paisley Krach | Van Sickle Academy**
- Kerry Cesan | Walsh Elementary School**
- Mindy Rosengarten | Springfield Conservatory of the Arts**
- Sarah Haluch | Elias Brookings School**
- Brianna Rivers | Kiley Prep Middle School**
- Leahnora Anderson | Roger L. Putnam Technical Vocational Academy**
- Alec Archambault | Springfield Central High School**
- Allison Stoddard | The Springfield Renaissance School**
- Kathy Chamberlain | White Street School**
- Phebee Allsop | M. Marcus Kiley Prep Middle School**

- Joshua McGowan | Springfield Central High School**
- Desiree Eickel | Milton Bradley Elementary School**
- New Teacher Award**
- Monica Koslowski | Homer Street School**

"I am pleased to congratulate the winners of the Springfield Public Schools Class of 2023 Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award. These educators represent what makes our school district so special," said Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick.

Winners were honored at an awards banquet at the Log Cabin in Holyoke on May 10. Prizes included an engraved plaque and \$250. The awardees are also offered tuition incentives and scholarships from Elms College, Bay Path University, Mount Holyoke College, Springfield College, Western New England University, Westfield State University, and the University of Massachusetts. In addition, they are granted access to thousands of WGBY digital education resources as organization members and are given three-month memberships at the Springfield Jewish Community Center or one of the six regional YMCAs.

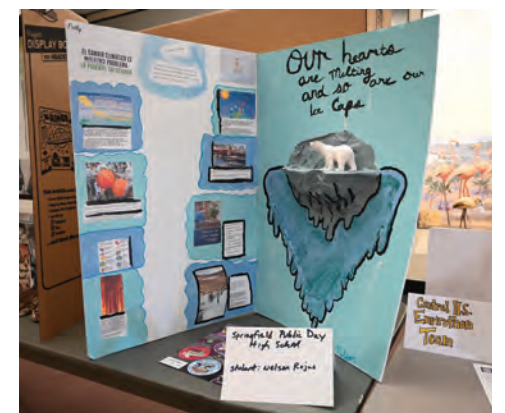
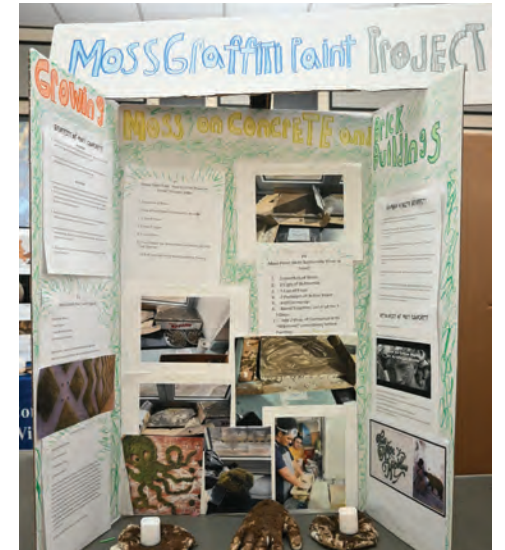
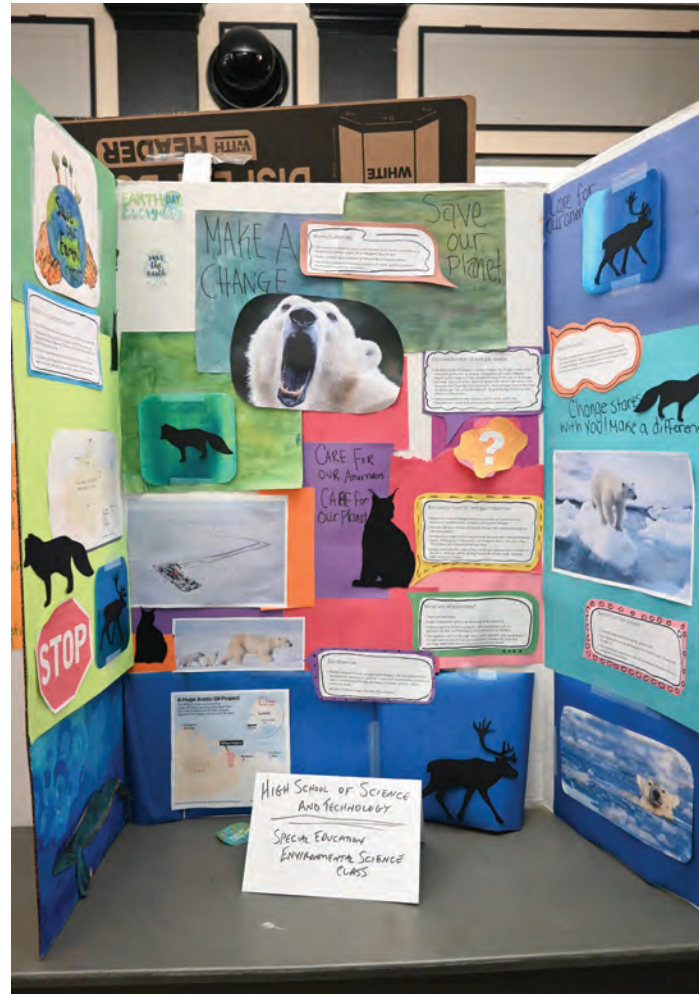
Now in its 20th year, the Excellence in Teaching Awards program is made possible by the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation and the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation. Other business and community support comes from American International College, Arrha Credit Union, Country Bank, and Meyers Brothers Kalicka.

# It's cool to be cool

Students from 10 schools exhibited their classroom work on energy and climate related topics at Springfield's Science Museum this spring with a goal of inspiring visitors to take actions that benefit not only the earth, but also their wallet and health. The exhibit launched with an event dubbed as the Cooler Communities and Home Energy Fair.

A collaboration between the district, the Harold

Grinspoon Charitable Foundation's Cooler Communities and ener-G-save programs, the City of Springfield and Springfield Museums, the project connects classroom learning to climate solutions and empowers students to become educators and change agents in their communities. It is also supported by additional funding from the Beveridge Family Foundation.



# First-class bus driver honored

Springfield Public Schools joins First Student bus company in congratulating 2023 HOWDY Hospitality award winner Madeline Rivera, shown with student Arianna Christiansen. The awards program, established in 1996, was created by the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau to recognize front-line employees. First Student provides bus services for Springfield Public Schools.

# Coming this fall: a new DeBerry-Swan

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Another state-of-the-art elementary school project in Springfield is nearing completion.

The new \$95 million DeBerry-Swan School will replace two old and outdated schools. DeBerry School was built in 1951 and could no longer accommodate the needs of students and staff. The former Homer Street School was opened in 1898 and lacked space and amenities such as a cafeteria and gymnasium. In November 2021, the School Committee voted to rename Homer Street School in honor of retired State Representative and Civil Rights Icon Benjamin Swan.

Much like the Brightwood-Lincoln School, the new consolidated DeBerry-Swan School will have separate entrances and each school will retain its name, but will share some common areas such as a gymnasium and cafeteria-auditorium.

“We will continue to invest in our students and their education and bring them the tools and opportunities they need to succeed,” said Mayor Domenic Sarno. “There is no limit to what our young people can accomplish. My administration will continue to do what we can to make sure that our youth have the skills and opportunities to

succeed in life.”

The school is expected to open by the start of the 2023-24 school year. The new building is being constructed on the site of the existing DeBerry school property on Union Street and DeBerry Park. The old DeBerry is slated to be demolished in 2024, with a parking lot created in its place.

Closely tied to this project is the former Massachusetts Career Development Institute (MCDI) site clean-up and DeBerry Park projects. Together these three projects represent significant public investment in the Mason Square neighborhood.



## Leveling — and enhancing — the fields

### Ted Plumb Athletic Field and Duggan Park

The city is looking forward to unveiling the soon-to-be-named Ted Plumb Field and Duggan Park, located behind Duggan Academy.

The development of Duggan Park, which will include an athletic complex rededicated to former Springfield Trade (Putnam) coach Ted Plumb, will provide a middle and high school level field for football, soccer, field hockey and lacrosse, and a running track for track and field events. The complex will also have lighting, bleachers, restrooms and a concession stand.

Additionally, development of the adjacent conservation area will offer a woodland walking trail, interpretive signage, and an outdoor classroom. The Community Garden, which will be maintained in collaboration with Duggan Academy, will offer raised planting beds, fruit trees, berry bushes, a compost area and a garden shed.

“This all-encompassing project will provide our city with a second major athletic field and complex, much like the one my administration did at Central High

School, along with enhancing our green open space areas,” said Mayor Domenic Sarno. “A city our size really does deserve and need two athletic complexes, with all the proper amenities, to accommodate all of our athletic and recreational activities. I am also happy that my administration will be able to relocate and dedicate this field to legendary coach Thomas ‘Ted’ Plumb. The improvements and enhancements planned for our Duggan field is desperately needed and will greatly benefit our youth, athletes and their families.”

The project will be performed in three separate phases. Phase one will include the construction of new state-of-the-art synthetic turf football field, surrounded by a new rubberized running track, which will start this summer and be completed in the fall. The second phase will begin in the summer of 2024 and will be completed in the fall of 2024. That includes a new fitness area for the community, as well as upgrades to the existing grass baseball, softball and soccer fields. The third phase will begin in the summer of 2025 and will be completed in the fall of 2025, and will include improved parking areas and an amenities building to accompany the field.



Mayor Domenic Sarno stands at the site of the new Duggan Park.

### Central Athletic Field

The Central High School athletic field upgrade project is slated to begin this summer and be completed in October.

This project provides the Central High School community and student-athletes with two new state-of-the-art synthetic turf fields—introducing the first synthetic turf baseball and softball fields available for Springfield Public Schools use. The new field

will accommodate baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse and football.

The area will provide a significant benefit to the school community, a reduced maintenance burden and accessible walkways for spectators to enjoy the game. This athletic field upgrade project is a unique opportunity to expand the world-class facility at Central High School and nurture the athletic community for many years to come.



William "Pop" Watson III is now headed to Virginia Tech.  
PHOTO: MASSLIVE

# ACC comes calling on Central stars



Dwayne Early Jr. has offers from Pitt, among other colleges.  
PHOTO: KATIE MORRISON

## By RICH FAHEY

The parade of student-athletes from Springfield Public Schools committing to colleges across the country continues, with a growing number headed to prestigious Division I institutions.

Springfield Central sophomore wide receiver Dwayne Early Jr., the son of Springfield Public Schools Athletic Director Dwayne Early Sr., announced in March that he has received a scholarship offer from the University of Pittsburgh in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Meanwhile, Central senior quarterback William "Pop" Watson III, the son of Central football coach William Watson, in December decided to de-commit from the University of Nebraska in favor of Virginia Tech. The younger Watson made his decision after new Nebraska coach Matt Rhule did not retain Mark Whipple, the former UMass coach and Pitt offensive coordinator whose presence at Nebraska helped Watson make the initial decision to commit there.

The highly-regarded Atlantic Coast Conference has increasingly become a landing spot for Springfield student-athletes, with Central's Josiah Griffin joining brother Joseph Griffin Jr. at Boston College and offensive lineman Jayden Bass committing to Syracuse.

Dwayne Early Sr. said the success of the district's Class of 2023 on the playing fields and in earning scholarships will aid those who come after them.

"I think this class will go down in the

history books when it comes to the number of scholarships," he said. "And it's not just the males. The girls have gotten them in basketball and other sports."

Early said the success in winning scholarships has been building since 2018 and while the pandemic slowed things down temporarily, the number of students participating in sports now is approaching pre-pandemic numbers.

"We lost a lot of kids when Covid hit," he said. "Last year we had protocols in place and there were stoppages during the seasons. This year we didn't have as many and there were no stoppages."

Early said the successes of the Class of 2023 on the playing field has put the district on the map for college recruiters and reinforced the importance of academic success. "Colleges cannot continue to recruit you if you do not meet the criteria. Student-athletes know they have to take care of business."

Early said that in his son's case, the recruiting process has just begun. "It's still open and he's visiting other schools. Pitt has made an offer but Dwayne hasn't committed to anything. When it comes to college sports, things change quickly."

Dwayne Early Jr. played basketball last winter and helped lead Central to the Round of 16 in the MIAA Division I tournament and he ran track this spring. After the basketball season ended, Early went to New Jersey to compete in a 7-on-7 football tournament with other young Western

Massachusetts players.

"I've always stressed the importance of playing other sports," said Dwayne Early Sr. "It's a two-fer. Playing multiple sports helps him and it helps the programs at the school."

Student-athletes earning scholarships today also will be entering the world of Name, Image and Likeness (NIL), which allows them to earn money while they attend college.

"It's a game-changer," said Early Sr. "It's a chance for the student-athlete to be rewarded for his or her hard work."

Even as a sophomore, colleges were already interested in Dwayne Early Jr., who stands 6-3 and has an 80-inch wingspan. A week after Central's season ended in the Division I Super Bowl in December, Early joined several other Central teammates in journeying to Frisco, Tex. to compete in the U.S. Army National Combine against other elite underclassmen from across the country. He attracted the attention of college coaches and in March received the Pitt offer, his first from a Division I school.

"It's amazing," Early Jr. said about the offer. "I know I have to keep working if I want it to continue."

Early also visited Boston College during the football program's spring practices and spoke with the team's coaches and caught up with former Central stars Josiah and Joseph Griffin Jr. BC Coach Jeff Hafley said last fall that Joseph Griffin, after a breakout game against Duke, would become "a star."

Central had 13 players getting at least

one reception during the fall, but Early still stood out. Observers noted both the ability to catch contested balls deep downfield and run short and intermediate routes.

Last August, William "Pop" Watson III was still a Nebraska commit. But with coaches touring a New England circuit of camps at various top high schools, he wanted to throw to his uncommitted receiver teammates at Central to help them catch a recruiter's eye.

As the camp commenced, the group of 30 or 40 coaches, which included Virginia Tech, started migrating to the quarterback who was putting on a show.

"They were all huddled around him, watching him throw the football," his father and coach said. "He kind of blew everyone away."

When Nebraska made the decision not to retain Whipple, Watson turned to a school that had kept up with him the whole time — Virginia Tech.

"Those guys have stayed persistent throughout the whole process, even when I was committed," Pop Watson said. "Virginia Tech never stopped recruiting me."

Increasingly, the city of Springfield has become a popular landing spot for college coaches looking for talent.

"We're very proud of our student-athletes in this class and previous classes," said Dwayne Early Sr. "Coaches and administrators work hard with the students to help them excel on and off the field and to get as many as possible free college tuition."