

PROPEL POST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM PROPEL SCHOOLS ISSUE #8



An early view of the school's temporary location next year.

Welcome Propel Northside!

Propel Schools will begin the 2011-12 school year with the opening of Propel Northside! This will be Propel's first school in the City of Pittsburgh and marks the first time that a Propel charter application has been approved by a local school board.

Propel Northside will open in August with grades K-4 and add grades in subsequent years, eventually expanding to grades K-8. The school will occupy a temporary space, in the former Columbus Middle School, before moving to a permanent facility in year two. Ariane Watson will be the school's Principal. Ariane was the Co-Principal of Propel Homestead and has been a leader within Propel since 2007, formerly holding roles as an Assistant Principal and as a Math Coach. An interview with Ms. Watson below reveals what's in store for Propel Northside.

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Propel is a not-for-profit independent public school organization whose mission is to catalyze the transformation of public education so that all children have access to high performing public schools.

Q: What excites you most about next school year?

A: I look forward to getting to know all of our new students, families, and the Propel Northside teaching staff. It truly takes a team to effectively build a productive and positive school, and having the honor to open the first school in the City of Pittsburgh is an amazing opportunity.

Q: What is your vision for Propel Northside as it grows?

A: It's critical that we start the year off strong in terms of expectations for the Propel Northside staff, students and families. Implementing clear expectations will allow us to continue to provide a quality education to our students, their families and the community.

Q: What are your goals for Propel Northside?

A: Our goal is to develop an environment of high academic expectations where students look forward to coming to school every day. I am confident that the staff that we've recruited, along with effective leadership, will make this happen.

Q: Are you looking forward to being a part of the Northside community?

A: Absolutely! We are excited to become a community partner, and we hope to collaborate with amazing organizations like the Children's Museum, along with the other local businesses and non-profits. Most importantly, we want to extend these great resources to our students, and give them the opportunity to be a positive influence on the Northside.

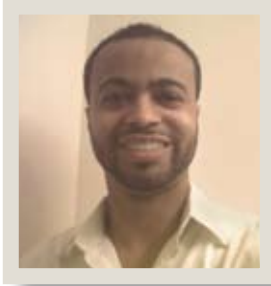
Q: How would you describe the culture you plan on cultivating?

A: Our vision is to cultivate a positive, warm school environment where all students feel like they are being supported and challenged to achieve their greatest potential. An emphasis on school culture is both a short and long term goal. In order to have a high functioning school environment, our students have to want to attend school and believe that they can succeed. We will work together to make our school a caring and warm place, coupled with high expectations!



Propel's Leadership Team Grows

We are thrilled to welcome outstanding educators to the Propel leadership team this year. Dr. Exley Warren will be the Associate Principal of Propel Homestead, Briant Williams will be the Assistant Principal of Propel Braddock Hills and Mike Evans will be the Assistant Principal of Propel East (Mike was formerly a teacher at Propel Montour).



Dr. Exley Horton Warren, Jr. is a third generation educator. He graduated with honors receiving his B.S. degree in Elementary Education from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). He went on to receive his Doctorate in Education from Nova Southeastern University where his concentration was Educational Leadership. Exley's dissertation topic was, "evaluating the use of differentiated instruction on third grade African American males to increase their reading proficiency." Additionally, Exley has taken post doctoral courses at the Harvard University's Principal Center. Previously, Exley has served as an elementary and middle school teacher, and an elementary school reading coach. He has served as an essay reader for Governor Jeb Bush's Hispanic and Black History month teams (2004) and facilitated a workshop entitled "African American males in the classroom" for the Urban League's Education Summit (2006).



Weldon Briant Williams, III is an educator with almost a decade of experience in teaching and learning. His most recent teaching experience is as the Director of Choral Activities at Carver School of The Arts in Atlanta, Georgia. During this experience, students earned consistent superior ratings at state evaluation festivals. In addition to his accomplishments in the classroom, Briant brings to Propel various school and community leadership experiences. He holds the Bachelor of Science Degree in Music Education from Florida A&M University, the Master of Music Degree in Music Education from Northern Illinois University, an Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration, and is currently in the dissertation phase of the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Administration K-12 at Georgia Southern University.



Mike Evans holds a B.A. in Elementary Education from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.A. in Teaching and Curriculum from Penn State University. He will receive his Principal's Certification from the University of Pittsburgh and begin work on a Doctorate in Education this fall. Mike has eight years teaching experience and has taught at Propel Homestead and at Propel Montour where he implemented Propel's first Digital Classroom. He planned and facilitated Propel Montour's Middle School Career Day for the past two years. He served as a Principal's Intern at Propel Montour.

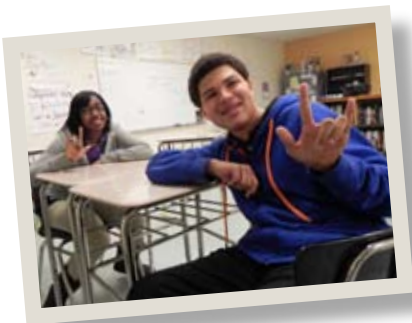
Silent Conversation at Propel Braddock Hills

By Elise Koslosky, Propel Braddock Hills

Silent conversation fills the air of Braddock Hills High School during the two novice level American Sign Language courses offered to students for the second and third trimester. In this "voice-off" environment, 9th and 10th graders eagerly chat with Deaf instructor, Ms. Maria Laura Shepeck, about themselves and their day, through new vocabulary and sign skills.

Amanda Keller, 9th grader at BHHS, lingers in the classroom every day just to spend a few more minutes practicing. "I get to interact with others that I would never get to communicate with. I recognize other people and cultures that have always been right in front of me. I want to learn more."

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Students at Propel Braddock Hills expressing the "I love you" sign in ASL.

Silent Conversation at Propel Braddock Hills *(continued from previous page)*

Ms. Sheppeck initially joined the Propel team as a volunteer Community Expert collaboratively instructing one class of 15 students. "Having a Deaf instructor is an interesting challenge," said 9th grader Avery Coles, "but Ms. Maria is a very loving and patient person who really wants us to learn." Through a grant awarded through Propel's Innovation Fund, this language program expanded to two classes five days per week, incorporating more students and allowing for more instruction time.

"...standards are set very high for student focus, patience, sensitivity and collaboration."

Principal Joe Oliphant attributes the success of the class to the high level of engagement and interaction with the language. "Students must continue learning in order to be a part of the conversation," said Oliphant. "This class is something different—unique. More importantly, standards are set very high for student focus, patience, sensitivity, and collaboration. These are all critical skills for 21st century learning and development."

Even some Propel Braddock Hills teachers have become interested, picking up Wednesday night community classes at the Western PA School for the Deaf in Swissvale where Ms. Sheppeck is an instructor. "I've always enjoyed learning new languages," said math teacher, Nick Bridge, "It is important that we step outside of our comfort zones and learn alongside the kids."

Propel McKeesport's Health & Wellness Initiatives

Hhealth and wellness was a major focus at Propel McKeesport this year. The school was engaged with Fitwits, a program from Carnegie Mellon University, founded by Design School Professor and Propel Board Member Kristin Hughes, and funded by the Heinz Endowments. Fitwits raises awareness and teaches students, families, and communities about healthy eating, staying active, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. With the help of Fitwits, teachers integrated lessons about health into their curriculum, creating things from newsletters to radio shows about healthy living.

As part of an effort to change the eating habits of students, families and the community, Propel McKeesport also partnered with Fitwits, Whole Foods Market and Eat'n Park to bring the school its first salad bar. Whole Foods purchased the salad bar unit for the school, and Eat'n Park donated all of the produce needed to fill the salad bar with fresh fruits and vegetables three days a week. The donation was part of Eat'n Park's "LifeSmiles" initiative, which aims to create healthier communities for kids and their families. eChef Regis Holden, Sr. Director, Culinary Services from Eat'n Park, visited Propel McKeesport to talk to students, families and staff about healthy foods.

This spring, a group of Propel McKeesport parents organized a community garden project in a vacant lot next to the school, obtaining permission to use the space from McKeesport Mayor Regis McLaughlin. Grow Pittsburgh, a local non-profit organization dedicated to teaching and promoting responsible urban food production, helped Propel parents and students plan and plant their garden with seeds donated from Seeds for Peace. The school had a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the garden, which was attended by community members and neighbors.

These initiatives made a meaningful and lasting difference in the lives of Propel McKeesport students, and helped change the way that Propel families think about healthy living.



Propel McKeesport students learning and sharing healthy habits through Fitwits.



Propel East receives the Charles Gray Award! Pictured from left to right: Darren Stromock, Assistant Principal, Anna Marie Joyce, Music Teacher, Sandy Gough, Principal.

An Award-Winning Year for Propel!

The 2010-11 year at Propel Schools was filled with many inspiring achievements.

Among these achievements was the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) Award from New Leaders for New Schools. The award named Propel McKeesport and Propel Montour as two of the top 18 charter schools in the country, based on student academic achievement gains. This was the first EPIC award for Propel Montour and the third consecutive EPIC award for Propel McKeesport.

Propel East received the Charles Gray Award from Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, in recognition of excellence in arts education. The arts program at Propel East engages students in interdisciplinary learning combining art history, art production, literacy, cultural studies, technology and civic responsibility. Among the schools many artistic accomplishments, Propel East's art teacher, Alison Babusci, established a school-wide arts festival featuring student artwork and musical performances, and interactive art activities for all ages. Propel East's music teacher, Anna Marie Joyce, developed a nationally recognized music program that allow students to experience music in-line with Pennsylvania and National Music Standards while integrating reading, writing, science and math into the music curriculum at all grade levels.

Propel is proud to celebrate these outstanding achievements, in addition to the many other significant achievements over the past year.



INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT

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