

Hands-on Math
Gets Students
Engaged

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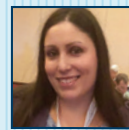
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News and Information
from Garfield Park Academy

Student Council: A Tool for Effective Self-Advocacy

Students at Garfield Park Academy are getting hands-on experience in leadership, democracy, and self-advocacy through student government. Roughly 30 students in grades K-12 were selected by their classmates either as representatives or alternates, to represent their homeroom class through the Student Council.

The group typically meets once or twice a month. In October, they sponsored a Halloween Parade for the elementary students. After the parade, students gathered in the Media Center, where both the Student Council members and elementary students met, talked and enjoyed a snack. Recently they completed their annual Thanksgiving Food

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Hands-on Math Gets Students Engaged

Ms. Jessica Jones, an elementary math teacher at Garfield Park Academy, knows that her students need more than a book and a worksheet to grasp math concepts. They need to move. That is why she brings an active approach to teaching math.

She plans hands-on lessons in which students roll dice to create numbers, add and subtract; use colored paper



to cut, paste and organize numbers as they learn fractions and place values; manipulate clock faces to show time; and use play money to make change. Even favorite foods, like an orange or a pizza pie can be "divided up" to learn about fractions and multiplication.

Hands-on learning is important in any classroom, but especially for students at Garfield Park Academy, many of whom struggle with basic math skills. Studies have shown that kinesthetic learning, in which students learn by doing, helps them gain a deeper understanding of the material.

Through trial and error, students can learn from their mistakes, and bridge the gap between abstract concepts and everyday life.

Ms. Jessica starts the school week with "Basic Skills Monday," lesson plans that allow students to practice skills, building fluency and confidence. "It helps the students reset, start the week on a positive note, and prepare for new skills," she stated.

Using the *My Math* curriculum, Ms. Jessica creates supplemental materials so all her students have multiple opportunities to develop the skills they need for higher-level math. "It is one thing for them to see what we are learning about from their desk, it is another thing altogether for them to use tools and manipulatives to perform the learning themselves," she concluded.





GPA Paraprofessional is Recognized for Excellence

Armanda Rodrigues, a paraprofessional at Garfield Park Academy, has been honored as ASAH's regional Paraprofessional of the Year. With more than a decade of experience, Armanda supports students with behavioral, learning and social disabilities. She has honed her skills utilizing the Teaching Family Model concepts and now leads as a mentor.

Each year, ASAH, a membership association of more than 150 private special education schools and agencies, recognizes educators who make a difference in the lives of students with disabilities. She was nominated for her dedication, professionalism, compassion and expertise.

"Not only does Armanda work diligently as a mentor, she is actively involved in all aspects of life at our school," said Dr. Steven Morse, Superintendent at Garfield Park Academy. "She is the consummate professional who epitomizes the qualities and character that have made her an outstanding staff member worthy of the award," he concluded.



Opportunities are Blooming for Horticulture Students

Community connections are turning classroom learning into real-life learning and job skills for students in the Horticulture program, supervised by **David Hamilton**. Through a new arrangement with the JFK Center, a performing arts center and catering hall operated through Willingboro's Parks and Recreation Department, students at GPA will have the opportunity to do floral design for local groups and organizations who rent the space for special events, parties, and conferences.

Last spring, as GPA was celebrating its 25th anniversary at the venue, event planners at JFK took notice of the beautiful floral centerpieces and expressed interest in having students from GPA make centerpieces for other events at the center.

Each week, students bring a custom arrangement to the center's welcome desk. As guests at the venue see the creativity, quality and beauty of the students' work, they are invited to contact GPA to arrange flowers for their own event.



Hamilton hopes the opportunity will lead to stronger community connections and real work experience that will help students land career-oriented work in the floral industry.

For years, students in the Horticulture program have been producing beautiful arrangements for events at the school, or to sell to school visitors.

"This new opportunity at JFK exposes our students to the challenges and joys of the floral business – and to some of the real-life business issues, like taking orders, meeting deadlines, and delivering beautiful products – that they might face when they graduate," Hamilton concluded.

Student Council (*continued*)

Drive, making posters to promote the activity to help families in need.

According to **Armanda Rodrigues**, a mentor who oversees the Student Council, meetings of the Student Council allow students to talk about issues at the school, giving students a voice in promoting change. Self-determination is a key element of the evidence-based teaching family model used throughout the school.

"Students learn appropriate ways to address an issue or idea, and how to respond to new situations when they arise. When they help shape changes here at the school, students learn to feel more confident and capable of affecting change outside of school. When they are ready to leave Garfield Park Academy, they will take these skills with them as they build self-determination," she concluded.



New Groups Help Students Build Pride and Confidence

Educators at Garfield Park Academy wanted to do more to support students, so they started simply by listening. Last spring, GPA launched three new groups: a Girls' Group, a Boys' Group, and an LGBTQ Pride Group. Each group has a unique approach, but the goals are crosscutting – self-acceptance, self-advocacy and self-love.

Maria Reuter, LSW and **Melanie Uhse, LSW** co-lead the Girls' Group. Their hope is to help the girls foster and improve relationships with each other, reduce conflicts and bullying, and build on relationships with friends, family and in the community. "We want to build self-esteem and self-confidence so students can be who they are now, and who they are becoming: young women," said Reuter.

Angelique Adams and **Reginald Weeks** are co-leaders of the LGBTQ group. "We open discussion to topics that matter to raise awareness of issues in the LGBTQ community," said Ms. Adams. "Reggie and I have both been there, so we understand some of the things they are going through. Students are building pride in who they are."

Walter Muhammad and **Lance Clark** work together to run the Boys' Group, which was

launched at the request of boys at GPA after learning about the Girls' Group.

"The work we do is all about empowerment. We strive to build them up and offer guidance," said Clark. Muhammad noted that many of the boys in the school lack a strong male role model. "We address the unique challenges these young men face – we are mentors who can be a resource for them," he said.

One of the hallmarks of Garfield Park Academy is that there is a social worker in every classroom who is able to support students when they need it. The new peer groups, which meet once or twice a week, broaden that support and teach students how to support each other. Students come to the groups through combination of self-referral and through classroom social workers who also help to identify students who might benefit. No one is turned away, and no one is required to attend.

"Many of these students have been knocked down, so when we start, it can be uncomfortable for them. Over time, they learn that we believe in them and their capacity for change," concluded Uhse.

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Garfield Park Academy is a New Jersey state-approved, not-for-profit school that provides effective, evidence-based special education services for students in grades K-12 who have a history of learning, social, emotional and behavioral challenges. Garfield Park Academy is accredited by the Middle States Association and accredited by the Teaching-Family Association. For more information, please contact Garfield Park Academy or visit our website.

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