

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Delta students' math success leads to NYC (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

CLARENDON — A small group of students gathered on a recent afternoon inside a Clarendon High School math room to talk about a planned field trip to New York City.

White boards, test papers and pennants from various universities, including the University of Pennsylvania and Brown University, adorned the drab, white walls and faux-wood paneling. Mismatched desks and chairs filled the small room.

The trip is a celebration of sorts, designed to both enhance the students' cultural experience and reward them for passing the state's required algebra examination last year.

In all, 41 of 43 Clarendon High School students who took the test last year passed. All were freshmen. Of the two students who failed, one had transferred at mid-semester, and the other had been out most of the year, according to the school district.

Clarendon High School Principal Doug Caldwell said the students' work represents "some of the best success we have ever had here. There is just a new energy right now in our school, and it's very exciting to be a part of."

Caldwell said there was a time when students at Clarendon "dreaded coming to school," but he credited his teachers, six of whom are part of the national Teach for America program, for "creating a more positive learning atmosphere."

Jeremy Rogoff, the teacher who helped the 41 freshmen pass the math test, arrived in Clarendon two years ago with Teach for America.

Justice Dawson, now a sophomore, described Rogoff as someone "who pushed us hard, so that made the test seem a lot easier when we actually took it. Math is not my favorite subject, but Mr. Rogoff made it better. He is an amazing teacher."

Dawson said he is excited about leaving his small hometown for the Big Apple.

"I want to see big buildings," he said. "I have always lived in a small town, and I've never been to big cities. It's going to be something we will all remember for the rest of our lives."

Rogoff, 24, doesn't look much older than the students he teaches.

He is the only algebra teacher at Clarendon High School, leading both algebra I and II courses, and he is quick to shy away from taking credit for his students' success.

Rogoff said he encourages students daily by telling them that they can succeed, no matter the adversities they face.

“Just getting to speak to them about their lives, getting to hear about the ways they have grown up, I realize how much I took for granted,” said Rogoff, a Philadelphia native. “So many of them have challenges because some of the basic needs aren’t being met at home.”

Across the state, other school districts are also seeing gains in math, a subject on which educators have put extra focus.

But Clarendon sits in one of the poorest areas of the Arkansas Delta in Monroe County, which has suffered significant population loss over the past decade. According to the 2010 Census, the county lost the most population in the state over the past 10 years. Monroe County’s population declined 20.5 percent, from 10,254 residents in 2000 to 8,149 in 2010.

Clarendon’s population dropped heavily too, from 1,960 in 2000 to 1,664 in 2010, a 15.1 percent decline, according to the 2010 Census.

And college isn’t everyone’s destination.

The Arkansas Department of Higher Education issued a report, released last year, on public high school students from the state going to in-state colleges and universities. The report showed that for Monroe County, 42 students of 83 high school graduates in the 2010-2011 school year headed to a public college or university in Arkansas that fall - a first-time freshman rate of 50.6 percent.

The county has two public school districts, Clarendon and Brinkley.

The Higher Education Department report shows Brinkley High had 39 graduates in the 2010-2011 school year and 22 first-time college freshmen at a state public college or university in the fall - a 56.4 percent college-going rate.

Clarendon High had 44 graduates; 20 were first-time college freshmen - an in-state college-going rate of 45.5 percent.

The overall in-state collegegoing rate was 51.7 percent, the report said.

The national college-going rate was 68.2 percent and is based on a survey that includes private-school data. Arkansas’ report only includes publicschool data.

For visitors crossing into Clarendon on the old iron bridge, which stretches across the White River like a silvery, latticed arm, the Monroe County Courthouse catches the eye as the most prominent architectural feature of downtown.

The Romanesque-style structure, with its tall, thin clock steeple and multiple red roof caps, is also the city’s tallest building.

For many children in this Delta town, the 19th-century building is the grandest they’ve ever seen.

Sophomore Tyesha Steward, who will be going to New York with Dawson and other classmates, said she has never left Arkansas before.

Her eyes widened when she talked about the possibility of seeing such sites as the memorial to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Statue of Liberty.

“We are all just so excited,” Steward said. “We never knew we would get a chance to do something like this. Mr. Rogoff is by far one of the best teachers that I have had in a long time. He has encouraged us to do our best, and look at what we are doing now.”

The students still need to raise about \$13,000 to reach their goal of \$40,000 for the trip, Rogoff said. They are in the middle of a letter-writing campaign, asking for donations and telling their story of success.

Rogoff said the trip will be “a great opportunity for them to be able to see such a great place and experience everything it has to offer.”

He said that when he approached them about the idea of taking a trip, all agreed on the destination: the Big Apple.

Rogoff lived in New York for a year after college and plans to introduce the students to the city’s vast cultural attractions. In addition, tours of New York and Columbia universities are scheduled.

He said it’s important that his students know they can have a bright future in education.

“These kids obviously have the motivation to succeed,” Rogoff said. “They just need that extra push, and with the right amount of hard work, they can do whatever they set their minds to. This is certainly a proud moment for me and for the school.”

Ten students receive Thea scholarships (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The Thea Foundation has announced the winners of its 2013 Performing Arts Scholarship Competition, which took place Feb. 2 at the Argenta Community Theater in North Little Rock.

A total of 120 high school seniors representing 56 Arkansas schools auditioned by vocal, dance or theater performance for 10 scholarships totaling \$25,000.

The winners of Thea’s 2013 Performing Arts Scholarship Competition are:

Micaleigh Coleman, Alma High, First Place, \$4,000.

Michael Gann, Benton County School of the Arts, Second Place, \$3,500.

Tiana Haynes, West Memphis High, Third Place, \$3,000.

Joseph Brodnax, White Hall High, Fourth Place, \$2,500.

Tressa Tiner, Little Rock Parkview Magnet High School, Fifth Place, \$2,000.

Emily Fenton, North Little Rock High, Sixth Place, \$2,000.

Grace Dostart, Parkview Magnet High School, Seventh Place, \$2,000.

K’Len Bunn, Lakeside High, Eighth Place, \$2,000.

Anna Grace Clark, North Little Rock High, Ninth Place, \$2,000.

Luke Wallace, North Little Rock High, Tenth Place, \$2,000.

Honorable mention honors went to:

Luke Conner, Wynne High.

Qassye Hall, Dardanelle High.

Bailey Moses, Cabot High.

Hannah Shellito, Jacksonville High.

Alice Spann, North Little Rock High.

2 state teens earn Prudential honor (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Tiffany Easter of Sheridan and Blake Abston of Little Rock have been named Arkansas' 2013 Youth Volunteers of the Year by The Prudential Spirit of Community, a nationwide awards program.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 18th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Easter, 18, a senior who was nominated by Sheridan High School, raised money to purchase the freedom of approximately 60 women and children being held in "Trokosi" slavery in Ghana, West Africa, by selling specially inscribed bracelets and sunglasses, according to the awards program.

Easter became aware of the plight of the women through the Every Child Ministries that raises money to buy the women and their children from the local priests who hold them in bondage and physically abuse them. The women are sold by their families to the priests in compensation for a crime committed by a family member.

Motivated by the plight of the women, Easter and her sister ordered inscribed silicone bracelets and sunglasses and sold them at churches and at church camps. For every \$200 raised, one slave and all of her children are released.

Blake, 13, was nominated for the volunteer award by Little Rock's Pulaski Heights Middle School, where he is an eighth-grader.

He led a project to build two raised garden beds at an emergency shelter, plant fruits and vegetables in the beds and teach young residents of the shelter how to take care of them. Blake developed the garden plan for a Boy Scout project at Methodist Family Health, which houses a temporary emergency shelter for children and teens who don't have parents or a safe place to live.

Blake raised the money, bought supplies and recruited Scouts, friends and shelter residents to build and plant the beds.

As state honorees, Easter and Blake each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from the other states and the District of Columbia for four days of national recognition events. During the trip, 10 students will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2013.

Four additional Arkansas student volunteers were finalists for the state awards. The four are:

Tatiana Borecky, 17, of Fairfield Bay, a senior at Shirley High School, who volunteers at the Fairfield Bay Animal Shelter, as well as tutors younger students and assists in planning Red Ribbon Week anti-drug use activities.

Katherine Boyd, 17, a senior at Huntsville High School, who has helped to raise \$7,800 as the team captain for an American Cancer Society Relay for Life team.

Robert Callahan, 16, of Rosie, a sophomore at Southside High School, helped open a food pantry at his school together with members of the Southside 4-H Club, of which Robert is currently president. The club raised \$14,000 to start the pantry that now serves 300 people a month as well as provides food for schoolchildren to take home over the weekends.

Hailey Flatte, 18, of Fort Smith, a senior at Greenwood High School, created and carried out the "Distracted Driving Awareness Project" at her school to raise awareness about how 77 teenagers die each week in distracted driving accidents.