

Program shows kids fun side of book learning

Lunch can wait as students get captivated by reading materials

This story marks another installment of *Today's Lesson*, which chronicles classroom activities in Farmington Public Schools.

By TOM SMITH
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The tray contained macaroni and cheese, a cup of chocolate milk, cookies and chips. First graders usually devour such lunches with hungry passion. But not little Jaclyn Christopher.

Jaclyn, a pupil at Hillside Elementary School, virtually ignored her meal because she had some reading to do.

Jaclyn and her mentor, Patricia Hopkins of the Farmington Hills-based Gale Group, had a whole stack of books to pore through during their 30-minute Power Lunch Program session at the Hillside media center.

"What books did you get?" Jaclyn asked Hopkins, who has been meeting every week with the student for a few months (as have all the mentor-mentee teams).

The youngster smiled as she noticed one of her favorite books in the pile, *Elmer*, a story about a multi-colored elephant.

Jaclyn and Patricia laughed together as the student read and pointed at the pictures. The adult mentor tried to help her pupil work on sounding out words. In the Power Lunch Program, adults and students each get to read a book to their partner.

"These are two words that they just squished together," said Hopkins, referring to the word *almost*.

Patchwork was another word worth discussing.

"Do you know what that means?" Hopkins asked. "It means they saw it all together ... yep, just like a patchwork quilt."

Jaclyn couldn't help but comment about the colorful variety she saw on the page. "There sure are a lot of colors, like all the colors of the rainbow."

Over in the corner of the media center was another mentor-pupil team, first grader Monica Kakoz and Gale employ-



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BRENNER

Read on: Diane Sawinski reads with student Monica Kakoz.

ee Diane Sawinski. Monica follows the lines of text with her finger.

"Think about what's happening in the story," Sawinski told Monica. "Can you start out the beginning of the sentence again, one more time?"

Book buddies

They also weren't too worried about lunch. And they still had a second book to get through, *The Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss.

After the session, Hopkins said she signed up for the Power Lunch Program because she used to teach first grade "and I just miss being with little ones." Her time with Jaclyn has been special, too. "She's just easy to be with, she's a real sweetheart."

Hopkins also stressed the importance of encouraging a love of reading at a young age. Apparently, her little team-mate already possesses that trait. "She loves books, and that's all important."

Another team is composed of Hillside fourth grade student Joe Evangelista and Peggy Ashlevitz, of the Gale Group. Joe doesn't like children's books, but does enjoy turning the pages of *Time*

magazine.

"Joe is an excellent reader, he just needed an adult friend," said Ashlevitz, among 24 mentors who rush over to Hillside for the Gale Group's 12 Mile-Drake office for the eat-and-read sessions. "... These are adult books (such as *The Greatest Generation Speaks*) and he's only in the fourth grade."

Hillside Principal Janice Colliton said staff members recommended youngsters who might enjoy teaming up with a mentor.

"We're trying to develop positive role models, develop positive relationships," said Colliton, adding that the program could be expanded in 2000-01 so that students could take advantage of Power Lunches all year long.

The Power Lunch Program was developed in 1991 by New York businessman Arthur Tannenbaum, and is now used throughout the United States.

Mentors also gain from the sessions a sense of giving back to the community, for example.

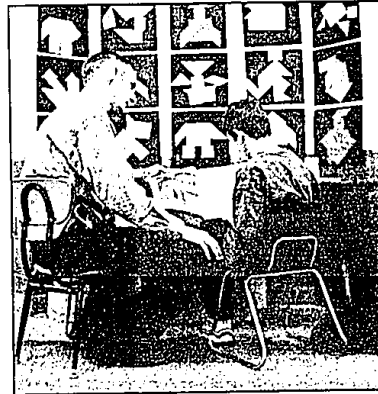
"I'm proud of my company for caring about the community," Ashlevitz said. "I want to support that."



Devouring books: Patricia Hopkins and Jaclyn Christopher eat lunch and read a book.

■ 'We're trying to develop positive role models, develop positive relationships.'

—Janice Colliton
Hillside Elementary principal



Mentoring: Gale Group employee Jason Abate mentors Anthony Christopher.

Rackowski pushes for new judge for Farmington's 47th District Court

By MIKE MALOTT
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It now appears almost certain a new judge will be added to the bench of the 62-1 District Court in Novi, according to Judge Dennis Powers. Exactly how and where that judgeship will be created is what's still in question.

The state House of Representatives' Committee on Family and Civil Law voted 7-0 to create the new judicial post effective in January of 2003.

If the bill survives the scrutiny of the full House and Senate, it would be the first new judgeship created in Michigan in over a decade.

Only 62nd District Court has received recommendation from the Michigan Court Administrator's Office for the addition of a new seat on the bench, based on the fact it has the heaviest caseload per judge in the state. State Court Administrator John Ferry has stopped short of recommending 35th District Court, covering Plymouth, Canton and Northville, and 47th District Court, covering Farmington and Farmington Hills, for new judges, although he admitted to the committee those courts are overloaded as well and could use the help.

Senate Bill 769, sponsored by Sen. Loren Bennett, R-Canton, originally proposed the elimination of one judgeship at 27th District Court, covering the area of Wyandotte and Riverview, and adding one in Plymouth's 35th District Court. Senate Bill 257, by Sen. Bill Bullard, R-Highland, would have merged 62-1 District Court with the 62nd District Court's second division in Clarkston.

Before passing the legislation on, committee members did quite a bit of rewrite. They dropped wording of the merger replacing it with the verbiage of a Rep. Nancy Cassin, R-Nowi, proposal, House Bill 4207, to simply add a judge to 62-1 District Court. The committee also dropped the additional judgeship in Canton.

They tacked on an amendment by Rep. Andrew Rackowski, R-Farmington Hills, to essentially reserve the next judgeship for 47th District Court. Rackowski presented the amendment to add that seat the next time a n o t h e r judgeship in the state can be eliminated.

Although approved by the overall committee, the amendment received strong criticism from Democrats, who

accused Rackowski of attempting to circumvent the process the state has been using for the siting of new judges.

Powers said he hopes wording to merge the first and second divisions of the court can be revived, and he has been promised an amendment will be offered on the floor of the House to make that change.

Merging the courts would allow judges to decide where cases belong. Communities that lie between the two courthouses — Highland Township, White Lake Township and Rose Township — could be switched between the courts as populations shift and caseloads require. Decisions about the jurisdictional boundaries between the two courthouses, Powers said, could be made in a single meeting among the judges. As it stands, with the two courts separate, adjustments to the boundaries take one to two years.

"It would give us the flexibility we need. As units of government get smaller, they get more expensive," Powers said after the committee hearing. "We want to achieve some economies of scale and save some money. This would allow us to make those changes as the economies of scale dictate."

Fears that, if the Clarkston court is combined with Novi's court, the smaller northern com-

munities would be unable to elect a judge to the bench because of the number of voters in Novi, are unjustified, Powers said.

"Novi cannot elect a judge alone," he said. "The numbers just aren't there."

He noted that he won election to that bench despite the fact he hailed from Highland Township, and he carried 78 percent of the vote.

The merger all depends on Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who has expressed opposition to the idea in the past. Powers said the judges of the 62-1 district court-house plan to pitch the idea to him again shortly to get him to reconsider. Powers argues the best solution, based on the courtroom space available, would be to locate the judge in Clarkston in a merged district court. The merger, as well as the new judgeship, will also have to be approved by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners before it can be filled by election in the fall of 2002.

Powers further said he had no objection to Rackowski's amendment. He said the wording reserving a future judgeship for Farmington is "meaningless" because the question would have to come back before the state Legislature before it could be added. And the Legislature would likely seek another recommendation from the State Court Administrator's Office.

"It just muddles the waters a bit," Powers said.

Democrats were downright angry about it. "Siting new judgeships is a touchy issue," Rep. Laura Baird, D-Okemos, said. "and I detect a little politics going on here." She labeled Rackowski's amendment partisan "shenanigans." Although Rackowski assured Democrats no additional judge would be added until one can be found which could be eliminated, Baird said he was "branking down the process" the state is using for siting new judges, and could soon "make a mess" of Michigan's courts.

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