

insideDPS

A NEWSLETTER FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS / OCTOBER 1, 2002 / ISSUE NO. 3

READ

one million words
EVERY YEAR

The Million Words Campaign is part of the district's overall literacy program and sets the expectation that each DPS student will read one million words this school year.

To help students achieve the million-word goal, DPS is working with parents, the Denver Public Library, community groups and the faith community. All schools are working on the goal with special bulletin boards, events and activities.

"The Million Words campaign is part of our overall literacy program and helps us meet our goals of high expectations for students, parents, teachers, principals, staff and community; improved performance of all students; and closing the gap between better and poorer performing students," said Superintendent Wartgow.



Superintendent Jerry Wartgow and Denver Classroom Teachers Association President Becky Wissink don Dr. Seuss hats to promote the Million Words Campaign during a news conference at Harrington Elementary School. Every DPS student will read one million words this year.

Area Superintendent Carla Santorno and Harrington Principal Sally Edwards talked about the efforts schools are making to support the campaign. At Harrington, a huge poster greets visitors, and a gumball is put in a huge plastic tube every time students read 1.5 million words collectively. The school goal is 550 million words.

Families are encouraged to obtain library cards, and school and public libraries are working together on special events. Every DPS student will receive a Million Word Campaign bookmark, and posters are being distributed to all schools and around the community.

Why one million words? Research indicates that a good way to increase student achievement is by encouraging reading. A 1994 study by R.C. Rogers showed that frequent readers showed higher reading achievement. A 1999 study (John Guthrie, Allan Wigfield, Jamie Metsala and Kathleen Cox) showed that reading volume predicted reading comprehension achievement.

A 1988 study of out-of-school reading by R. Anderson, P. Wilson and L. Fielding showed that fifth grade students who achieved in the 90th percentile read 40 minutes a day and 2.3 million words a year. Students at the 50th percentile read 12 minutes or 600,000 words; and students at the 10th percentile, two minutes and 50,000 words.

Reading one million words means 25 chapter books per year for a fifth grader or about four books per day for a first grader. ■

Chief Academic Officer Sally Mentor Hay talked about how important reading is in developing comprehension and vocabulary. "We learn most of the words we know from reading," Mentor Hay said.

This year, DPS elementary students are reading and writing for three hours every day in school, and it's important that they continue their reading practice at home. "We have a strong classroom component, and we need the help of parents. A little bit of time reading each day will do it," Mentor Hay said.

"DPS teachers are 100 percent supportive of the Million Words campaign, and we'll do everything we can," said Becky Wissink, president of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. At the press conference, Wissink presented Wartgow with a Dr. Seuss hat, noting that schools will participate in the March 3 Read Across America, which celebrates Dr. Seuss' birthday, and community members will be invited to read at school.

A Day In The Life...



...Of Debra Rodriguez, Facility Manager George Washington High

Traveling down the squeaky clean corridors of George Washington High School with Facility Manager Debra Rodriguez is like walking with a bouncing ball. Rodriguez, always the perfectionist, is persistently bending to pick up the stray candy wrapper or piece of notebook paper from the well-polished floor. She's also eyeing the walls for tape, gum or out-of-date posters. "See that one. The event happens tomorrow. I'll take the poster down on Thursday," she tells InsideDPS.

Not only is she scrutinizing the floors and walls, but Rodriguez is also looking up at the lights, making sure no bulbs have gone out since her last inspection. She wears a tape recorder attached to the loop of her jeans so she can record problems she sees around the building. But that's not all she's wearing. Her waistband also holds her district identification tag, three massive key rings, a cell phone, the school radio, a district pager and a Leatherman Wave all-purpose tool. She also carries a putty knife to remove gum or tape from floors and walls.

Rodriguez' school day starts at 6 a.m. with paperwork and a check of the time cards. She'll then whip through the 330,000-square-foot building to make sure everything is ready for the students. She presses the record button on her small tape recorder to document a locker scratch or a broken light. When she gets back to the office, she'll transcribe her tape, noting where there are problems and what looks particularly good. Since each of her 18 staff members is assigned to a specific area of the building, she can work with the custodian in charge if there's a problem area.

As she walks through the three-story building, a teacher stops her to ask for help in laying out wrestling mats that have to cure to eliminate the

what's inside

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September 11 remembered 11

by tiffany cottle, intern, public information office

While people across the nation reflected on the events of September 11, schools throughout Denver also planned events to remember and honor the victims.

Among the many events was one at Horace Mann Middle School, where students and staff honored the heroes of 9/11 during an assembly by recognizing local heroes from District One Police Department and Fire Station #7.



Colfax Elementary School students wave homemade paper flags during a moving ceremony at the school on the Sept. 11 anniversary.

"The purpose of the assembly is to recognize and symbolically thank those service providers who were on the front line and risked their lives," said Principal James Trevino. The students and staff presented awards to District One Police Officer Raymond Gallardo, Lieutenant Bill Nagel and Officer Brian Galleger. They also

See **SEPTEMBER 11** on page 4

On June 24-July 3 choir director Priscilla Shaw and students from the George Washington High School choir program traveled to Beijing, China. While there, they performed a concert at the Great Wall and participated with seven other choirs in a concert at the Forbidden City Concert Hall. Dr. William Hall of Chapman University directed spirituals by Moses Hogan and Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" in a benefit concert to aid disabled children in China. The choir of 200 voices was accompanied by the Beijing Symphonic Orchestra and was the historic first performance of "Carmina Burana" in Beijing. Of course, GWHS students took in all the sights of Beijing, including the Great Wall, Hutong City, Silk Alley, the Forbidden City and several temples. In China: George Washington High School choir students who made the trip included (left to right, standing) Cassie Echelard, Forrest Schumaker, Allison Gordon, Desiree Myers and (in front) Chelsea Draper.



Board resolution on Amendment 31 urges voters to reject

The Board of Education in September probed the pros and cons of the ballot question known as Amendment 31 and agreed unanimously to urge voters to reject the proposal.

Amendment 31 is a proposed change to the Colorado Constitution that would mandate that English language learners attend regular classrooms after one year of intensive instruction conducted in English.

The proposed Amendment "ignores the individual learning needs of children; conflicts with Denver's federal court-ordered program; severely limits parental choice; changes current constitutional provisions calling for local control of education; and will eliminate current and future dual language programs," said the resolution approved by the Board.

Approval of the resolution followed a special meeting when the Board quizzed proponents and opponents of the proposed Amendment and heard from nearly 50 community members.

When the time came to vote on the resolution, Board members' comments were uniformly critical of the proposed Amendment's potential harm.

Among the comments were those from Board member Michelle Moss who asked Colorado voters to read the whole proposal before deciding. "I can tell you that my greatest concern in this election is that this initiative would be passed by the citizens of Colorado without fully understanding what it does," she said.

The proposal, added Moss, "tricks us into thinking that one year (of immersion) is enough... and we know that isn't true... What I think we don't want is a one-size fits all program that may or may not serve the needs of our children."

For a complete text of the resolution, see the September 6 edition of Board News. ■

character education: a critical piece of learning

While maintaining its focus on academic achievement, DPS is committed to creating responsible, caring citizens. That's why the district is expanding its character education initiative and has established a new Office of Educating for Character.

The new office, under the leadership of Director Charles Elbot, is funded through a \$308,000, three-year grant from the Rose Community Foundation. "The goal of the grant is to develop profound and sustainable school-based approaches to educating students in character, K-12," Elbot said. "It is our hope that schools will learn and borrow from each other, transforming and blending the pieces to create an approach that is deeply rooted in the life of each school community."

"Educating for character isn't a program, but a fundamental part of the educational process. It's about empowering students with goodness as well as knowledge," Elbot said. He believes character education can and should be embedded throughout the school day and curriculum.

"In addition to being supportive of Denver's groundbreaking pay-for-performance pilot, we are interested in helping schools become communities of caring, justice and democracy. So we are thrilled to help DPS do some thinking about strong pedagogy in this area," said Phil Conring, Senior Program Officer for the Rose Community Foundation.

Elbot will work closely with schools that wish to establish character education. The first step is gathering a core group of

constituents to act as a steering committee and to engage the school community in the project. School surveys and interviews may then be conducted to reflect on school culture. The next step is to develop a mission statement. Staff development and parent education are other key components of a successful character education initiative.

Schools will consider the following steps as they undertake character education:

1. Transform existing classroom rules and guiding beliefs into a schoolwide code of conduct to reflect the school's criteria for good character.
2. Use the existing curriculum as a vehicle to explore ethical issues. Literature, history and science can be used to gain perspectives on character.
3. Encourage all adults in the building to serve as powerful role models to the students.
4. Use "think-alouds," shared thinking and other techniques to teach critical thinking skills. During "think-alouds," students and staff talk about their thought processes in making a decision. With teacher guidance, students reflect on their thinking so they can make conscious choices.
5. Enhance experiences of qualities such as poise and perseverance through physical activities, including sports, drama, physical education and service learning.
6. Develop significant markers throughout K-12 years. Markers are special events that students will remember as highlights of their education. Events might include overnight trips, student presentations or other rites of passage. Schools interested in participating in this new phase of the character education initiative should contact Charles Elbot at 303-764-3368. ■

Castro Elementary School principal Frank Gonzales displays his patriotic flair during an all-school assembly to kick-off the Kids Voting Denver campaign. The Sept. 17 event included students reading their thoughts about democracy and the importance of voting. Also, a mayoral proclamation was read declaring the day as Kids Voting Day in Denver because "the future effectiveness of all levels of government depends upon citizen involvement and participation."



APPOINTMENTS

Ronald A. Amer: Library Technician I, Education
 Teresa R. Barber: Secretary I, Moore
 Ruth M. Brassell: Library Technician I, Education
 Mary C. Chisel: Office Support II, Administration
 Marsha M. Fushini: Secretary II, Grant
 Connie A. Gonzales: Secretary I, Grant
 Marlene Gould: Bookkeeper I, Kepner
 Kristin M. Graf: Secretary I, George Washington
 Siobhan Haskell: Office Support I, Hill
 Kathryn King: Secretary I, Eagleton
 Mary K. Martinez: Bookkeeper I, Morey
 Nicole C. McCoy: Secretary I, Slavens
 Luz M. Melillo: Secretary II, Cheltenham
 Diane M. Nordquist: Secretary II, Administration
 Nissa S. Oldefest: Secretary I, Fallis
 Lucia Saenz: Secretary I, Whiteman
 Veronica Saldana: Secretary I, Noel
 Patricia A Walsh: Library Technician I, Education
 Tonya Whittaker: Secretary I, Abraham Lincoln
 Timothy J. Huffman: Shipping & Receiving Clerk, Operations
 Etoi M. Montgomery: Shipping & Receiving Clerk, Operations
 Starded J. Avila: Custodian Assistant III, George Washington
 Mark L. Bodiford: Custodial Helper, George Washington
 Margarita Gonzalez: Custodial Helper, Emily Griffith Opportunity School
 Nancy A. Leapley: Custodial Helper, Thomas Jefferson
 Carlos R. Lopez: Custodial Helper, Emily Griffith Opportunity School
 David J. Medina: Custodial Helper, Emily Griffith Opportunity School
 Ray A Quintana: Custodian Assistant II, Knapp
 Cecilia Rosas: Custodial Helper, Marrama
 Berenice Saldido: Custodial Helper, Emily Griffith Opportunity School

Anthony E. Sifuentes: Custodial Helper, Emily Griffith Opportunity School
 Andrew Sterner: Custodian Assistant I, Holm
 Becky J. Wickham: Custodial Helper, George Washington
 Katherine J. Nobles: Library Tech I, Amesse
 Jason Anders: SFPC Liaison Specialist, Barrett
 Vivian G. Avilia: Human Resource Specialist, Human Resources
 Kent B. Graziano: Enter Data Warehouse Supervisor, Administration
 Fernando Perez: SFPC Liaison Specialist, Education
 Stephanie D. Silva: Human Resource Specialist, Human Resources
 Denise Vonderharr: Employment Coordinator, Operations
 Jan Burke: Supervisor Elementary Education/ Head Start, Education
 Carlos Vigil Jr.: Food Vending Services Supervisor, Operations

CHANGE IN ASSIGNMENT

Carol J. Babst: Secretary II, Moore
 Dora L. Bruce: Secretary II, Education
 Toni Jo A. Cothran: Secretary II, Montclair
 Ellene Hernandez: Bookkeeper I, Randolph
 Jeanette Steggs: Secretary II, Marrama
 Nancy E. Swanson: Secretary I, Lowry
 Teresa J. Torres: Secretary II, Education
 Richard Archuletta: Facility Manager III, Randolph
 Eliza M. Armijo: Executive Secretary I, Human Resources
 Jonel T. Filipek: Executive Secretary II, Education
 Ariel Pitt: Facility Manager I, Eagleton
 Linda M. Vigil: Facility Manager II, Castro
 Deborah Y. Harris: Food Service Manager II, Lowry
 Gladys Hernandez: Food Service Manager II, Archuleta
 Tina M. Walker: Food Service Manager II, Randolph
 Mykale W. Lofton: Custodian Assistant III, Randolph

Gloria Rodriguez: Custodian Assistant II, Cheltenham
 Ann E. Vigil: Custodian Assistant II, Castro
 Talonna Arakawa: Cntl. ELA Compl. Specialist, Education
 Lyntyna C. Bedford: Help Desk Specialist I, Operations
 Mary A. Corro: Area ELA Compl. Specialist, Education
 Lydia Hoague: Cntl. ELA Compl. Specialist, Education
 Nicole R. Johnson: PC App Specialist III, Administration
 Vickie Mestas: Tech Services Supervisor, Administration
 Amy Milberg: Cntl. ELA Compl. Specialist, Education
 Beverly J. Rosenow: Lead Payroll Technician, Administration
 Maria A Solano: Area Specialist, Education
 George M. Stevenson: Central Curric. Specialist, Education
 Thomas C. Trotman: School To Career Specialist, Emily Griffith Opportunity School

REAPPOINTMENTS

Pamela M. Adams: Secretary I, Education
 Patricia F. Bringenberg: Secretary I, Samuels
 Margaret L. Curry: Secretary I, Martin Luther King Jr.
 Audrey M. Duran: Secretary I, Smedley
 Ida B. Dallas: Office Support I, Randolph
 Byron Ruff: Vehicle Service Tech I, Operations

RETIREMENT

Alvino D. Vigil: Facility Manager, Ashley
 Lois A. Titus: Food Service Manager, Knapp
 Elsie D. Vigil: Food Service Manager, Cole
 Eloy F. Atencio: Painter, Operations
 Courtney D. Miller: Welder, Operations
 James M. White: Tech Services, Administration
 Elizabeth J. Verdine: Bus Driver, Operations

DEATH

Julia M. Gallegos: Food Service Manager, Godsman

presented awards to Fire Station #7 Assistant Denver Fire Chief Keith Mehrens, who was unable to attend the assembly. Both Officer Gallardo and Fire Chief Galleger are alumni of Horace Mann Middle School. Gallardo received an official Horace Mann Tiger mascot in addition to his plaque.

To close the assembly, students observed a moment of silence. Music teacher Sue Clayton led the school in singing America the Beautiful; and eighth-grader Eivi Colmenero recited a moving poem by Susan Polis Schutz. "We must understand the differences among us and celebrate the sameness," Colmenero said.

Students and staff at Colfax Elementary School also chose to honor local heroes during a memorial ceremony to lower the flag to half-staff. Principal Mary E. Romero and the staff of Colfax thought it would be nice to recognize the veterans who work in the school or have family who work at the school. Students and staff – dressed in red, white and blue – lined up around the flagpole on the front lawn for a moment of silence and reflection.

Students and staff then recognized veterans Frances Jimenez, school nurse; Fernando Reiz, custodial helper; Carl Almqvist, father of second grade teacher Catherine England; and Tony Garcia, husband of Assistant Principal Beatrice Garcia, all representing the U.S. Army. Fifth grade teacher Joe Svoboda represented the U.S. Air Force, and physical education teacher Tom Barela represented the U.S. Navy.

Near the end of the ceremony, a group of students raised handmade flags and waved them over their heads as they cheered. Throughout the rest of the day, classes took turns waving flags at passersby along Colfax Avenue. ■

ECE Early Childhood Program Granted Accreditation

The Children's Place Child Care Center at the Fred N. Thomas Career Education Center of Denver Public Schools was recently granted accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This is the seventh year of accreditation for The Children's Place under the direction of Ramona Hall.

Only 7 percent of early childhood programs nationwide, or approximately 8,000 programs, have received this recognition. Accreditation is a rigorous, voluntary process by which early childhood programs demonstrate that they meet national standards of excellence. Approximately 15,000 programs are seeking accreditation. NAEYC focuses on all aspects of a child's experience. Children in NAEYC-accredited programs benefit from high quality language and social skills instruction.

The Children's Place Child Care Center is located at 2650 Eliot St. It serves 20 children from three to five years old and is open to the public. For information, contact Ramona Hall, 303-964-3013. ■

Expect Success Project Helps Improve School Climate

"In the past, I used to make fun of people who were different from me. But now I take no part in making fun of them because I know and understand that they are people who have feelings. I also try to stop other people from teasing the people who are different."

KEPNER MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

Kepner Middle School is one of five Denver Public Schools now taking part in the Expect Success Project with Assets for Colorado Youth to integrate "developmental assets" as a strategy for improving student achievement. The schools are working to build stronger relationships between teachers and parents to support students.

Developmental assets, identified by the Search Institute, are the building blocks of healthy development that allow young people to thrive. The assets include parent support, achievement motivation and a caring school climate.

Asset teams are also active in four other Expect Success schools: Castro and Smedley elementary schools, Horace Mann Middle School and Abraham Lincoln High School.

Kepner Principal Deborah Lanman learned about an elective course on the developmental assets for middle school students and recruited drama teacher Jenny Goldberg to start a similar elective, the Ambassadors Class, in each grade at Kepner.

Goldberg presented the developmental assets to her classes in a way that allowed students to implement assets in their own lives. The other teachers saw evidence of positive changes in the students' behavior and attitude toward school.

Following staff training on the assets, Kepner teachers and staff formed an Asset Team to create a vision for improving school climate and parent engagement. The team coordinated parent trainings and meetings last school year and made plans for the 2002-03 academic year. "It reminds me of why I wanted to be a teacher in the first place," one Kepner teacher said.

Kepner has a great deal of momentum moving into 2002-03 with Expect Success. The combination of a supportive principal, an Asset Team that is taking on a leadership role, student support through the Ambassadors Class and parent-friendly office staff all contribute to a sense of energy and commitment.

"Infusing asset building into Kepner is about trying to create a positive environment that allows all of us to be our best, not create more for us to do. It's a way of life," said Goldberg.

Superintendent Jerry Wartgow said, "Parent support of the student's education is a critical component to student achievement. Parent engagement in schools leads to higher grades and test scores, better school attendance and improved student attitudes and behaviors. The Expect Success Project is working to build stronger relationships between teachers and parents, and uses the assets to define the roles that both have in supporting the young person."

For information on the Expect Success Project or how to become a participating school, call 303-832-1587, or visit the Assets for Colorado Youth Web site at: www.buildassets.org. ■

pilot visits remington elementary

Pilot Donna Miller visited students at Remington Elementary School, who presented her with Colorado flags to take to New York. Miller was one of two pilots chosen to represent the state of Colorado in Flight Across America, a nationwide event to honor the memory of those killed in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Miller, a furloughed American Airlines pilot, talked to the students about aviation as well as the Flight Across America program. She encouraged them to study their math because she uses math every day as a pilot. A busload of Remington students went to Centennial Airport on Saturday, Aug. 24 to see Miller off, and classes kept in touch with her throughout her journey across the nation. Miller returned to Remington on Sept. 19 to tell the students about her trip.

On Sept. 8, 2002 Miller and the other pilots flew their aircraft, with state flag aboard, in a parade of planes down the Hudson River, past ground zero and the Statue of Liberty. The flags were then transferred to a helicopter and flown to the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum, moored on the west shore of Manhattan, where they were presented to the people of New York in a moving ceremony. ■



American Airlines pilot Donna Miller visits with a student at Remington Elementary School. Miller came to school to talk about her participation in Flight Across America, where pilots from around the country flew to New York bringing state flags to commemorate the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 attack.

Ruth Hilliard

Sixth Grade Teacher, Henry Middle School

Years with DPS: 37



Greatest or Latest Accomplishment: Receiving the Most Distinguished Teacher Award in 2000. Raising four daughters successfully and teaching for 37 years.

The Most Challenging Part About My Job: Trying to meet children where they are and make learning interesting for them.

The Most Rewarding Part About My Job: Seeing the light bulbs go off in a child's head and seeing children get excited about learning something they never knew before.

I've also worked: My whole career has been in DPS. I taught at a number of elementary schools before coming to Henry in 1988 with the sixth graders. When I first started teaching, I was making \$5,400 a year, so I also worked part-time at the May Company and Denver Dry to make ends meet.

When I'm not working I am usually: Reading or working on my property. I live on three acres in the foothills.

Hometown: Born in Peninsula, Ohio and attended Ashland University. I attended school where K-12 was in one building, and my mother was the sixth grade teacher.

Favorite restaurant: Bandido's Mexican Restaurant on Kipling near Belleview

Favorite book: "The Poisonwood Bible" by Barbara Kingsolver.

Family: Husband, Al, and four grown daughters.

Philosophy for life: Do the best you can do every day.

Volunteer activities: Volunteered as a parent at Conifer High School when the school first opened.

Final words: I love Denver schools. I think teachers should continue to demand the respect they deserve. Because none of us has tomorrow guaranteed to us, we should always treat each other well and never leave a person with bad feelings. I believe in caring and honesty. People say, "If you want to know the truth, ask Ruth."



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odor and prepare them for student use after reconditioning. Another teacher needs some furniture moved. Then there's an electrical problem – some of the outlets on the third floor aren't working.

Next comes a radio call from one of the custodians; there's a burning smell coming from the second floor faculty lounge. A quick trip to the lounge indicates that one of the light ballasts is going out. Rodriguez turns off the lights and instructs the custodian to return after they've cooled to locate the problem.

While walking through the gym, Rodriguez notices stains from a beverage spill and calls on the radio to custodian Lisa Alvira for a cleanup. "There's a spill on the south gym floor. Come up at the end of the period because there are quite a few kids in the gym right now," Rodriguez instructs her custodian.

Unsolicited, Alvira sings the praises of her supervisor. "We love Debra. She's strong-willed, determined, dedicated and oh-so-fair," Alvira said. She came with Rodriguez from Morey Middle School and her duties include pool maintenance -- checking the temperature, Ph level and sanitizing chemicals three times each day -- as well as cleaning a section of the building.

Passing the office, Rodriguez stops to get her mail. It's 8 a.m. and already there are three Requisitions for Custodial Service filed by teachers. One reports a broken lock on a classroom door; another informs of non-working restroom sinks; and the third requests rearrangement of furniture for an upcoming conference.

While cleaning the 98 classrooms and .8 miles of hallways takes priority, Rodriguez and her staff are expected to do minor maintenance in the building -- everything from repairing broken glass to changing heating filters to fixing plumbing. They are also responsible for the outdoor areas of the 33-acre site, including watering, some mowing, trimming and weed removal.

If one of her staff members is out for the day, Rodriguez fills in where needed, cleaning hallways, bathrooms or grounds. With vacations, sick days and employee turnover, she's often under-staffed, and turnover is her biggest challenge.

"I'm constantly training new staff. People learn the job, then get promoted and go to another school. I want to make sure every employee at GW knows the building well," she said. Keeping the 42-year-old school in good working order takes constant vigilance.

Rodriguez is supposed to leave school at 2:30 p.m., but she has a hard time getting away. Before she heads for her home in Thornton, she meets with the night crew to provide instructions that will ensure the building is ready for students and staff in the morning. Night helpers are on duty until 11 p.m., and Rodriguez is on call if they need her.

Rodriguez started in the district at Smiley, and Jay Richards, the facility manager there, encouraged her to take classes and advance her career. She took his advice and enrolled in all the classes the district offers. Rapidly moving up the ladder, she became facility manager at GW in May 2001. Between the classes and the tutelage of the service technicians, Rodriguez has acquired the skills and knowledge to manage one of Denver's largest schools.

"I'm a person with high expectations, and our principal has high standards as well," said Rodriguez, with justifiable pride in the spic-and-span appearance of George Washington High.

BY MARILYN SALTZMAN, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of stories profiling the wide variety of people and talents who work together 'insideDPS.'