



NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Great things are happening at New Haven Public Schools

July 1, 2019 through July15, 2019

Please see articles below

We believe that all kids can learn, achieve, and rise to a bright future. Our purpose is to provide an outstanding education that extends beyond graduation and prepares our students to be the next generation of leaders, innovators and problem-solvers.

- **New Haven Public Schools begins Summer with a variety of choices for students of all ages**
- **ARTE Inc. Sponsored Trip to the University of Puerto Rico - June 2019**
- **Metropolitan Business Academy Teacher, Ms. Lapan receives Grant focusing on Independent Reading**
- **Rain Barrels Get A Fishy Flourish**
- **NHPS Students Show True Colors at NHFPL**
- **Cross Student Wins National History Prize**
- **Experimental School Rediscovered The Magic**

New Haven Public Schools begin summer with a variety of program choices for students of all ages

New Haven Public Schools are busy this summer. The summer season began with many opportunities for students of all ages. This year we are excited to offer a diverse variety of enrichment opportunities, ranging from our LitCamp program, which sparks student engagement with multiple genres, to our partnership with the Cub Scouts that will offer students outdoor activities such as conservation projects and multiple science experiments.

The programs are designed to foster the social emotional needs of our students; to which many of them also incorporate athletics, arts and music.

The District is proud to announce that new to our summer programs this year is the *Superintendent's Summer Reading Challenge* that includes the following components:

The District is securing over 40,000 books to distribute free to our students to encourage them to continue to learn and grow academically throughout the summer.

The *Superintendent's Summer Reading Challenge* will become an annual citywide program encouraging students to read books during the summer months.

The *Superintendent's Summer Reading Challenge* will also become a citywide competition for schools, based on student population and grade level.

This year, the schools with the highest percentage of participating enrollment and the highest number of books read by participating students at the end of the summer will be recognized for their accomplishments.

Please visit nhps.net

ARTE, Inc. Sponsored Trip to University of Puerto Rico - June 2019



Arte Inc. sponsored its third educational and cultural trip to The University of Puerto Rico. Students from various schools in New Haven, who graduated from ARTE's SLATE program qualified to participate. These students graduated SLATE in 8th grade, and are now entering their junior year.

SLATE is ARTE's very successful life and social skills program with the slogan "Every kid starts with a clean slate!" Four cohorts have graduated from the program, which is FREE and open to any NHPS student. SLATE is unique in that life-long mentorship and guidance is provided to graduates.

During the trip, students are housed at the University of Puerto Rico. Daily excursions incorporate lesson plans which included: history, culture, ecology, marine science, art, and language. Highlights included: Leatherback Turtle Lecture at nest site, Bomba Dancing, Music Presentation & Instruments, museum visit,

Rainforest Water Falls with River Swim, Tour of Old San Juan, Loiza Cultural Center & Caves, Canoeing in Bioluminescent Bay, and a Para-Sailing demonstration. All classes took place in natural settings and environments. Students also volunteered and cleaned up Ocean Park Beach.

Chaperones included: Mia Duff, Asst. Principal Career High School / Cpt. Anthony Duff, NHPD / Anthony Reid, teacher, Lincoln Bassett / Daniel Diaz, NHPS and David Greco, ARTE Inc.

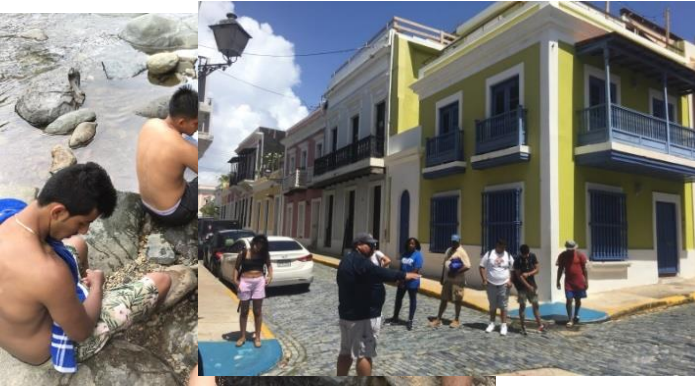


Canoeing in Fajardo at Bioluminescent Bay demonstration on headwraps worn by African slaves, native Taino painting and Spanish influences in the Puerto Rican culture to learn importance of reefs and marine life and their significance.



Learning about the importance of marine science / Rain Forest and Caves Systems





Metropolitan Academy Teacher, Ms. La Pan receives grant focusing on Independent Reading.



2019 PRESS RELEASE

The Book Love Foundation awarded **66** classroom library grants totaling \$130,000 to teachers in the United States and Canada this year. Since 2013, the Book Love Foundation has given away \$500,000 in grants to more than 200 teachers from 41 states and five provinces. Each one works to create a lasting love of reading in all students. We continue to receive generous support from BookSource and Heinemann, as well as hundreds of individual donors to support this work.

The Book Love Foundation reviewed (and were inspired and moved by) four hundred applications this year. Our 2019 grant winners are extraordinary teachers who work at local, state, and national levels to inspire their colleagues. If you have any doubt about engaging today's busy students in reading, these teachers will convince you it is not about time, and not about technology, but it *is* about putting the best books you can into students' hands and then giving them time to read them. Every one of these teachers is on the path to creating a future generation of readers.

Danielle La Pan teaches 9th grade ELA at Metropolitan Business Academy, a public magnet school in New Haven, CT. Danielle has established a well-developed program of choice reading. She has about 300 books in her classroom library, with about 70% of high interest and is committed to continue building her library through several organizations. Her students volunteer to pre-read new books and give book talks.

Danielle is leading her colleagues, so that all students in the school can make choices about their reading. She has created a book-study program for the teaching staff where they jointly choose a professional book to read each fall and discuss together.

Rain Barrels Get A Fishy Flourish

[Lucy Gellman](#) | July 10th, 2019

[Education & Youth](#) | [Environment](#) | [Fair Haven](#) | [Arts & Culture](#) | [Visual Arts](#)



David Wiel, Jr. grew up in New Haven, but didn't think about waterway conservation as a kid. Now, he said, he thinks of it as a priority and is excited to get involved with a public art approach.

Lucy Gellman Photos.

David Wiel didn't grow up thinking about the rivers that ran through his city. Now, he's trying to spread information about how to protect and preserve them—with a paintbrush as his primary teaching tool.

Weil, a rising senior at [the Sound School](#), is one of four students apprentices with [Lots Of Fish](#), an eco-art program run by Art25 New Haven with support from the Quinnipiac RiverFund and the city's [Youth @ Work program](#). Through the end of the month, students from the Sound School will be painting and installing rain barrels in Fair Haven, in an effort to collect and repurpose stormwater. In addition, they are priming the wall at 12 East Grand Ave. for a mural that they hope to paint later this summer.

Three of the students are compensated through Youth @ Work, and one is working as a volunteer to log community service hours. They are working under [public artist](#), educator and [Art25 Co-Founder](#) Joann Moran, who is running the program with guest speakers from [Save The Sound](#) and the [New Haven Bioregional Group](#), as well as local artist Juan Negrón. Artist [Barbara Pochan](#), the other half of Art25, has been working with apprentices on the social media component of their program.

“It’s still a little rough around the edges, but we’re getting it,” Moran said Wednesday, as the group entered its fifth day together. “The idea was green jobs for youth.”



Carlos Lebron and Alanis Delect.

Wednesday morning, the group's work found them outside [Anastasio's Boat House Cafe](#) on Front Street, installing a rain barrel decorated with painted-on wooden planks, a submarine-like bolted door and school of bright, happy fish. As they moved the barrel beneath the cafe's gutter, New Havener [Frank Panzarella](#) talked them through installing the apparatus, whipping out a hacksaw and power drill to install a drain hose.

Once installed, rain barrels collect stormwater runoff through their connection to a building’s gutter system. In New Haven, they are supplied for free through the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), which gets them as discarded syrup drums from Coca-Cola (sometimes they arrive still smelling of citric and phosphoric acid, Panzarella said).

In the past two years, the New Haven Bioregional Group has installed close to 150 throughout the city, according to member Aaron Goode. It’s one of the ways the city is acclimating to [heavy, short bursts of rain due to climate change](#).



“I think it’s a great idea,” said Lisa Fitch, who owns the Quinnipiac River Marina on which the group is placing several barrels. “It helps the environment, and they’re beautiful to look at. And it helps me—there are flowers I can’t get to with a hose.”

The barrels arrive to the group as bright white drums, which is where Lots Of Fish comes in. Each barrel—Moran is hoping to install 10 this month, and then more on demand—is painted

with a marine landscape, bands of color arranged into blue skies, expanses of clear water, bobbing sailboats and birds overhead. Some sport fish, swimming by. Others have clouds that look like spun sugar, hanging low over boats that cruise by.

Spread out on a paint-splattered sheet in the cafe’s parking lot, 17-year-old Alanis Declet put the finishing touches on a pink-and-white sailboat, on a barrel that has yet to be installed. A rising senior at the Sound School, Declet initially heard about the project from Moran, who saw that she had signed up with Youth @ Work and thought she might be a good fit.



“I don’t want to be that parent who is like ‘yeah, we had this thing when I was little and it’s not here anymore.’”

At school, Declet is involved in the school’s [aquaculture program](#) and does [seahorse husbandry](#), overseeing a growing herd that the school keeps in a saltwater tank. On a recent trip to check on the fish, she saw that their number had grown to almost 400, meaning that they are “super happy” with their salty environment, and breed constantly. It’s the same kind of clean, safe marine environment she wants to preserve for generations to come.

“It’s really important to me,” she said. “I don’t want to be that parent who is like ‘yeah, we had this thing when I was little and it’s not here anymore.’”

That’s also true for 16-year-old Carlos Lebron, who will start his senior year in the fall. Raised on New Haven’s East Shore, Lebron said that he didn’t grow up thinking a lot about the city’s waterways. That started to change during his time at the Sound School, where part of the curriculum is taking care of the stretch of the Long Island Sound by which the school sits.



Carlos Lebron, pictured with Frank Panzarella. Lots of Fish members Amaiya Rivera and David Wiel are in the background.

Then last month, he was working as a fellow for the [International Festival of Arts & Ideas](#), and saw a banner project with huge, bright fish unfolding on the New Haven Green. He went over to take a look. Moran was running the project. When he mentioned to her that his school requires 200 hours of community service before graduation, she suggested he join.

“I think it’s important because it’s more than just one river,” he said. “If you don’t take care of one place, you don’t take care of any of them. We created this problem; we can create a solution.”

In part, students are learning from Negron, a muralist and graffiti artist who came to New Haven 36 years ago when his family moved from Puerto Rico. As both a kid growing up in Fair Haven and now an adult, he said, “I’ve done everything on this river.”

As a kid, that included fishing and swimming. He recalled seeing the rivers “at their worst” in the 1980s, when it wasn’t uncommon for plastic bags, syringes and manmade debris to float by, wash up on the shore close to where he was sitting. He was part of cleanup efforts then. He still is now, too.



Now 41, he spends time passing that knowledge to his three sons, all of whom are under 10 years old. He still goes crabbing on the Quinnipiac and Mill River, with a wide net that “keeps it more

interesting” than the cages some fishers use. He said he loves the water, because it makes him feel connected to the landscape around him.

In late June, he saw Lots Of Fish members cleaning the lot at 12 East Grand Ave., where they plan to paint the mural. He jumped on board as a volunteer.

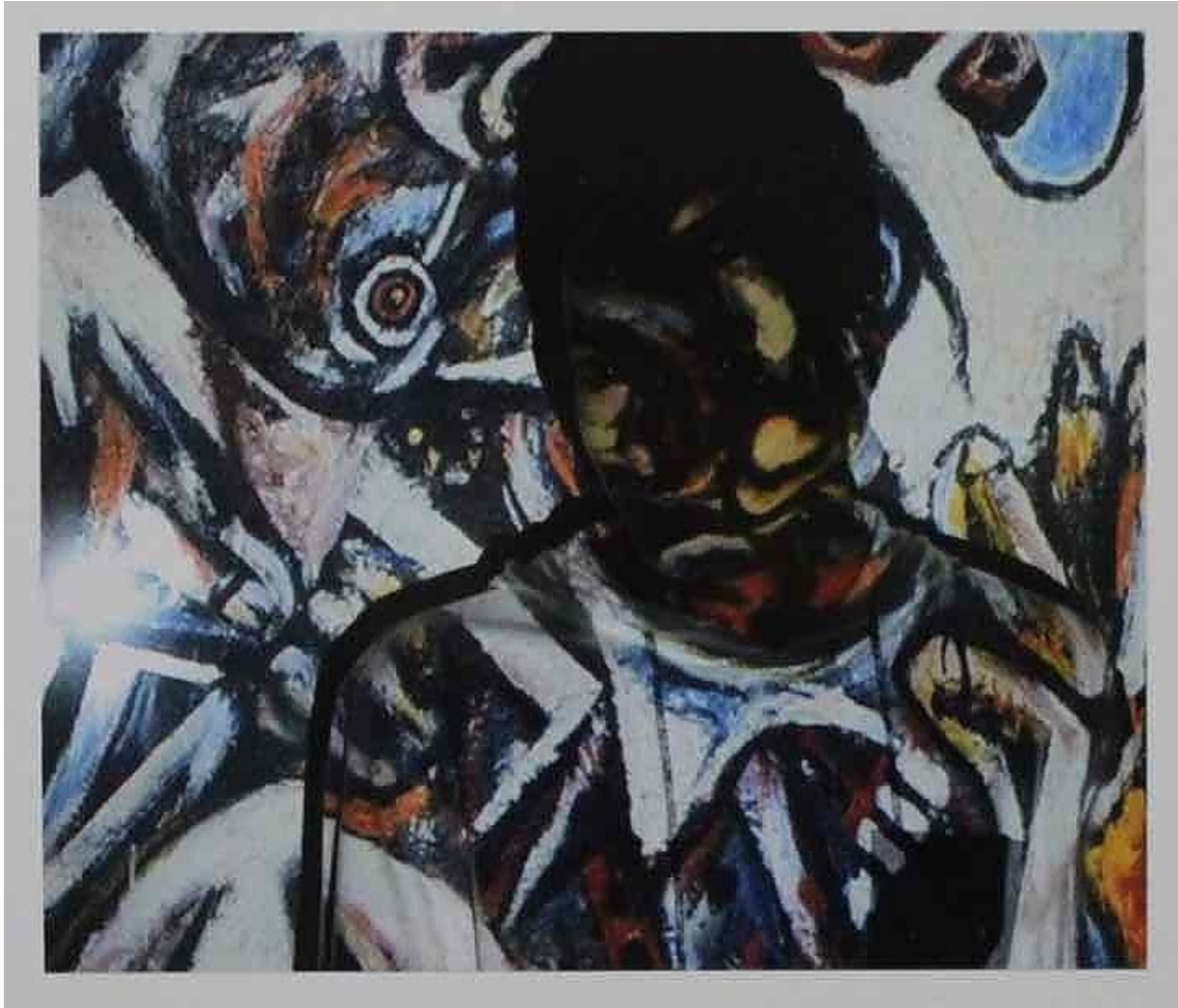
“Our waterways are beautiful man,” he said. “Protecting them ... it’s a big deal. I’m proud to sit by the waterfront, and to teach our youth.”

Joann Moran is still looking for volunteers for the project. To get in touch with her, contact art25ct@gmail.com or call 203.298.2628.

https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/ives_gallery_nhps_students/

NHPS Students Show True Colors At NHFPL

by Brian Slattery | Apr 11, 2019 12:36 pm



Evelyn Novoa, *I'm Not There*.

She says she's not there, but it's a trick. She's there, somewhere in the splash of color. There's the outline of a shoulder, the side of a head, and at last, an eye. Then the title of the piece — *I'm Not There* — takes on another meaning. Maybe you've found the artist, Evelyn Novoa, but she's still a couple steps ahead of you.

Novoa is an 11th-grader at Wilbur Cross High School and one of many artists celebrated in "Creative Minds: The Work of New Haven Youth," running now at the Ives Gallery in the main branch of the New Haven Free Public Library on Elm Street. The exhibit, which runs through

May 10, offers a sense of the creativity pouring out of New Haven's public schools these days, and at times, a glimpse into what's on the students' minds.



Habin Lee

Habin Lee, a 10th-grader at Wilbur Cross, has a few pieces in the exhibit, from realistic portraiture to distortions of reality to pure abstractions like the piece above. Given Lee's age, productivity, and wide-ranging eye, it seems clear that we'll see more from this artist in years to come.



Michelle Serrano

Meanwhile, Michelle Serrano, a 9th-grader at Co-op High, allows us to journey into the petals of a flower. The way she renders them, she conveys how the petals feel as much as how they look.



Grace Adolphe

Grace Adolphe, a 12th-grader at Co-op High, offers an image that feels like a moment out of a story, a chapter out of a book. Even if the reality is that the picture was taken as part of a daily routine, Adolphe finds the drama in the everyday. It could be a still from a thriller. The people in the car might be in the middle of a chase. Even if it's also possible that the driver is parallel parking, and just doesn't want to hit the car behind him.



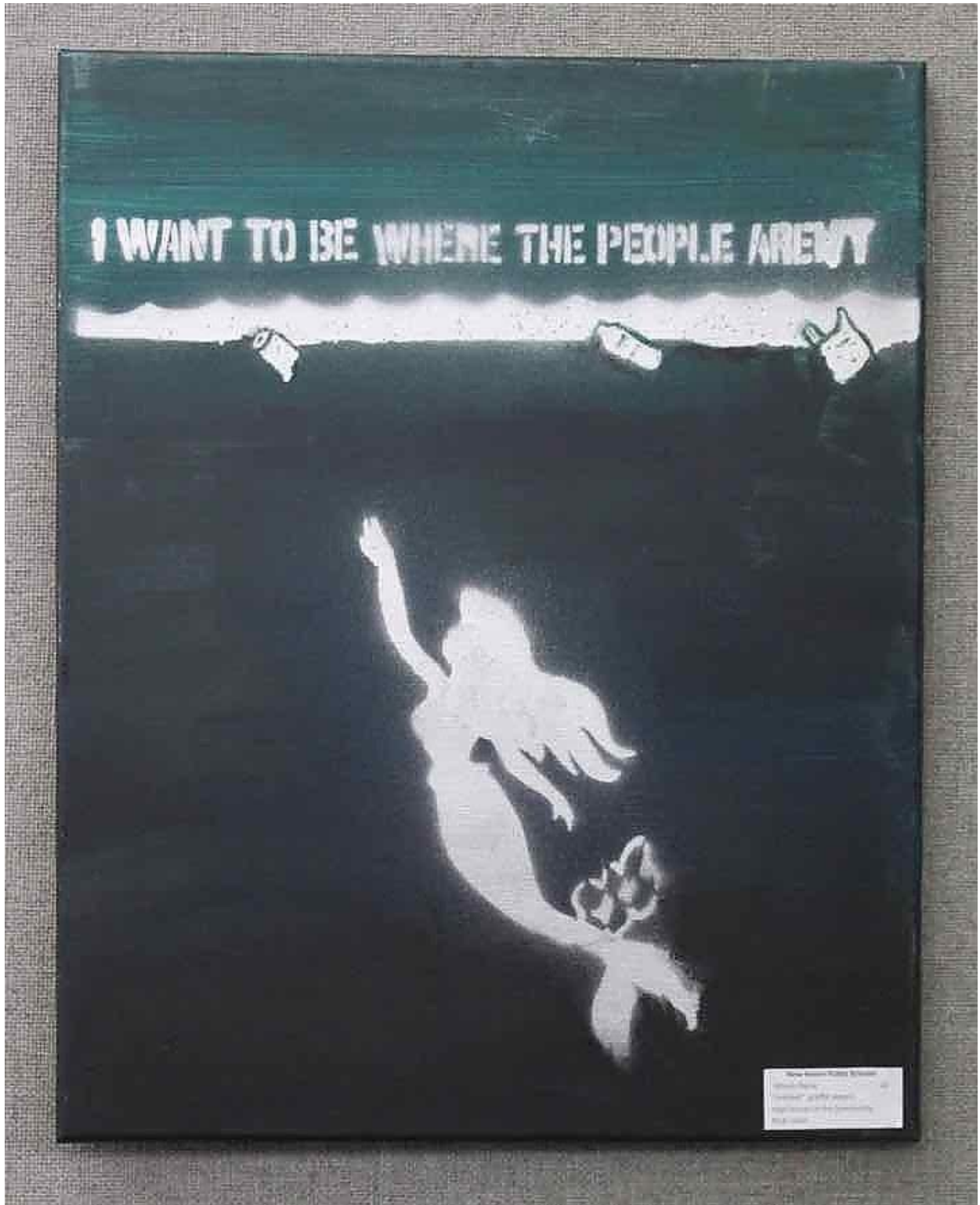
Maria Castro

Maria Castro" /&amp;gt;Maria Castro, a 12th-grader at Wilbur Cross, makes her art by pyrography, burning images into wood, putting out designs that partake of the bold, curling lines of tattoos or graffiti.



Zuhah Syed, *Chains of Faith*.

Zuhah Syed, an 11th-grader at High School in the Community, also leans into the spray-painted stencils of graffiti art to make a bold point about the ways religious beliefs can confine and harm us as much as connect and heal us, if we're not careful.



Allison Diana, *Untitled*.

And Allison Diana, a 12th-grader at High School in the Community, uses humor with an edge to make a deep point about our treatment of the oceans. If mermaids were to exist, we'd never meet one; after seeing what we've done to the planet, maybe they'd just want nothing to do with us.

Sent from my iPhone

[https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/margo_pedersen_cross /](https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/margo_pedersen_cross/)

Cross Student Wins National History Prize

by Christopher Peak | Jun 24, 2019 12:09 pm



Connecticut Public Radio Contributed Photo

A Wilbur Cross High School sophomore who revived a forgotten story about the destruction of a racially diverse community off the coast of Maine has won a top national prize for her historical research.

That student, Margo Pedersen, took home a gold medal last week after competing in National History Day at the University of Maryland, where she submitted a paper she had written for teacher Al Meadows's AP U.S. History class.

At a time when [social studies teachers have been targeted in the latest round of budget cuts](#), district officials said her research is an example of the type of curiosity that they're hoping to encourage in all their classes.



History teacher Al Meadows with student Margo Pedersen.

In [her 2,500-word paper](#) — the bibliography runs as long as the text itself — Pedersen wrote about the forgotten history of Malaga Island, part of an archipelago near Portland, Maine, where the state had evicted a racially diverse community nearly a century ago.

In her research, Pedersen read about the diverse community of African-American, Native and Portuguese people who coexisted on the island. Mainlanders didn't pay them much mind until the early 1900s.

After the local wood shipbuilding industry started losing out to railroads and steamships, the neighboring town tried to reinvent itself as a vacation spot. But its residents worried about that

“incongruous scene” of “southern negro blood ... on a spot of natural beauty” visible from the steamship routes, as one reporter put it in 1905.

At the same time, the junk science of eugenics was taking hold. Its racist theories held that societies could breed out “undesirable traits,” such as ignorance, criminality and sexual immorality,” as Pedersen wrote.

Soon, reporters from across the East Coast were visiting Malaga, describing its residents’ “ignorance, shiftlessness, filth and heathenism,” as one Boston headline put it.

In 1911, Maine’s governor said, “I think the best plan would be to burn down the shacks with all their filth.” A state agent evicted all the residents the following year, committing eight people to the Maine School for the Feebleminded.

All that remained were an empty schoolhouse and a cemetery, which even that the state exhumed and dumped into unmarked graves, to restore Malaga to “undisturbed pristinity.”

“The state and the press branded this cruel tragedy a triumph and their interpretation was accepted for almost 70 years,” Pedersen wrote. “What happened on Malaga Island demonstrates the power of the state — influenced by racism and pseudoscientific eugenic theory and fueled by sensationalistic journalism and economic factors — to define a human tragedy as a societal triumph.”

Sandra Clark, the district’s social studies supervisor, said that the award-winning research papers are standout examples of what students throughout New Haven get from “inquiry-based learning,” the model where students are encouraged to follow their own curiosities as they learn how to look for answers.

“Guided by classroom teachers and librarians, many of our students actively participate in the annual yearlong program leading to the development of inquiry-based projects,” Clark wrote in an email. “Our students gain so much throughout the experience, from research to presentation skills through the authentic application of their learning showcases publicly.”

That’s what happened for Pedersen. She first came across the history of Malaga Island after reading “The Rattled Bones,” a young-adult novel where the main character sees ghostly apparitions from the island’s history. “It haunted me,” Pedersen said.

Pedersen said that the key is for students to know that they have to be “really fascinated by what they’re choosing to pursue and really want to learn about it.” She said she’d seen that happen with her classmates’ projects on the Young Lords or the Freedom Summer, for instance.

As a prize, Pedersen will be granted a scholarship to the 2020 National History Academy, a five-week summer program on early American history, plus a \$1,000 grant from the National Endowment from the Humanities. She said she’s planning to donate some of that money to the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Students for Educational Justice.



Connecticut students competing at the National History Day.

During the state competition last month, 16 other New Haven students also won recognition:

- *Outstanding Entry Related to World War II: Charles Wortman, Worthington Hooker School, for “Cracking the Enigma: How Alan Turing and Other Cryptoanalysts Changed the Course of the Second World War”*

- *Outstanding Entry in World History, Junior Prize: Marlon Coon and Young In Kim, Worthington Hooker School, for “The March 1st Movement: The Cries for Korean Independence”*
- *Outstanding Entry Related to Social Justice, Junior Prize: Sophia Arnaout and Athena Brown, Worthington Hooker School, for “Doctors Without Borders: A Journey to Save Lives”*
- *Outstanding Entry in Maritime History, Junior Prize: Askari Hussain, Worthington Hooker School: “Operation Dynamo: The Tragic Success of One of the Largest Evacuations in Military History”*
- *Bruce Frazier Prize for Outstanding Senior Paper and First Place Senior Paper: Margo Pedersen, Wilbur Cross High School, for “Malaga Island: How the State of Maine Devastated a Resilient Island Community in the Name of the Greater Good”*
- *Outstanding Entry in Maritime History, Senior Prize: Maria Lopez and Brandon Inahuazo, Wilbur Cross High School, for “The Voyage of Christopher Columbus”*
- *Outstanding Entry in Aerospace or Technological History: Federico Lora and Jason Lampo, Wilbur Cross High School: “The Manhattan Project: A Triumph for Science but a Tragedy for History”*
- *Outstanding Entry Related to Connecticut Law, Senior Prize: Hallie Hushion, Johanyx Rodriguez, Shakshi Patel and Jeinylee Salame, High School in the Community: “Griswold v. Connecticut: A Woman’s Day in Court”*
- *Outstanding Entry in Women’s History, Senior Prize: Eloise Benoit and Sadie Turner, Wilbur Cross High School: “Angela Davis: Trial of 1972”*

Experimental School Rediscovered The Magic

by CHRISTOPHER PEAK | Jul 11, 2019 11:47 am
[\(9\) Comments](#) | [Post a Comment](#) | [E-mail the Author](#)
Posted to: [Schools](#), [Wooster Square](#)



CHRISTOPHER PEAK PHOTO: HSC graduates await their diplomas.

To the sounds of “Pomp and Circumstance,” 50 members of High School in the Community’s senior class marched in to the middle of Wooster Square. Wearing caps and gowns of turquoise and white, they took their seats in the middle of the park for their graduation ceremony.

That scene would have been hard to imagine just five years ago, when almost as many students were dropping out as were making it through.

This graduating class, bigger than any before, arrived to celebrate a moment that had been four years in the making.

For years, High School in the Community had the lowest graduation rate in the district. In 2014, an HSC student’s chances of finishing in four years were no better than a coin toss, at just 45.8 percent.

Now the school has pulled off a feat that years of extra funding and staff shakeups hadn't been able to produce. When HSC's most recent class walked up to the stage in Wooster Square Park to receive its diplomas, close to 92 percent of its members were there.

History of Experimentation



Building Leader Matt Brown.

Always experimenting, HSC was founded in the early 1970s as a teacher-led school. Starting in an auto garage, it was meant to be a “school without walls,” where students would take their learning out into the Elm City.

Teachers went by their first names. They picked their own leader. Class periods were longer, and disciplines commingled. Civic engagement was always emphasized.

“Since its inception, it has been completely racially integrated, democratically organized and educationally progressive,” [a reporter from The New York Times wrote in 1996](#). “What other schools would consider revolutionary, High School in the Community has had for decades.” Over the last decade, something went awry. Test scores bottomed out. Dropout rates climbed. In 2012, the state named the school a “turnaround.” That meant it needed extra help to turn around from a challenging place.

[The district handed the school over to the teachers union](#) as part of its “portfolio model,” where [schools are treated like a diverse array of stocks](#), doubling down on high-performers and selling off low-performers.

Across the country, unions had generally opposed those kinds of takeover, which were often done by [charter management organizations](#). New Haven's teachers union defied the trend,

deciding to take part. Building leaders would not have to report to Central Office for staffing and budget decisions. Those decisions would all be approved by the teacher's union president, vice-president and secretary.

Three years in, though, not much changed, at least by the state's metrics. In 2015, [then-Superintendent Garth Harries decided to boot the entire leadership team](#). The union said it would open up the search for an outside principal. Faculty and students worried that would mark the end of HSC's experiment.

Dave Cicarella, the teacher's union president, said that if HSC hadn't started improving right away, the district might've shut it down altogether.

"We had been the perfect candidate for a school closing. We had declining enrollment, downward test scores and an aging building," he recalled. "They had been working hard, but none of the tangible markers were improving. They were either flat-lining or going down, even with all the Commissioner's Network money."

Cicarella eventually brought in Matt Brown, a founding principal at a Brooklyn high school that focused on "expeditionary" field trips, as the building leader, along with Cari Strand as curriculum leader and Michelle Cabaldon as school culture leader.

They narrowed the focus to a law and social justice theme, and they changed the evaluation of student work from standard report-card grades to mastery-based portfolios. They allowed students to set their own pace for learning, while doing their best to keep it within four years.

Brown said that the school's improvements really began when it shifted focus from the "thousand different things" HSC had been asked to do to earn the state's turnaround dollars to the actions that they thought should define the school.

For HSC's new leadership, that meant elevating student voice and easing the ninth-grade transition.

"When we started to get successful as a school was when we leaned into what we were good at," Strand said. "We were really great at listening to kids and making them leaders who can strengthen the academic programming and the college-going culture. We were always good at tapping into what they want to be. Now we're applying that in project-based learning in the capstone, in our day-to-day work with them."

"Make-Or-Break" 9th Grade

Brown said a big part of HSC's success was rethinking how to ease into ninth grade, which experts describe as "the make-or-break year." The school did that largely by meeting up, as a staff, to talk about what kids need.

Students at HSC regularly hear administrators and teachers nudging them towards engagement opportunities. “They’re continuously told, ‘This is here for you,’ very directly and very specifically,” Strand said.

The advice isn’t just for students who are failing classes or skipping school. Brown set up an “MMMT Team” for “Moving the Mass in the Middle,” where the faculty “talk about those kids that don’t get talked about,” Strand said. “Someone seeks them out, takes that quiet kid and asks, ‘What do you want and how can we help you get it?’”

Doishellys Rodriguez, a senior who is heading to Southern Connecticut College next year to study nursing, was one of those students who felt adrift during her freshman year, even though she didn’t realize it much until later.

She had transferred between two schools, before she landed at HSC. During her junior year, as she assembled a portfolio of all the activities she’d been involved in, she said she realized just how different HSC had been.

She’d gone on a trip abroad to Nicaragua, interned at ‘R Kids Family Center, taken college-level classes at Gateway and voted in the Citywide Student Council.

“When I did my defense last year, I included a lot of the things that I’ve done at HSC. I realized I was never involved in anything at Career. I felt lost. I wanted to join things, but I didn’t know how,” she said. “At HSC, the teachers come up to you. They find you in the hallway. It made me feel important, like I belong in this school and I belong in this community. It made me feel like I can make a difference.”

Each year, [graduation rates climbed upward](#). Beginning in 2016, the rate made just a small jump of less than 5 points, but after that, it shot up by 18 points. According to the school’s numbers, which haven’t been vetted by the state yet, the rate went up by another 7 points last year and then 17 more points this year.

Looking Beyond Graduation

Along the way, HSC’s administrators don’t just want students to pass their classes. They’re trying to foster leadership that prepares students for life after graduation.

That’s what happened for Rocco DeMatteo. When he arrived as a freshman at HSC four years ago, DeMatteo always kept his hood up. He didn’t talk much, and he could fly into a rage. He said he didn’t trust the people around him, even as teachers kept trying to get him to open up.

“It was a big adjustment. You’re so used to, in middle school, walking in a straight line with your teaching, but now you’re walking to your own classes and joining in one big lunch wave. You’re so used to teachers telling you what to do, but now you get into a school where there’s student-based learning, where the teachers let you do what you have to do with all different ways to learn,” DeMatteo said. “You’re not a baby anymore.”

DeMatteo wondered whether he was cut out for school. He didn't see himself going to college. He planned instead to go to trade school, where he could learn to be an electrician, until he was old enough to apply for New Haven's police force.

But DeMatteo started to open up after performing in the school's jazz and rock bands, as his teachers helped him learn to play guitar.

Figuring he "might as well try to get as much done" as he could, he started doubling up on math and science classes.

"I don't like school. I just wanted it to be done. All your teachers talk about is college this and that. I always wanted to say, 'Stop talking about it: If I go, I go,'" DeMatteo said. "Senior year, I said I wasn't going to go. But as more and more time went on, I realized that while I need to be 21 in order to join the Police Academy, I could do four years of work at a bad job or I could get my degree in criminal justice."

Eventually DeMatteo was so far ahead that he didn't have any more math classes to take. So he started assistant teaching an Algebra II class. He said that the experience taught him what leadership means.

"If they're having a problem, I could say, 'I know how you're feeling. I'm still a teenager too.' I want them to know that there's somebody that's been through all this," DeMatteo said. "That's my main goal in being an officer to show that there's police you could trust. I use that as a guide to where I am now. If I find out a student is doing things in their life that they shouldn't be, I don't tell them, 'Don't do this or that,' but I give them pointers that I've done things in my past that I regret."

Trusting The Student Voice

Strand said that having upperclassmen share their academic experiences, as DeMatteo did, can often get through in a way that adults can't. For instance, "at an SAT prep class, a senior can say, 'This is something that matters,'" she said. "It helps students see why, as opposed to saying, 'This is a thing I have to do because the grownups told me.'"

She added the type of leadership role DeMatteo took on is exactly what they're trying to encourage, making students trust in their voice and abilities.

That happens throughout the school year.

"All the time, you're seeing at pep rallies and at lunches, there's always kids going up and speaking," said Emily Lucke, another senior. Especially compared to her small Catholic middle school, "it was a little weird seeing kids with a megaphone on stage. I thought, 'Oh my god, are you going to make me do that?' But you get to a point where you're so passionate about something that you kind of want to go up there and get people involved, see what they think or put yourself out there."

At the start of every week, students lead a “Motivation Monday” meant to inspire their classmates, whether it’s playing a set like DeMatteo did or practicing motivational speaking like Nia Jones did. Strand describes it as a “high-stakes experience in a low-stakes environment.”

Students also hold workshops, whether on boxing for anger management, guided meditation and voting in the American electoral system. During the school day, students go to clubs, and after, they join discussion groups, as Dante Wiggins and Matthew Perez did on the topic of masculinity.

“People will tell you that teenagers are lazy, but the feeling when they do something inspirational is the most powerful feeling that there is,” Strand said. “It does tend to bring it back to academics. I can’t say everyone is a student earning all 4’s,” the top mastery score, “but we saw a good drop in our chronic absenteeism, and I really think that’s because of the environment around them.

“They might think that school is hard, but it’s something that they like,” she added. “It’s a space where they feel seen or respected or heard, and that matters to them. There’s an adult who they know will miss them if they’re not here.”

Reaching A Milestone Together



HSC's Class of 2019 in Wooster Square Park.

On that mid-June evening, as the setting sun filtered a dappled light through Wooster Square's trees onto the soon-to-be graduates, just a few blocks from their Water Street school, Brown gave his last words to his first class. He said this was a special group.

"I am always so excited at our graduations, but this year I'm particularly so because of the respect and admiration I have for this class of students," Brown said. "We all started together here at HSC. Their beginning as a class marked my beginning as a staff member at HSC and therefore I feel, in some ways, as if we are both reaching a milestone together."

Brown recounted stories of students who he'd watch grow in ways that even some of their classmates hadn't seen.

Everyone had heard Rocco play riffs on the guitar. But who knew that he had also helped lead Algebra 2 classes as a teaching assistant "and learned how incredibly annoying it can be when you are trying to teach and kids take out their cell phones"? Brown said.

Everyone had known Nia as "the kindest, sweetest person." But who knew that she had such a "powerful, inspirational and confident voice" that had uplifted arriving freshmen adjusting to the rigors of high school?

Everyone had seen Dante and Matt as the "cool guys" on campus. But who knew they would found a group whose conversations would redefine "what it means to 'be a man'"?

"In the long road of life, we know it is the stories you tell yourselves about who you are and what you can do that make all the difference," Brown said. "Use the power of this evening, the magic of this moment, to look up at this stage, to look into these stands, and see the eyes of someone who knows some of your stories: of you being strong, being courageous, being tough, being loving, being wise, being someone the world needs."

"Know that when this day fades," Brown concluded, "we are always here for you: ready to help shape, support and edit the stories about yourselves that you have yet to write."



Cari Strand congratulates HSC's newest alums.

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