

# CityScapes

*An Update on Exciting Events, Programs, and Activities in New Jersey's Urban Public Schools*

A PUBLICATION OF THE URBAN SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENTS OF NEW JERSEY (USSNJ) JANUARY 11, 2010

## Building Bridges

### *The Neptune Township Regional Deaf Education Program Helps Auditorily Impaired (AI) Students Succeed in a Hearing World.*

Reena Banerjee is one remarkable young lady!

Reena is currently a sophomore at Neptune High School in Neptune, New Jersey. She is taking a full course load of classes, including Honors Algebra. Reena is a member of the school's varsity bowling team and plays soccer, as well. This spring, she is hoping to join the softball team. Reena is also involved in many other activities and recently served as one of the emcees for her school's Women in Politics and Public Service Forum. She is a well-spoken, confident, and personable student with lots of friends, a great sense of humor, and a maturity that belies her years. Reena has also set some pretty ambitious goals for herself. After completing college, she is determined to go on to medical school and ultimately become a pediatrician.

What makes Reena's achievements all the more noteworthy is that she has been hard-of-hearing since birth. In fact, Reena's mother and two sisters are also hard-of-hearing and her brother is deaf...the difference between the two classifications measured simply by the decibels of hearing loss.

Ask Reena how she has been able to assimilate so well into a community of students with normal hearing and she'll tell you in great detail about the Neptune Board of Education's Regional Deaf Education Program.

This award-winning program began in Neptune almost 40 years ago on a very small scale. At that time, a single class for students with hearing issues was pioneered in a room located in the basement of Summerfield Elementary School. Since then, Neptune's Regional Deaf Education Program has grown to include a pre-school and an elementary school program sited at the new Summerfield School facility and programs at both Neptune Middle School and Neptune High School. Today, auditorily impaired (AI) students from all over Monmouth, Ocean, Middlesex, Mercer, and Union counties travel to Neptune every day to take advantage of these classes.



*Neptune High School Principal, Dr. Richard Allen, with student, Reena Banerjee.*

Neptune's AI programs at all grade levels are centered on the concept of total communication. Total communication has teachers using the communication method or combination of methods most appropriate for a particular child at a particular stage of his/her development. Although Neptune's AI students are encouraged to use voice and sign as their primary means of interacting with others, such strategies as lip reading, writing, gestures, body language, and facial expressions are also used if they work best. It is believed that the total communication strategy creates the "least restrictive" learning environment for the deaf child since it is geared to each student's own unique abilities and developmental level.

Most of the students enrolled in Neptune's Regional Deaf Education Program enter the program at the age of three. Summerfield School, where the preschool and elementary programs are located, has six New Jersey-certified Teachers of the Deaf on staff, as well as a fulltime Educational Interpreter, an AI Inclusion Teacher, and two AI Speech Teachers. An audiologist also visits weekly.

According to Special Services Supervisor, Claudia C. Mooij, the program's youngest students start off their education receiving intensive help and support within self-contained classroom environments. All members of the AI team work collaboratively on the development of the youngsters' communication skills, as well as on their mastery of the traditional academic curriculum. Summerfield's principal, Dr. Arlene M. Rogo, and her staff go to great lengths to ensure that their AI students are included in every school event and participate in lunch, recess, and, to the greatest extent possible, in classes such as art and gym along with the rest of the school population.

As the AI youngsters become more and more adept at communication skills, they are often as-



*Neptune Special Services Supervisor, Claudia C. Mooij, and Speech Teacher, Julie Jackson, work with student, Robert O'Gorman, at Summerfield School.*

signed to regular classroom settings for specific subject areas. In-class support is provided by the Inclusion Teacher and/or the Educational Interpreter to ensure that the students are able to follow along with the lessons and that any questions that they may have are answered. The classes that each child will attend and the level of support or the accommodations that will be provided are based on each youngster's own Individual Education Program (IEP):

The kinds of assistance provided to Summerfield's AI students are truly state-of-the-art. Along with a host of targeted student and family support services, the school also uses personal FM systems that provide an optimum level of hearing for the AI students. The adults working with the AI students wear lapel microphones that pick up whatever they are saying. The AI students, in turn, wear small receivers that direct their teachers' voices right into their ears. If necessary, the FM systems can block out any extraneous classroom sounds to better support concentration and understanding. Neptune's Regional Deaf Education Program also makes use of closed captioning devices,



captioned films, specialized computer software, telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDD), and a visual fire alarm system.

All AI students are continually evaluated and teaching and socialization strategies are specifically aligned with individual needs. Speech therapy is an important part of the program and students are given every opportunity to master oral language and improve the clarity of their speech. Thanks in large part to the recently passed "Grace's Law," any New Jersey youngster who needs a hearing aid and whose family cannot afford one, is fitted for one for school use. As the use of Cochlear implants has become more and more commonplace, Neptune has increased the support it provides to students who have had this device implanted and must undergo intensive training in order to learn how to actually listen to and translate sound.

"We take great pride in the continuum of education options that we provide for our AI students from preschool right through high school," says Mrs. Mooij. "An AI student completing the Summerfield preschool and elementary programs moves seamlessly into our middle school and then our high school AI programs, both of which continue to provide individualized support and constant opportunities to assimilate to a greater and greater degree into the hearing world."

Neptune High School's AI Program was recently singled out by the New Jersey School Boards Association as the recipient of a 2009 School Leader Award. "Our AI Program here at Neptune High is really remarkable," says the school's principal, Dr. Richard Allen. "We have three Teachers of the Deaf, three Educational Interpret-

ers, and a Speech and Language Therapist who literally work day and night to ensure that our AI students are given every opportunity to participate in typical day-to-day high school activities. Not only are many of these students mainstreamed into regular classes; they are also involved in clubs, have been selected to play on various sports teams, and often assume leadership roles in many other special events."

Reena, for example, has been in the Neptune program since she was three years old. She is now mainstreamed into all core content classes at Neptune High School. Her language skills have developed to the point where she can even handle a general English class, which is not the norm for hard-of-hearing youngsters. "Each of our AI students' programs is geared to his/her unique needs and abilities," says Teacher of the Deaf, Jessica Swallow. "We have students who are mainstreamed, as Reena is, into the majority of their classes. We have other students who may participate in a general education mathematics class, but attend self-contained AI classes in English and social studies. Whatever a student's needs are, we meet them where they are and work to give them the highest level of communication independence possible."



*Summerfield staff members, Candy Alburtus, Susan McGann, and Linda Morales, pose with a group of their students.*



When AI students participate in general education classes, they are accompanied by a Teacher of the Deaf and an Educational Interpreter or, depending on the class involved, sometimes just an Educational Interpreter. The Educational Interpreter signs the lesson that the teacher is presenting and the Teacher of the Deaf is on hand to explain or clarify the information presented or to answer questions. Personal FM systems are also used at the high school and each student can control his/her own device to eliminate any distracting background noise. AI students also participate in a special study skills class each day that is designed to continually reinforce the skills that a hard-of-hearing or deaf student must have in order to handle not just the school program, but day-to-day life in a hearing society, as well.

The success that Neptune High School's AI students have experienced in both classroom and extracurricular activities is due in large part to the efforts made by the AI staff members who ensure that every possible door is open to their students. Currently, AI students are active in numerous clubs and activities and participate in up to nine varsity level sports. Many are members of academic honor societies, as well as the National Honor Society. Others have assumed leadership roles at special events such as Back-to-School Night and at the first Annual Deaf Education Culture and Leadership Summit, which was held at Neptune High School last year. Many AI students have gone on to earn not only college degrees, but master's degrees, as well, in various disciplines. Many have attended the prestigious National Technical Institute of the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York.

Whenever Reena or any AI student gets involved in a sport or other activity, an interpreter is always on hand to ensure that the student is able to participate to the fullest extent possible. According to Reena, it is because of the many opportunities that she has had to play on sports teams and to join various clubs that she has been able to make so many good friends. "You're so busy concentrating in class," says Reena, "that

you really don't have much time to just talk to other kids. But at soccer practice or when I'm working on an extracurricular project, other students get to know me as a real person and not just as a kid who has a hearing problem!"

Reena travels almost an hour each day to participate in Neptune's Regional Deaf Education Program...quite a long trip and one that many of her AI friends also undertake. Ask her if it's worth it, however, and she'll give you a resounding yes. According to Reena, one thing that the Neptune program has given her is confidence. She has no doubt that she can go as far as she wants to go in this world, and she's made some pretty remarkable strides already!

"The fact that, year after year, so many districts decide to entrust their deaf and hard-of-hearing students to our care is something in which we take a great deal of pride," says Mrs. Mooij. "Certainly a lot of the credit for our success has to go to our AI staff. They are among the most engaged, enthusiastic, and dedicated educators you will find anywhere. Thanks to their valuable input and innovative ideas, our program has been able to offer more and more to our students every year. The results speak for themselves!"

**For more information, please contact Claudia C. Mooij, Special Education Supervisor with the Neptune Township School District at: [ccmooij@neptune.k12.nj.us](mailto:ccmooij@neptune.k12.nj.us)**



# CityScapes

*A Publication of the Urban Schools Superintendents of New Jersey  
(USSNJ)*

920 West State Street,  
Trenton, New Jersey 08618

## OFFICERS

(2009-2010)

Dr. H. Victor Gilson, Superintendent, Bridgeton Public Schools, President

Dr. Clarence C. Hoover, Superintendent, East Orange Public Schools, Vice-President

Mrs. Geraldine Carroll, Superintendent, Lindenwold Public Schools, Treasurer

Mr. Richard Kaplan, Superintendent, New Brunswick Public Schools,  
NJASA Officer Liaison

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(2009-2010)

Dr. Frank Alvarez, Superintendent, Montclair Public Schools

Ms. Ethel Davion, Superintendent, Irvington Public Schools

Mr. Rodney Lofton, Superintendent, Trenton Public Schools

Tom Dunn, Jr., NJASA Director of Legislative and Urban Affairs

**[tdunn@njasa.net](mailto:tdunn@njasa.net)**

