

Professionals Enrich Classroom Lessons with Expertise

Schools Draw Historians, Scientists, Mathematicians, Artist

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A typical class of 4th or 5th graders might be skeptical about the potential for fun when a mathematician or historian pays a visit to class. But not at Stevens Elementary School in Seattle, where professionals-in-residence might ask students to test a homemade apple launcher to learn about trajectory and other algebra concepts, or sit on a desk and pretend to row the boat that carried George Washington across the Delaware River in 1776 to surprise British and Hessian troops.

The school has long tapped into a corps of local professionals in the arts, math, and history as a way of enriching the curriculum and engaging students in activities that bring the content to life.

Such arrangements are popular across the country as schools collaborate with community groups, businesses, universities, and individual professionals to expand on traditional curricular programs without sapping their limited budgets.

At Stevens and several other Seattle schools, historian-in-residence Mary Anne Christy works with classroom teachers to plan lessons and activities that give depth to a historical topic or era that students are studying.

Drawing on her theater background, Ms. Christy has helped students write plays and perform re-enactments in the subject, such as a dramatic recitation of the Declaration of Independence that accentuated such important words as "liberty" and "equality."

"My goal is to capture their imagination and make them love history," she said. "Teachers can't always go into that kind of depth, so the best situation is when I'm supporting what the teacher is doing in social studies, and I can come in and go deeper into one thing."

Ms. Christy conducts lessons at Stevens weekly throughout the school year. The school's vocal music teacher and artist-in-residence meet with each class weekly as well, while the mathematician-in-residence plans enrichment lessons for accelerated-math students. Stevens Elementary also offers after-school programs, like chess, knitting, and science, taught by experts from the community.

"As school budgets have gotten cut more and more, we've asked what do the children at our school need and how can the [PTA] help fill in holes or provide enrichment," said Wendy Saffel, a co-president of the Stevens PTA. "There's a big wonderful world out there with people with all sorts of specialties and information, and we have learned how to tap into those resources," she said.

The Stevens PTA provides more than \$30,000 for the year-round residencies in art, history, math, and vocal music. Article continues... Vol. 28, Issue 20, Page 8