



IN REACH, INC.
*helping young people
reach their potential*

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Community-based organizations, educators, county officials and others helping students pursue and achieve academic excellence in Prince George's County, Maryland

Welcome to the Inaugural Issue

Welcome to the first issue of **IN REACH's** electronic newsletter. I am elated to be able to present to you what has been a long time in the making.

For three very good reasons, *high school* has been chosen as the theme of this first issue.

1. Academically, we tend not to pay as much attention to high school students as we do students in primary education. I guess we rationalize that by now high school students should possess all of necessary basic skills they need to succeed and, if not, they should be able to figure out what to do about it. As a result of No Child Left Behind (see page 3 "Issues to Watch" for more info), we can no longer afford to think this way about older students.

2. Rarely do adult conversations about high school students welcome student voices about their own lives, struggles or experiences, let alone their thoughts about their education.

3. As we approach graduation, the fruits of our (parents, community, educators) labor can be appreciated or not. According to 2001 SAT information listed in the Maryland School Performance Report, students in Prince George's County are still scoring below the state average of 500 verbal and 508 in math, versus 448 and 438 respectively.

The little celebration of academics saddens me, but the lack of concern for and engagement with our older students on the brink of adulthood saddens me more. In every issue we will highlight the achievements of students, particularly teens. In this issue, we proudly reveal the top two academic achievers in Northwestern High

School's Class of 2003. We will also capture student voices in articles such as "Engaged Youth, Distant Adults."

I look forward to a time in Prince George's County when all public school students will be enrolled in a system capable of providing them with the tools they need to achieve academically including:

- Somewhere to go after-school that is safe, nurturing, and supports academics especially on weekends and on weekend nights for older youth;

- Aware, engaged, and knowledgeable adults available to listen and encourage students to strive for excellence; and

- People working on their behalf who actually care about their educational and developmental outcomes.



One day, I am convinced, I will open the local paper and see equally as many pages dedicated to academics and the development of youth as for athletics and wrongdoings. Until then, I will settle for **REVEALED!**

Toni A. Smith



OFFICIALLY SPEAKING

with

SENATOR PAUL PINSKY *Democrat, District 22*

No stranger to education, Senator Pinsky is a former Prince George's County Public Schools educator. He is the father of two daughters currently attending Prince George's County Public Schools and he has served in numerous capacities allowing him to represent students and families in the county.

It was a rainy Friday morning when IN REACH interviewed Sen. Pinsky, by phone, about education and community engagement.

IR: How are you working with your constituents to address local educational issues such as over-crowding?

PP: Clearly there is a need to expand and build new schools, unfortunately the dollars are not there due to the recession. I am trying to work with people to understand how TRIM (property tax) affects state matching funds for schools.

IR: According to the 2002 documented decisions of seniors, only 44% responded that they plan to attend a four year institution. What do you think we can do to encourage more students to seek four year institutions?

PP: Getting people into a post high school four- or two-year institution is important. We need to open as many doors as possible. Kids need to have more interest also. They have got to want to do it.

IR: What are some steps you think the community can take to engage in helping students achieve academically?

PP: I think two things about this. One, when offered information all students

can learn. Students need to be challenged in a rigorous, but nurturing way. The bar needs to be set higher, but not be unreachable. Two, we need to push parents to push students. We need to go

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RECOGNIZE THIS!

Marianne Ward

Valedictorian, Northwestern H.S.

Trudinique Munroe

Salutatorian, Northwestern H.S.

In the fall, where are you going to college? "I have been accepted into Villa Julie College in Stevenson, Maryland and I have been awarded a \$40,000 academic scholarship. I am also the recipient of a Lewisdale Citizenship Association Scholarship." Marianne will major in Theater.

Did you have any idea when you entered high school that you would make it this far? "I always worked hard, but never imagined this." She said that this was an "unexpected position" [to be Valedictorian].

What does being the Valedictorian mean to you? "Hard work is worth something." She added, "it feels good and my parents are very proud of me."

What were some of your favorite courses and what type of extracurricular activities did you participate in? Initially, "I was in the Science and Technology Program at Roosevelt, but felt that I did not want to do a lot with it." Drama and English are her favorite classes and she always enjoyed history and government. Marianne worked on the school newspaper, Yearbook Committee, has performed in plays and is a member of the French Honor Society.

What are your recommendations for achieving academic excellence? "You have to do the work. Do the reading. Put in the time and effort. Always work hard and try to do your best. You can take satisfaction in that regardless."

In the fall, where are you going to college? "I have been accepted into Towson State University and awarded a four year full tuition academic scholarship." Trudi, as her friends call her, is interested in becoming a pediatrician.

Did you have any idea when you entered high school that you would make it this far?

"No idea." In fact, she said she was "very surprised" [to be Salutatorian].

What does being the Salutatorian mean to you? Being salutatorian means that "I have done my best in high school and that I have demonstrated my capabilities to achieve. This can show others that if they work hard that they can do well also."

What were some of your favorite courses and what type of extracurricular activities did you participate in? Naturally, Trudi said that, "math and science are my favorite classes." Her extracurricular activities included Peer Mediation, a flag girl for the Marching Band, a member of Best Buddies which pairs student members with students from the special education program, and participating in dance and youth choir at Shiloh Christian Fellowship Church in Silver Spring, Maryland.

What are your recommendations for achieving academic excellence? "Work to the end. Do your best. Do your homework. That's what counts."

Issue To Watch

When we usually hear about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), we often think about its standards and accountability requirements for elementary education, rarely has attention been given to what the Act means for students on the secondary level.

While measuring graduation rates, the topic of the Urban Institute's May Forum, raises specific concerns, it is one of five requirements of all high schools including:

1. employing "highly qualified" teachers in core academic subjects;
2. ending the practice of counting alternative graduation certificates, such as the GED;
3. defining graduation rates in a rigorous and standardized way;
4. annually testing students in the subjects of reading, math, and eventually science, in at least one grade (10-12); and
5. steadily increasing students' test scores and graduation rates, ensuring 100 percent of students meet proficient levels of achievement by 2014.

For detailed information, please read **Left Out and Left Behind: NCLB and the American High School**, www.movingideas.org/cgi-bin/rd/epn_letter.pl?id=3518, and **Counting High School Graduates when Graduates Count: Measuring Graduation Rates Under the High Stakes of NCLB**, www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410641.

Engaged Youth . . . Distant Adults



In April, IN REACH's Youth Leadership Council held its first Youth Forum, *Word on the Skywalk*. About forty students gathered in the Career Center at Northwestern High School for two hours to discuss relationships—with peers, parents, and teachers. Students were asked to respond to a variety of questions. They were not shy about sharing information about themselves. They were very open and honest about how they felt, and clear about what they did not understand.

While the responses to questions about students and their peer relationships mostly centered around dating, the hot topic with the girls was lesbianism. It was apparent during this discussion that young people are not receiving enough information or "straight talk" about sexuality to help them understand it, the choices they make because of it, or its consequences.

When asked, "Do you think your parents understand you?" all of the students overwhelmingly responded "no!" Students detailed how times are different now than when their parents were growing up, that they have more influences such as the internet and as a result, their experiences are different.


One student wanted to know, "Why do adults choose the easy way out and

divorce instead of working out the problem?"

Hands down the winning question of the day asked by several students still haunts me, "Why don't adults like to talk to us?" I fumbled with a response to this one as I could not imagine why an adult would not want to talk to inquisitive, bright and engaging young people such as these or any for that matter.

Students with immigrant parents were especially concerned about how their cultural differences impact on their lives as teens in the United States.

At the conclusion of the Forum, several seniors remarked that they wished we had started doing this earlier in the year, and one senior left her address and telephone number so that she could assist next year. Clearly high school students welcome interacting with adults.


When asked how teachers could help students more students responded by saying that teachers need to teach more about finances, offer more resources, site more "real life" experiences and open up about what is really happening.

Reflecting on the Forum with youth council leader, Chantal Curry, she stated that the Forum was "Something that needs to be done often because it gives students the opportunity to look at their

values and helps them in the decision-making process. . . gives us something to think about." She concluded, "I could not imagine that it would have been so much fun." I was a little surprised myself. —TS

Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations by Andrea Venezia, Michael W. Kirst, and Anthony L. Antonio, a Project of the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research looks at the disparity between the aspirations of high school students, how states prepare high school students for post-secondary education, and the importance of bringing college stakeholders to the table. The report investigates efforts in 6 states. Maryland is one of them. Download from [Http://bridgeproject.stanford.edu](http://bridgeproject.stanford.edu).

As revealed In Their Own Words: How Maryland teens perceive their lives and what they think would help alleviate the problems that trouble them most., a Special Report by Maryland Attorney General J. Joseph Curran, Jr., middle and high school students from every county in Maryland were engaged in forums about the issues that affect them most such as after school, evening and weekend activities, school and media violence, and the internet. A must read, the students provide insightful and thoughtful feedback on what they are thinking, hoping for and really capable of. This report can be downloaded from www.oag.state.md.us/children.htm.

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to the community and let them know that we expect more and need their support. We need to increase our level of responsibility and have greater accountability. This can not be done alone.

IR: How can your office help community-based organizations better fulfill their missions?

PP: I can help spread the word about organizations and their causes and I am available to speak at forums. I try to serve as another voice and to be an advocate for education on the state level. Also, there is a Senatorial scholarship available in the District (22) that individuals going to school or returning to school can apply to receive.

COALITION FOR GIRLS

In April, **IN REACH** held its first forum **At The Table: A Roundtable Discussion** for women working with and on behalf of girls in Prince George's County. The goal of the Roundtable was to bring together women from across fields to begin building a strong coalition of support for girls in Prince George's County.

Our goal was accomplished when 35 women of diverse backgrounds attended. Representatives from the Prince George's County Public School System, the Board of Education, Maryland Park and Planning, the Department of Juvenile Justice, faith-based and community-based organizations engaged in conversation around four topics:

1. Fostering relations between organizations to work collaboratively on behalf of girls;
2. Identifying the needs of girls in Prince George's County;
3. Increasing the awareness of girls' issues; and
4. Setting a Prince George's County Girls Agenda.

You can read the Notes and Next Steps on our website, www.inreachinc.org. If you are interested in being added to our email list to receive information on upcoming activities, please email, tsmith@inreachinc.org or contact Toni Smith at 301.779.2564.

PUBLISHER

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Toni A. Smith, Founder and President

IN REACH believes that young people should always be *in reach* of a quality education, opportunities in their community for development, and, ultimately, their dreams.

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