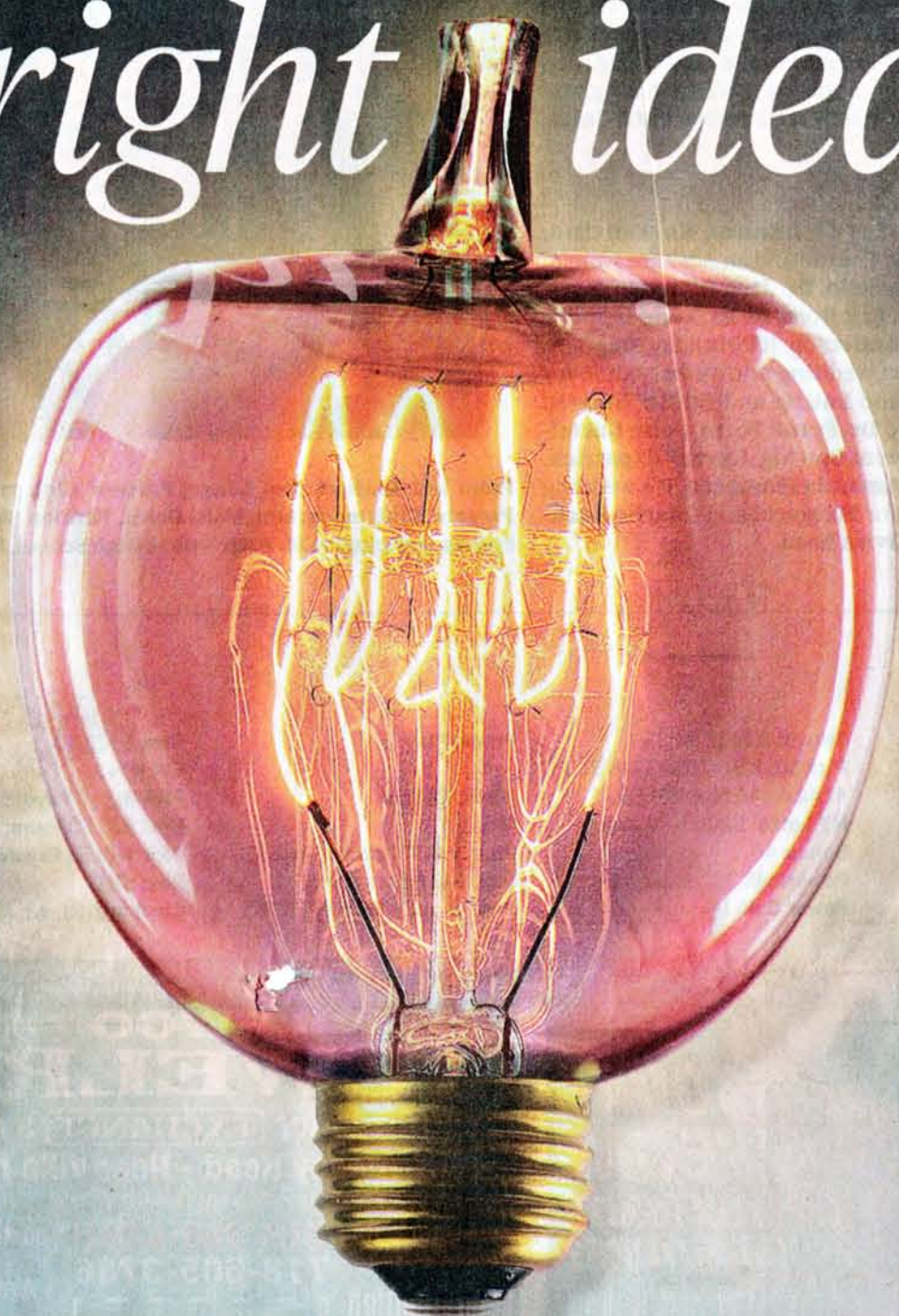




SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS

REAL-WORLD LEARNING IN A HIGH-NEED NEIGHBORHOOD

bright ideas



Claire Regan For the Staten Island Advance

Harvey Quezada pushed up the sleeves of his sweatshirt and held his hands, palms up, under the faucet in anatomy and physiology class at Port Richmond High School.



Kyle Allen, right, a Wagner College student studying to become a physician assistant, teaches Port Richmond High School junior Harvey Quezada how to “scrub in” for surgery. Photo courtesy of Claire Regan for the Staten Island Advance

“Make sure the water runs to your elbows,” instructed Kyle Allen, a fourth-year physician assistant student from Wagner College, as he guided Harvey through the steps of scrubbing in for surgery.

A sturdy junior with experience on the football and wrestling teams, Harvey is enrolled in Port Richmond’s med-tech track and wants to follow in Kyle’s footsteps. A recent class trip to the simulation lab at Wagner where he “delivered” a baby sealed his plan to become a physician assistant.

It’s not unusual to find Wagner College students working alongside the students of Port Richmond High School, where community engagement and partnerships are key in a ground-breaking curriculum.

As one of only two designated “community schools” on Staten Island (the other is PS 78 in Tompkinsville) and 130 citywide, Port Richmond has undergone a transformation in the past 24

SEE LEARNING, A6



Port Richmond High School

85 St. Josephs Ave., SINY 10302



Principal
Timothy M. Gannon, since 2005

Enrollment
1,550 (capacity 1,800)

Number of teachers
100

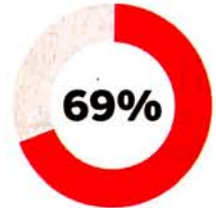
Year opened
1927




Students with special needs



Students that receive free lunch



Notable alumni

 Author Paul Zindel (1953)

 Musician David Johansen (1967)

SOURCES: schools.nyc.gov, insideschools.org

Spotlight on schools

Find out what makes each of these schools stand out

May 1: Port Richmond High School

May 8: Susan Wagner High School

May 15: IS 75

May 22: IS 51

May 29: PS 1

June 5: PS 69

June 12: PS 19

June 19: PS 13

June 23: PS 45

June 26: PS 56



Teacher James Ryan and Assistant Principal Suzanne Woodman work with students in the culinary arts classroom. (Photos by Claire Regan for the Staten Island Advance)

“We want students to feel respected when they come to school.”

Timothy Gannon, below, Port Richmond High School principal since 2005.



LEARNING

FROM A1

months and now offers health and wellness services, mentoring, family fitness programs and even a food pantry.

Mayor Bill de Blasio’s community schools initiative is a holistic approach that fosters real-world learning in high-need neighborhoods like Port Richmond. Each community school provides access to critical services that support the whole child and make the school the center of the community.

“The goal is to offer on-site solutions to every problem that could possibly interfere with attendance,” explained Timothy M. Gannon, Port Richmond’s principal. And so far, it’s working, he said.

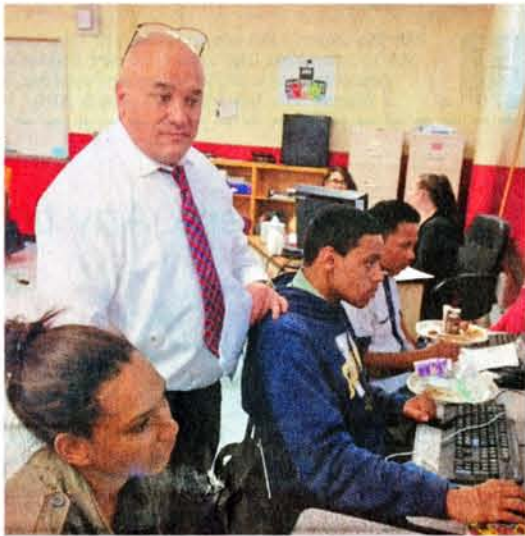
HEALTHY MINDS, HEALTHY BODIES

Made possible by a partnership with Staten Island University Hospital (SIUH), the Health and Wellness Center opened in April 2015 in a ground-floor wing and features four exam rooms, two mental health rooms, a reception area and a lab for blood work. Each exam room is equipped with an electronic blood pressure machine and a laptop for medical records.

The center operates during school hours – Monday to Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. – but there are plans to open it on weekends to better serve the community, according to Principal Gannon.

“Our goal is to keep students in school by maintaining their health,” said Dr. April Lee, SIUH director of adolescent medicine, one of two physicians staffing the center. “We teach them to advocate for their own health. We teach them life skills.”

Those skills include learning to recognize a medical problem, seek treatment and follow up on care.



Community school director Michael Candella mentors Port Richmond High School freshmen in The Hub.

There is an emphasis on privacy, dignity and confidentiality to ease discomfort among typically self-conscious teens.

“High school is a time of change and instability so we offer guidance and education,” said Dr. Edward McCabe, SIUH assistant director of adolescent medicine who works with Dr. Lee. “This is a safe place” to talk about difficult issues like substance abuse and pregnancy, he added.

Two SIUH social workers complete the Health and Wellness Center’s multidisciplinary team.

CULINARY CAREER PATH SET

On a recent Wednesday morning, the sweet smell of freshly baked carrot cake filled a third-floor hallway of Port Richmond High School.

Inside the culinary arts room, 17-year-old Victoria Modica applied the cream cheese frosting her classmates had just prepared.

She cut a few slices and took a bite. Principal Gannon joined her for the impromptu taste test.

Victoria will graduate this June from the Culinary Arts Academy, one of six learning communities Port Richmond students choose from as freshmen.

She said the program helped expand her horizons about food. She has successfully prepared pork chops, couscous and grilled tilapia – an entrée she would have pushed away before becoming a culinary student.

Fellow senior Louis Miguel Santos has been accepted into the College of Culinary Arts at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, R.I., and hopes to one day own a restaurant. It will be “family style, but with a high-end menu,” he said.

Justin Cencel will continue culinary studies in the fall at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn.

“I’d like to teach,” Justin said with confidence. “So many people are addicted to frozen food. It’s 10 times healthier if you make it yourself. Everyone should know how to cook.”

Culinary is one of Port Richmond’s most popular programs, said James Ryan, one of two teachers who run 11 classes that prepare students for the catering and food service industries.



The Wagner Raiders Room is headquarters for the Port Richmond Partnership Leadership Academy. From the left are junior Pedro Santiago, senior Eric Greco, and partnership coordinator Leo Schuchert.

As part of the community school initiative, Wagner College nursing faculty and physician assistant students are teaching the culinary students how healthy eating can prevent chronic health problems. Kale, sweet potatoes, cherry tomatoes and okra will soon be planted in the school garden.

A ROOM OF THEIR OWN

“Welcome to The Hub” announces a sign on the door.

A cross between a clubhouse and a classroom, The Hub is a gathering place for Port Richmond’s 314 first-year students enrolled in the Freshman Academy.

Staffed by nine social workers from the New York Center for Interpersonal Development, a community school partner, The Hub offers freshmen mentoring, tutoring – and a place to hang out, eat lunch and adjust to high school life.

“It’s like a big brother-big sister program,” explained Michael Candella, community schools director at Port Richmond. “We focus on academic skills ... and make sure they have the skills to transition to high school.”

“The idea is to prevent kids from dropping out after freshman year,” added Principal Gannon. “It’s a one-stop shop. If I’m a freshman with a problem, I can go to The Hub.”

Candella said the concept is a success. The attendance rate for freshmen has risen to 93 percent, and 78 percent of all freshmen have passed six or more classes, he confirmed.

RAISING THE BAR

Built in 1927 with additions in 1968 and 1992, Port Richmond High School is a sprawling complex located in the shadow of the Bayonne Bridge.

Its hallways are polished to a shine and all doors are painted Raiders red in tribute to its sports teams.

“We want students to feel respect when they come to school,” Principal Gannon explained.

A man on the move, Gannon briskly walks miles each day through the school he’s managed since 2005. On his way to a visit a classroom, he stops to pick up a rare piece of litter or greet a student by name.

His charisma is welcome in a school that reflects the diversity and challenges of the neighborhoods it serves. Forty-two percent of its students are Hispanic, many of them first generation Mexicans.

Gannon fought hard for the community school designation in an effort to boost the Department of Education’s progress report grade of C and increase attendance and graduation rates.

According to the DOE, Port Richmond’s four-year graduation rate in 2013 was 61.1 percent, which was lower than the average overall four-year graduation rate of high schools in New York City serving students with similar characteristics.

By 2015, Port Richmond’s graduation rate was up 2 percent.

And there are more initiatives on the horizon.

In September, the school will launch a dual-language program as part of the DOE’s plan to expand bilingual education. The program will teach the standard curriculum in English and Spanish.

“The idea is to connect kids to a second language, and celebrate it,” said Gannon. “We’re telling kids their Spanish is going to be a real boost” to their success.

Gannon is equally passionate about an ongoing collaboration with Wagner College called the Port Richmond Partnership Leadership Academy.

The three-year program gives high school students a chance to socialize and study with college students. A cohort spends five weeks during the summer on the Wagner campus taking classes and living in the residence halls. Wagner awards full scholarships to several Port Richmond seniors each year.

“We look for students at risk for not going to college,” explained Leo Schuchert, partnership coordinator. They are the students who benefit most from the Leadership Academy.

Gannon sees it as win-win situation. “High school kids and college kids learning together – it puts the high school kid on an even keel with the college kid and they realize, ‘I can do that. I can go to college.’”

“It’s just a good fit,” he said.