

## LOCAL NEWS

# Wagner College president at the White House

Richard Guarasci describes partnership his school has formed with Port Richmond for select panel

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Wagner College President Richard Guarasci was a guest speaker yesterday afternoon at the White House as part of an event to announce the release of a new U.S. Department of Education report.

Guarasci was one of the 11 national higher education leaders who sat on the National Task



GUARASCI

Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement that created the report, titled "A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future," which highlights the need to revitalize the civic element of American higher education.

Guarasci described his institution's role in Staten Island's Port Richmond Partnership. He described how, 14 years ago, Wagner College created a new curriculum called the Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts that links clusters of courses — called "learning communities" — with real-world problems through service learning activities.

"For most of those 14 years, our service learning tended to be episodic — activities ended when each se-

mester ended," Guarasci said. "We found that wholly inadequate, so in March 2009 we launched a partnership with one community on Staten Island where we would focus about 50 percent of our civic engagement work. That community is Port Richmond."

About 30 courses at the college are linked with specific agencies and efforts in the Port Richmond community, targeting issues identified by the community itself.

"We said, instead of having the curriculum look for outlets in community work, let's work closely with the community to identify what the challenges are, and marry them back to the curriculum," he explained.

Nursing, physician assistant and pre-med students

work with various community agencies on projects related to obesity and diabetes. Business and finance students are linked to economic development work, particularly small business development. Education students engage in projects targeting literacy and college readiness.

"Our goal here is to do three things," Guarasci said. "First, to fundamentally increase learning in the disciplines for our students; second, increase their civic learning — what it means to be connected to publics they will serve in the professions they choose — and, finally, that we are actually changing things in a community, that there is an impact in those areas where we are focusing our attention."