

## *We choose Albany public schools because ...*

### **Club R.A.W. begins second year at Delaware Community School**

Club R.A.W. (Reading and Writing), an afterschool literacy enrichment program at Delaware Community School, begun anew with the start of school in September.

The program, overseen by teaching assistants and teachers at the school, utilizes peer mentoring, pairing strong readers with those in need of additional support in an effort to improve the reading ability of all students.



Club R.A.W., which enrolled approximately 80 students in its first year last year, is based around group work. The importance of peer mentoring, says program director Derek Johnson, is that it encourages a worry-free environment where children who may become apprehensive in class when unsure are able to express themselves freely and work through their mistakes with the help of others.

Further, in emphasizing the joy of reading, it encourages students to become interested in reading for pleasure, a trait that in turn makes them better readers. The program also offers practice in public speaking in a formal, student-friendly environment.

In addition, it evokes in the students traits of cooperation, volunteerism and community-building, qualities that will serve them well in later life.

“The program was created with the principle that it takes a village to raise a child,” Mr. Johnson said.

Mr. Johnson, himself a City School District of Albany alumnus, remembers the guidance he received at School 19 and how it inspired him to want to give back.

Club R.A.W. received considerable support from members of the community last year, with 2007 City of Albany Tulip Queen Amisha Gomes and local professional boxer Wayland Willingham visiting to read with students, along with parent Dakota Alvarez.

Delaware teachers have noticed a marked improvement in reading and writing ability among students enrolled in the program. Teaching assistants Joy Allah, Norma Holmberg, Ayesha Baxter, Jennifer Ahlstrom, Gustavo Loor, Akili Duncan, Walter Aguilera and Tara Alberico have worked closely with the program director and teachers to reinforce grade-specific reading and writing lessons.

Delaware Community School as a whole showed significant progress last year on the standardized English Language Arts tests and was among eight district schools to earn the “rapidly improving” distinction from the New York State Department of Education.

Club R.A.W. continues to evolve this year.

The program has formed partnerships with third- and fourth-grade teachers to coordinate weekly spelling and vocabulary lessons in an effort to better prepare students for the third-grade ELA test.

In addition, building on the bilingual aspect of the school (Delaware is home to the Dual Language Program), the club has included a Spanish-speaking element in the program, utilizing the skills of teachers and teaching assistants fluent in Spanish.

The result was an increase in sign-ups among Spanish-speaking students at the school this fall.