



# Staten Island Advance

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## At Westerleigh's PS 30, arts and music take center stage

By DIANE C. LORE

When times are tough, and budget cuts have to be made, art and music programs are often the first to end up on the cutting-room floor.

That's not the case, though, at Westerleigh's PS 30.

The school has a thriving arts curriculum that includes music and band, performing arts, dance and theater, and the visual arts — all adapted for students from kindergarten through fifth-grade, as well as for special-needs students.

Music and art teachers work with classroom teachers to integrate the arts with core subjects including math, reading, history, geography, social studies, science, and literacy and language arts.

The goal of the arts program is to give students the opportunity to express themselves creatively. This helps them grow emotionally, confidently and to succeed academically, explained performing arts department coordinator Dana Baranello.

"I strongly believe that all students, regardless of their academic or physical abilities, can benefit tremendously and positively through a strong performing arts program," she said.

### FULL YEAR PLANNED

To that end, Mrs. Baranello has a full year of programs planned for students from pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade.

On tap is a visit from Staten Island's own 13-year-old Broadway sensation, Analise Scarpaci. Working in cooperation with Mrs. Baranello, Analise, 13, and a freshman at St. John Villa Academy, Arrochar, will share with the younger students her successes on Broadway, including her current role in the Tony-nominated musical "Matilda." She'll give advice for aspiring performers talk about her life as an actress and perform for students.

In addition, Mrs. Baranello, a Wagner College graduate who holds a degree in education and theater, is partnering with Wagner theater professor David McDonald, who is teaching a first-year class in public speaking.

Wagner students are visiting PS 30 in small groups over eight weeks to perform and teach some of the younger students the rudiments of theatrical performances. The partnership with PS 30 is part of Wagner's experiential learning program.

The college students have been working with fourth-graders on a fall "theater reading" performance and with fifth-graders who have begun rehearsing for a spring production of the musical "Treasure Island."

Fourth-graders Jack West and Jake St. John look forward to their classes with the college students. “Having Wagner College students come to teach my class every week is fun and exciting,” said West.

The sentiment is reciprocated.

Wagner freshman Alexandria Brown said she “thoroughly enjoys” working with the younger students.

PS 30 students said the performing arts classes have helped them gain confidence.

“Performing arts is one of my favorite classes, where I have the chance to express my creativity and use my imagination,” said fourth-grader Liam Pesce.

Ellie Ferranola said the performing arts program has given her the confidence to stand up and perform in front of a live audience. “It’s helped me gain confidence to perform in front of an audience,” she said.

Fifth-grader Amanda Calabrese is ready to take center stage.

“This is my first time being a lead in a play, and I am so excited that I get to perform ‘Treasure Island’ in front of a huge audience,” she said.

### **EXCITED TO PERFORM**

Olivia DePeppo is also energized.

“I’m really excited to perform in ‘Treasure Island,’ and I really enjoy practicing my lines and rehearsing every week with my classmates,” she said.

“Being with my friends and doing what I love is so much fun and it allows me to express myself,” added her classmate, Olivia Brescia.

Mrs. Baranello said she couldn’t pull off the program without the support of Principal Alan Ihne and Assistant Principal Joseph Napolitano. “We’re fortunate that they are extremely supportive of the arts and what we’re trying to achieve with the children here.”



Wagner College student Kristen Sullivan gives directions to students, from left, Amanda Calabrese, Dominic Rosalia, Olivia DePeppo and Olivia Brescia. (Photo courtesy of Dana Baranello)