



National Conference showcases Albany schools

Urban educators need to 'believe to achieve'

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NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi, Albany School Superintendent Eva Joseph and Harborfields teacher Jeff Shade serve on a panel to promote financial education for all students.

Talk about a super-deluxe Superintendent's Conference Day. Albany Public Schools' 1,100 educators took part in a three-day national conference dedicated to sharing strategies for success in urban schools.

National Urban Alliance President Eric Cooper called the late-March gathering "the Woodstock of conferences."

For those too young to know what he meant, he explained it was bringing together more than 50 of the world's leading researchers, scholars and advocates to interact with classroom educators. "Woodstock had 50 of the best bands in the world," Cooper said. "We have 50 of the best education experts coming together in Albany."

In all, more than 2,500 educators from across the country participated in NUA's third annual "Teaching for Intelligence: Believe to Achieve" conference. The event focused on today's most pressing educational challenges, including the achievement gap, graduation rates, multilingual and cultural education, and educator preparation.

NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi said the statewide union co-sponsored the event as a continuation of NYSUT's commitment to raise awareness about the achievement gap. "This conference will build upon the critical dialogue we so desperately need to continue," Iannuzzi told the crowd. "I know you believe we can all achieve."

The program began with pre-conference tours of five Albany public schools, giving dozens of visiting educators a chance to observe NUA strategies in action. Albany School of Humanities staffers showed how they have infused Spanish and Chinese language and culture into their curriculum. Educators at the newly rebuilt Pine Hills Elementary School have used a team approach that centers on a new mascot, the dolphin, to promote respect and responsibility in the "pod."

The conference featured dozens of hands-on workshops ranging from the specific learning needs of boys to open-ended math problems. A who's who of national speakers included author Jonathan Kozol, urban sociologist Pedro Noguera and researcher Linda Darling-Hammond.

"This was a wonderful opportunity for our staff," said Albany Public School Teachers Association President Cathy Corbo, who negotiated release time for members to attend. "Not only did we get to attend high-quality professional development workshops, I'm proud to say that more than 20 of our members were leading workshops themselves."

"I found the conference validating and healing," said Shameka Brown-Johnson, a Giffen Elementary sixth-grade teacher. "And most of all, it was uplifting."

— Sylvia Saunders