

IN PLAINFIELD: Local talent gets promoted



STAFF PHOTO: ED PAELLARI

Cedarbrook K-8 Center Principal Frank Asante and Vice Principal Rosa Salinas are among the former teachers who have moved up to administrative posts in Plainfield schools.

Administrators often home-grown

By **MARK SPIVEY**
STAFF WRITER

PLAINFIELD — When Plainfield Public Schools last year sought a new superintendent to lead the district of about 7,000 students, it looked more than 1,000 miles away to Miami and selected the thus-far highly successful Steve Gallon III.

When in past years the district sought personnel

to fill other administrative posts, on the other hand, many times it looked just a few blocks away.

Of the district's 42 administrative posts, 20, or nearly half, are filled by former teachers, secretaries or even custodians at some of the city's 15 different public schools.

"There's really been a culture of growing from within," said district Coor-

dinator of Public Information and Marketing Eric Jones.

Jones himself represents one of the district's many home-grown officials, having taught math at Barlow Elementary School for five years before moving to his current position. Other similarly promoted administrators include four vice principals at the city high

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school, top officials at both city middle schools and more than a half-dozen district vice principals, among others.

Multiple administrators agreed that familiarity with the city and its diverse student body made transitioning from, say, teacher to principal, a natural fit.

"I think that benefit is because of the relationships that are established as a result of one's longevity in the district," said BJ Brown-

Johnson, principal of the city's Clinton K-8 Center. A former teacher at Barlow Elementary School and mother of two boys who went through the city's public school system, she also taught at Barlow before working at four other city schools and the district's administrative office.

"As a principal, you need to interact with so many people on so many levels," BrownJohnson said, "and having those relationships actually helps you do your job."

"It's a tremendous benefit," agreed Frank Asante, principal of the city's Cedarbrook K-8 Center, who was hired as a fifth-grade teacher at Stillman Elemen-

tary School in 1993 (Asante's vice principal at Cedarbrook, Rosa Salinas, started out as a science teacher at Maxson Middle School).

"I'm a principal to some of the kids of the kids I had (when I started teaching), and I'm sure many of my colleagues have experienced that too," Asante said. "It's a good thing."

A growing pool

Jones said that the district's high percentage of administrators who were promoted from within actually should rise in coming years, when an initiative launched last summer by Gallon bears fruit.

The district partnered with The College of New Jersey on a leadership program through which a group of 20 district staffers started taking courses toward earning master's degrees, Jones said. Those staffers are expected to

complete the program by the end of 2010.

"The opportunities will be there, and there's going to be a pool of people who are ready to come step in and help lead the district," Jones said.

Opportunities for advancement, Jones added, also aren't limited to being available only to teachers. James Hutchins is a good example, as the district's assistant supervisor of buildings and grounds in 1989 started out as a general service worker — performing paint and light carpentry work on city schools — before working his way up the ladder.

"I personally think it's an awesome position," Hutchins said of his current post, adding that he still considers himself an "old school" worker who values staying true to his employers.

"For me, it's not just the salary, but a loyalty to the

FROM WITHIN

Current Plainfield Public Schools administrators who served as custodians, secretaries or teachers within the district before ascending to supervisory roles:

Sasha Slocum, Plainfield High School vice principal
Dion Roach, Plainfield High School vice principal
Deborah Celestand, Plainfield High School vice principal
Daniel Cone, Plainfield High School athletics director/vice principal
Kevin Stansbury, Maxson Middle School vice principal
Gwynetta Joe, Hubbard Middle School principal
Scot Burkholder, Hubbard Middle School vice principal
Kwame Asante, Washington Elementary School principal
BJ BrownJohnson, Clinton K-8 Center principal
Frank Asante, Cedarbrook K-8 Center principal
Rosa Salinas, Cedarbrook K-8 Center vice principal
Elena Rutherford, district early childhood vice principal
Beth Fillipatos, district special education coordinator
Joi Bethea, district educational services vice principal
Yvonne Breauxsaus, district educational services vice principal
Eric Jones, district public information coordinator
Harold Gee, district buildings and grounds assistant supervisor
James Hutchins, district buildings and grounds assistant supervisor
Ronald Eddy, district payroll coordinator
Yvonne Watts, district student truancy coordinator

profession," Hutchins said of his most recent promotion. "And whether it's a teacher, or a custodian, or a maintenance man or an inspector, there's really not much difference."