

# School Newspaper Trains Future Editors and Reporters

By Lloyd Lyles

It's 12:43 pm. Children noisily chase one another outside; others are finishing their lunch down the hall, while the sounds of a basketball game waft into Room 206, the *J.N.A. Episodes* newsroom.

At the sound of the bell, three student reporters rush into the room, eagerly finding their seats at computer terminals, where they log on and do some typing practice to develop word-processing skills. Then they begin to wrestle with their stories, ignoring the surrounding bedlam.

Veteran educator Frances Blahovich teaches 75 motivated children K-8 daily in the enrichment program at John Nevins Andrews Elementary in Takoma Park, Maryland. She utilizes a variety of ideas she has developed over the past 15 years.

The 1987-1988 sixth-grade creative writing class sparked Blahovich's students' desire to write. She began by giving them one sentence, which they would use to write imaginative stories. Some of their articles were entitled: "Only in the White House," "A Memo on Missions, and "An African Safari."

The next year as seventh graders, the students began to publish a monthly newspaper.

Owen Steinert, editor-in-chief of the *J.N.A. Episodes*, had a staff of seven—an assistant editor and six reporters.

"It's kind of fun, but sometimes it is an inconvenience," Steinert said. "If you

have a story due and you have homework, it's kind of difficult."

Completing his own stories was not the only difficulty for the editor-in-chief. The other half of his worries was getting his reporters to produce. Steinert reasoned, however, that "since they aren't getting paid, we can't kick them off the newspaper."

Each *J.N.A. Episodes* features headlined stories of school events, an editorial, computer-generated graphics, student poetry, comic strips, sports, and a special report.

"As soon as children are able to read and write they can start a school newspaper," says Blahovich. She feels that the sponsor does not need a background in journalism. Her students use *The Newsroom* computer program by Springboard, the "Complete Guide to Creating a Newspaper," and their own ideas. "The opportunity for poetry, cartoons, and stories are endless," she says.

Newspapers can be published without computers, Blahovich points out. Typewriters and a photocopy machine will do. Newspapers can even be handwritten and mimeographed.

What about a one-room school setting? "Oh, absolutely, because all the students can have input!" says Blahovich enthusiastically. School subjects and homework can be integrated with publishing a newspaper, she says. Assignments in English, social studies, geography, and art can be used in the

newspaper.

"It's fun working on stories together," reporter Kerri Brown said. "I'm learning layout, writing, and graphics."

Caryll Campbell said she enjoys meeting people and asking them questions. She recognized the fact that writers influence thought, as well as the need for balanced reporting. "If you're not fair, people won't like what you write," Campbell said.

With a circulation of 400 to students and parents, and an additional 100 to school board and educational officers of the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union, the publishers of *J.N.A. Episodes* are learning more than journalism skills.

Blahovich feels that the experience in publishing the newspaper has developed positive character traits that her students will need later in life. Meeting deadlines, cooperation, coping with problems, and accepting other people's ideas and opinions are a few of these qualities, she says.

*J.N.A. Episodes* "gives (students) a reason for writing, and they are developing leadership ability," says Blahovich. "I believe we are laying the groundwork for some future editors!" □

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