

## **Early success in Spencerport**

### **Success**

#### **Urban-Suburban students are ‘just like any other kids’**

**JUSTIN MURPHY** @CITIZENMURPHY

It’s been a year and a half since 12-year-old Jayden Conti began attending Spencerport schools through the Urban-Suburban program, yet he was still easy to identify among his classmates during a science lab before Christmas break.

After all, he was wearing a glittery silver Santa Claus hat. It kind of stuck out.

Holiday headgear aside, Jayden and his 14-year-old sister, Mackenzie, fit in perfectly with their Spencerport classmates. In fact, they’re not even Urban-Suburban students; their mother bought a house in Spencerport after seeing how well Jayden’s first year went.

“It’s just normal,” Jayden said. “I met a lot of new people.”

Two years ago this month, the Spencerport school district was enveloped in an ugly controversy over whether to participate in the Urban-Suburban program, which allows poor, mostly minority students to attend suburban schools.

The proposal only entailed a few dozen students through grades 1-12, phased

**See SUCCESS, Page [5A](#)**



TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/@TYEE23/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Mackenzie Conti, 14, with teammates John Christanis, pointing at her screen, and Layanna Scott, looking at Conti's screen, and Khalize Beaman, who is peeking over Scott's shoulder, try and beat other teams in matching the Spanish word to the English word in their Spanish I class at Ada Cosgrove Middle School in Spencerport. Before moving to Spencerport, Mackenzie attended a charter school in Rochester.**

TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/@TYEE23/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



**Seventh-graders Jayden Conti and Julian Colon, both 12, cut out images of insects on a page during their science class. They were learning about classification and arthropods.**

**Jayden used to be an Urban-Suburban student until his family moved to Spencerport.**

TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/@TYEE23/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

---

Continued from Page 1A

in slowly. But a number of district residents objected loudly on several grounds: that white students were unfairly excluded from the program; that city students would take their children's places on sports teams; that city parents should work harder and buy a house in Spencerport if they wanted their children to go to school there.

Many other residents responded that Spencerport itself would benefit greatly from the students' presence. In the end, the school board unanimously approved the administration's recommendation to join and welcome 18 students beginning in 2015-16.

There are now 25 Urban- Suburban students in Spencerport, about a quarter of the eventual expected enrollment of 72. Those students, their parents and the district agree: there have been no problems at all.

"In every sense, the plan has gone beautifully," Superintendent Mike Crumb said. "Not just academics, but attendance, parent (involvement) — everything worked out just the way we were told it would work out. It worked fabulously."

None of the children or parents reported being made to feel unwelcome. In fact, Cosgrove Middle School Principal Ned Dale said the children don't really know who is from the city and who is from Spencerport. "People ask me how they've done, and I tell them: 'They're just like any other kids in our building,' " Dale said.

Three people who publicly opposed the program two years ago did not respond to requests for comment about how it has gone since then.

Jhavanie Napier began in sixth grade last year after having been on the Urban-Suburban application list for several years. Her mother, Natasha Thomas, had heard of the disagreement in Spencerport but decided to send her daughter there anyway.

"I understand where they were coming from, because it's a change and it's new," Thomas said. "But I know the type of child I have, and that she wasn't there to cause any ruckus. ... I knew my child would be someone they would love."

Indeed, Jhavanie was recently named student of the month, her mother said. She's on the honor roll and does volunteer work with her classmates. She even led orientation tours for new students in the fall.

"It's been a way for her to advance herself," said Thomas, who bought a house on Ridgeway Avenue in the city to shorten her daughter's commute. "She's a kid who wants to achieve something in her life. ... I couldn't be more proud of her."

Spencerport was one of several districts to join the 50-year-old program in the 2014-15 school year. Webster and Rush-Henrietta have followed suit, meaning the majority of districts in Monroe County now participate.

Enrollment is up from fewer than 600 in 2014-15 to 767 in 2016-17, Program Director Theresa Woodson said.

For the first time, a participating district withdrew earlier this year. That was Kendall, which could not overcome the logistical problem of the long bus ride.

Mackenzie Conti was never an Urban-Suburban student. She attended Urban Choice Charter School in Rochester until her family moved to Spencerport. She and Jayden are in Cosgrove Middle School and their younger brother is in first grade at Munn Elementary School.

Her transition was difficult at first, she said, because she didn't know anyone and the work was more demanding. Both she and her brother have now made many friends, though, and agree they're glad to be there.

"(My friends in the city) ask me how people are here," Mackenzie said. "I just say: 'They're not that different. They're just friendly and nice.' "

JMURPHY7@ [Gannett.com](mailto:JMURPHY7@Gannett.com)