

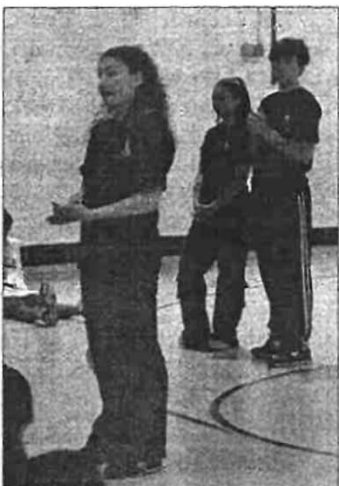
SCHOOL NEWS

Neelsville Middle School students explore the art of dance

by Melissa E. Irion

Mark Twain once said, "Dance like nobody is watching." The seventh and eighth grade students of Neelsville Middle School (NMS) learned to do exactly as Twain prompted during a dance residency held in May.

As part of the residency, students attended workshops during their regular physical education classes. Instruction was



Clancy Works Artistic Director Adrienne Clancy talks to Neelsville Middle School students.

provided by Clancy Works Dance Company dancers, including Artistic Director Adrienne Clancy, Mathew Heggem, Caitlin Quinn, Christina Lane, Annie Ferebee and Charlene Gentles. The endeavor was the second of two recent artists-in-residence programs, established by Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Cultural Arts Chairwoman Carolyn Camacho, to give students the opportunity to experience improvisation through art. Camacho has been instrumental over the years in drawing artists to Village schools to expose students to the arts. This year, grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, the NMS PTA, *The Washington Post* and the Maryland Arts and Humanities Council made the dance residency possible.

May's venture began with a performance to give future dancers a glimpse of what they would soon explore and what can be achieved in the world of dance should they choose to pursue the art. At the following four work sessions, the Clancy Works dancers broke into teams of two, splitting the 90 student participants into

three smaller working groups. The teams led students in learning attention-grabbing dance steps and an inspired routine, leaving portions open for the students to insert their own unique moves. "We used hip hop as a connector and that was the doorway for modern dance and for the students to do creative dance," Clancy explains.

Along the way, students broke out of their shells, showing an aptitude and passion for dance. "I noticed the students who would be quiet normally start to grow," Heggem says proudly. "There is one boy who is definitely going to be a dancer, but otherwise, he's so quiet. When he starts to move, his personality really comes out."

Student, Alonzo M., let his own personality shine through with a back flip during the final group performance held on Wednesday, May 31. That afternoon, all three student groups came together under a contract of mutual audience and performer respect to show their peers what they had learned. Alonzo added the flip during the improvisational portion of his group's number, comment-



One of the student dance groups practices their routine.

ing that he "just felt like doing it." Feeling the team spirit of the residency, he was quick to add, "It's not just you on the stage; it's your partner, too. You have to get feedback and give them feedback."

Even the NMS teachers got in on the action, dancing with students and trying their best to keep up with the music. The tunes were specifically chosen to connect with the students. Explaining this musical draw, NMS teacher Linda Barrett says, "Any time you can tie things

into [the] music they love, it's good." The Clancy Works dancers also strove to relate to students on a more emotional level, building respect for themselves and others, creating self confidence, exploring creativity and working as a team. Camacho sums up the collaboration saying, "The kids got to see very positive role models, people not far removed from their generation, who are able to perform and go to college for dance."