



TRUMP, BIDEN SPAR IN DEBATE

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump opened their first 2024 president debate without shaking hands and went right to mixing it up on policy last night. Page A8

TODAY'S MUST-READS

STATE

Mass. stands to lose up to \$110M from opioid deal

Thursday's U.S. Supreme Court ruling rejecting the nationwide settlement with OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma has dealt a blow to Massachusetts' efforts to fight opioid addiction.

But the state's top cop says she'll keep fighting for funding even as Massachusetts stands to lose as much as \$110 million from the \$5.5 billion settlement with the company. Full story, Page A3

STATE

Healey decries abortion ruling

Gov. Maura T. Healey sharply criticized Thursday's U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Idaho's emergency abortion law, saying it leaves the procedure open to attack by extremists.

"The Supreme Court's non-decision leaves millions of pregnant women in limbo, and allows anti-abortion extremists to continue their attack on emergency abortion care," Healey wrote in a post to X after the high court issued its closely watched ruling. Full story, Page A3

SPRINGFIELD

Men get 35 to 40 years for brutal home invasion

Two Springfield men will go to prison after they were both sentenced in connection with a 2019 home invasion that left one person beaten, tortured and burned following a home invasion.

Paul Gayle, 30, was sentenced to 35 to 40 years in state prison, and Malik Erskine, 24, was sentenced to 18 to 20 years in state prison. Full story, Page A7

WEATHER

Sunny skies, beautiful.
High: 78°; Low: 58°

EXPANDED WEATHER, A8

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SPRINGFIELD

A model for other schools

Empowerment Zone Partnership's practices are beginning to attract attention

By **CAROLYN ROBBINS**
Special to The Republican

Nearly a decade after a state and local partnership was created to radically remake eight underperforming middle schools, Springfield schools today have rebounded and become a national model, recently attracting groups from across the U.S. to see the success for themselves.

This spring, a group from Georgia spent a whole day visiting Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership schools to find out how they operate, and to observe students and teachers in

several classrooms that are part of the zone.

Educational leaders and community activists from Colorado, Delaware and Indiana are scheduling visits to find out if they could replicate Springfield's success in their own home school districts.

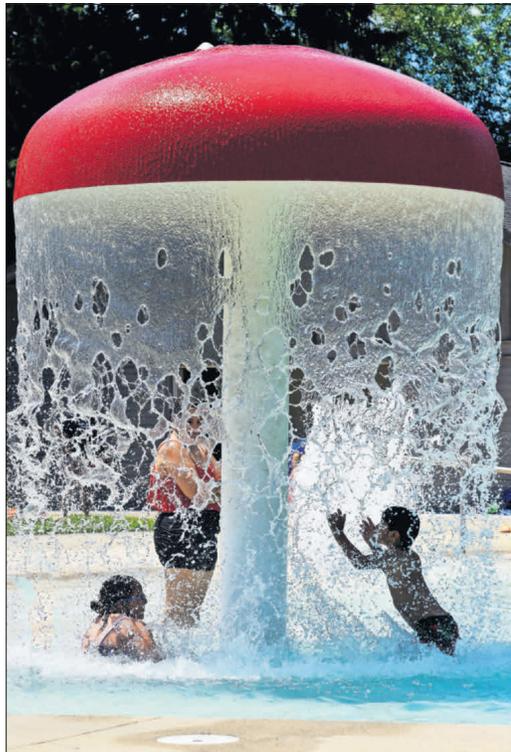
Why the national interest?

Since the start of the Empowerment Zone, the districts schools have reversed course on former negative trends, with high school graduation

SEE ZONE, PAGE A6



Springfield schools today have rebounded and become a national model, recently attracting groups from across the U.S. to see the success for themselves. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)



WEST SPRINGFIELD

Wall of water

Kids and grownups alike enjoy the mushroom water feature at West Springfield's Alice Corson Pool on Main Street. (DON TREGER / THE REPUBLICAN)

WEST SPRINGFIELD

4 WMass mayors back autonomy of ride-share drivers

By **NAMU SAMPATH**
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Four Pioneer Valley mayors gathered Thursday to lend their support to the effort to keep ride-share and delivery drivers working as independent contractors.

Their comments came the same day the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court green-lit an effort to place on the November ballot a question with implications for how drivers for companies such as Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and Instacart earn their keep. An effort backed by the industry would ask voters to clarify whether the drivers should be independent contractors. The state's attorney general's office has argued they should be considered employees.

Gathered at West Springfield's Century Plaza, the mayors of West Springfield, Westfield, Agawam and Chicopee said that transportation and food delivery via the apps help impact the economy and their communities.

Roughly 300 drivers for app-based services live in Chicopee, according to its Mayor John Vieau, who described the community as one made up of blue-collar residents.

"Not many people can afford a car, so the opportunity to be able to get to and fro with less and less cab drivers, these app based ride shares are incredibly important to the community and to our economy," said Vieau.

SEE DRIVERS, PAGE A2

SPRINGFIELD

Independent candidate to challenge Neal

By **JIM KINNEY**
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Independent congressional candidate Nadia Milleron submitted 3,000 certified nomination signatures to elections officials Thursday. It was the next step in her general election challenge to 35-year veteran U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal.

Voters she's met while gathering signatures tell her running without party affiliation is an asset.

"They don't trust the Republican

and Democratic parties," Milleron, of Sheffield, said in an interview outside the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Springfield Office on Dwight Street. "And when they see I'm independent they relax and say, 'That's great. I'm with you.'"

Milleron is an attorney and farmer. She said her candidacy stems from the 2019 death of her daughter Samya, who was aboard a Boeing 737 Max flown by Ethiopian Airlines that crashed in Addis Ababa in 2019.

The crash was later blamed both on pilot error and on a Boeing stabilization system linked to another crash.

"Neal stopped paying attention to his constituents," Milleron said. "When we had our terrible tragedy he just was AWOL. He didn't help us. My daughter died on a Boeing plane, and he's my representative and he didn't do anything to help me in Washington."

Milleron said her lobbying efforts

SEE CANDIDATE, PAGE A2



Attorney Nadia Milleron submitted certified signatures Thursday to run against U.S. Rep. Richard Neal, D-Springfield. (DON TREGER / THE REPUBLICAN)

NATION

Poll: 7 in 10 think Supreme Court justices put ideology over impartiality

BY THOMAS BEAUMONT
AND LINLEY SANDELS
Associated Press

A solid majority of Americans say Supreme Court justices are more likely to be guided by their own ideology rather than serving as neutral arbiters of government authority, a new poll finds, as the high court is poised to rule on major cases involving former President Donald Trump and other divisive issues.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 7 in 10 Americans think the high court's justices are more influenced by ideology, while

only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults think the justices are more likely to be guided by an independent check on other branches of government by being fair and impartial.

The poll reflects the continued erosion of confidence in the Supreme Court, which enjoyed broader trust as recently as a decade ago. It underscores the challenge faced by the nine justices — six appointed by Republican presidents and three by Democrats — of being seen as something other than just another element of Washington's hyper-partisanship.

The justices are expected to

decide soon whether Trump is immune from criminal charges over his efforts to overturn his 2020 reelection defeat, but the poll suggests that many Americans are already uneasy about the justices' ability to rule impartially.

"It's very political. There's no question about that," said Jeff Weddell, a 67-year-old automotive technology sales representative from Macomb County, in presidential swing-state Michigan.

"The court's decision-making is so polluted," said Weddell, a political independent who plans to vote for Trump

in November. "No matter what they say on President Trump's immunity, this will be politically motivated."

Confidence in the Supreme Court remains low. The poll of 1,088 adults found that 4 in 10 U.S. adults say they have hardly any confidence in the people running the Supreme Court, in line with an AP-NORC poll from October. As recently as early 2022, before the high-profile ruling that overturned the constitutional right to abortion, an AP-NORC poll found that only around one-quarter of Americans lacked confidence in the justices.

And although the Supreme Court's conservative majority has handed down some historic victories for Republican policy priorities over the past few years, rank-and-file Republicans aren't giving the justices a ringing endorsement.

It's been two years since the court's ruling on abortion rights. Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett — Trump nominees confirmed by a Republican Senate — were part of the majority that overturned the near-50-year abortion-rights precedent established in *Roe v. Wade*. This year's term, with a dozen

cases still undecided, has already seen some major rulings. Earlier in June, the Supreme Court unanimously preserved access to the pharmaceutical drug mifepristone, a medication used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. last year. The same week, the court struck down a Trump-era gun restriction, a ban on rapid-fire gun accessories known as bump stocks, a win for gun-rights advocates.

Only about half of Republicans have a great deal or a moderate amount of confidence in the court's handling of important issues.



Duggan Academy's Daniel Click (11) attempts to advance the ball to the hoop past Granby defenders Colin Murdoch (4) and Cody White (23) during a high school basketball game Feb. 15. (J. ANTHONY ROBERTS PHOTO)



Student Jada Coates listens as author Rita Williams-Garcia, who wrote "One Crazy Summer," speaks to seventh graders at Duggan Academy in Springfield. (DON TREAGER / THE REPUBLICAN)

Zone

CONTINUES FROM PAGE A1

rates now up by 37%.

Under the management of the Zone Partnership established in 2015, the city's graduation rate — rising from 62% in 2014 to 85% in 2022 — is now closing the gap with the statewide graduation rate of 90%.

Meanwhile, data shows that the percent of 11th and 12th graders completing advanced coursework increased from 27% in 2018 to 64% in 2023. And nearly 80% of the zone's schools have made substantial progress in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, data shows.

Also, over the last five years, the percent of school leaders of color has grown 160%, and educators of color have grown by 54%, better reflecting the student body's ethnic makeup.

From struggling to thriving

Governed by a private nonprofit collaborative composed of the Springfield Public Schools, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education along with the Springfield Education Association union, the empowerment zone is turning struggling students into thriving ones.

Colleen Curran, co-executive of the partnership along with Matt Brunell, noted that the zone's reach increased not too long after its start.

"Within 18 months, we added the High School of Commerce, the first nine-through-12 program in the zone," she said. Curran noted that John J. Duggan Academy, one of the original zone schools, has since expanded to include grades nine through 12.

"There's no such thing as 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to education," Curran said. "We believe that schools should have the power to make their own decisions tailored to their students' unique needs."

That school-level empowerment is a major key to the model's success, she said. Examples include decisions to create new specialized schools designed to better meet student needs. The fledgling Polytech Early College High School, within the Chestnut Middle School



Darion Mattern rides a stationary bicycle at a FitZone class during the Empowerment Zone's February Academy at M. Marcus Kiley Middle School in Springfield in 2017. The class teaches fitness while and math solving problems. The class is one of many featuring fitness and academics for 100 invited sixth and seventh graders in the school. (DAVE ROBACK / THE REPUBLICAN FILE)

building, is one of those schools.

High-speed lane to college

Discovery High School Executive Principal Deedan O'Connor said students start taking college courses along with high school requirements beginning in ninth grade.

Now in its third year, the school's 187 students have collectively earned 1,400 college credits, O'Connor said.

Under the "wall-to-wall" early college model, students take college classes through a collaboration with Worcester State University, Western New England University, and Springfield Technical and Holyoke Community colleges, where they can earn at least six credits a semester.

Students can choose to defer graduation for a fifth year, or they can apply credits earned toward a bachelor's degree, O'Connor said, adding that the money saved is a "game changer" for students from low-income families.

Discovery also has adopted a "pathways" model, in which students participate in internship experiences in one of several technology-centered majors, including cybersecurity, mechanical engineering, optics and photonics, interactive media, biotechnology and IT engineering.

What the kids say

During a recent group interview at the school, four juniors — who had all just returned to the Chestnut campus after spending the morning taking classes at local community colleges, said

they were excited about becoming the first school's first graduates, while acknowledging there were bumps along the way.

"I failed my first college course," said 17-year-old Sonny Casano, who now has almost 30 credits.

"I failed, too," said 16-year-old Yamilex Arroyo Montanez, who is now closing in on 27 college credits. She said she feels at home at Discovery and likes being part of the "tight-knit" class of 60.

"Lightning struck in sophomore year," Casano said. "That's when I got serious. I made up all my work, watched my peers, and said to myself, 'This is a big opportunity, I'd better get on board.'"

Casano said the atmosphere at Discovery started feeling more like family. "We began to take ourselves seriously because the teachers treated us like adults," he said, adding, "We're college kids now."

They can do this

Farrika Turner, Discovery co-assistant principal and co-founder of the school, said, "We learned a lot that first year. We realized the students needed more support, so we added a helpline and a learning coach who helps teach them how to be college students. That means managing their workload and handing in papers on time. They can do this," she said.

Erik Moniel, 16, learned about gaining college credits back in middle school while in a Zoom class during the pandemic. He had already selected Central High School

for ninth grade.

Now, Moniel said he hopes to earn an associate degree and get a job dealing with lasers and fiber optics by the time he graduates. Casano, also drawn to fiber optics, hopes to get a job when he completes his studies.

For Izabella Martinez, 17, the accelerated pace at the school was a selling point.

"I'm a good student, but I don't like being in school, so I liked the idea of speeding up the process," said Martinez, who now has almost all college credits and is eyeing a college major in molecular biology.

Outside-the-box education

The power of zone leaders to create smaller high school models, like Discovery, flows from the zone-wide autonomy "to think outside of the box," Curran said.

Two other zone schools — Springfield Honors Academy and Aspire Academy, both in wings of Commerce — were born from that kind of creative thinking, she said.

Honors Academy Executive Principal Grace Howard-Donlin, and Principal Dena Cooper, said students who seek admission to the school must understand that they will be required to begin taking Advanced Placement classes in their freshman year.

"The idea is not to accept honors students, but to make honors students out of them once they get here," Cooper said, noting that there is no test to seek admission. "Students don't have to be number one in their middle school classes. They just have to be willing to do the work."

"The staff helps students pace themselves while instilling in them a can-do-mentality, coupled with tough love," Howard-Donlin said, noting that the students rise to the challenge.

The Honors Academy, founded in 2021, offers 17 different AP courses, ranging from STEM disciplines like science and math to liberal arts class like English and history. Students in the school's first graduating class will have, on average, four to five AP credits when they get their diplomas, Howard-Donlin said.

Two of this year's graduates have received full scholarships — one to Boston College and the other to Oberlin. The scholarships are given to stu-

dents who are the first in their families to attend college.

Aspire Academy has an entirely different focus than the honors program. The program enrolls 66 students who had failed to complete high school.

Tiffany Carr, principal and founder of the academy, now in its first year, said the school was designed to meet the needs of "over-aged and under-credited students, who weren't succeeding in other schools."

For many of the students — currently ranging in age from 14 to 19 — poor school attendance has been a problem, Carr said. "There's not one issue stopping them from attendance," she said. "It's a bunch of little issues."

"For example, some had family obligations like bringing the younger brothers and sisters to school, making it impossible for them to get to school on time," she said, adding that the students are capable of doing the work.

Aspire uses a hybrid approach to education, she said. Teachers are available online to chat with students and help them with self-paced studies, and students can also take traditional classes. "If they need, they can attend an in-school English class," she said.

Classes are not confined to the school year, she said, so school is in session during vacation breaks and the summer months.

The school's goal is to help students "gain additional credits to put them on a career pathway," Carr said.

To accomplish that goal, Aspire has formed a partnership with Springfield Technical Community College to help students become certified nurse assistants, putting them on a course to a job when they graduate.

Visitor greatly impressed

Jonathan Leon, who was part of the visiting team from Atlanta that came to the area to learn about the model, said he left impressed with the collaborative spirit, culture and climate across the entire system.

"The empowerment zone stakeholders — from teachers unions to parents and community to elected officials — are all working together," he said. "To hear about the sacrifices each made to serve kids' interest illustrates how we can work towards positive student outcomes."

FACTS ABOUT THE ZONE

■ More than 5,000 students study in Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership schools, which is part of the Springfield Public Schools. Overall, about 23,700 students are enrolled in the district.

■ In 2015, 100 percent of empowerment students were in schools in the bottom of the 10th percentile in the state. Latest data shows 50 percent of students are in schools above the 10th percentile in the state, and nearly 25 percent of students are in schools in the 20th percentile or higher in the state.

■ Since 2017, only three schools serving grades six through 12 in the state have exited underperforming status. Two are Springfield schools: Chestnut Middle School and Duggan Academy.

■ Over the last seven years, the single highest improving school in the state was Chestnut Middle School.

■ In 2022, two zone schools have higher graduation rates than the state average: Springfield Honors Academy at 99 percent and Duggan Academy at 96 percent.

The High School of Commerce's graduation rate has increased from 47 percent in 2012 to 86 percent in 2022.

■ Empowerment schools have received \$3.5 million in federal and state grants for programming.

Sources: Springfield Public Schools; Springfield Education Zone Empowerment Partnership

Leon said there were lessons learned that could serve the city of Atlanta, such as collaboration across titles and positions to make change happen more quickly.

He said, "The culture and climate in schools was top-notch: Teachers, students and teachers engaged in the content, loving logic and structures to support student success, and ultimately leaders in buildings motivating staff and students toward success."

Work to be done

Brunell, meanwhile, pointed to the change the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership has made to the operation of schools in the city over the last decade.

"They have intentionally started and improved schools based solely on the individual needs of students and families, including launching schools for populations as diverse as newcomers and older students, as well as providing early college for all students. And they have done it all with the voices of families and educators front and center," Brunell said.

Like other schools, the empowerment zone is facing the current challenges in education, such as meeting students' mental health needs and boosting literacy skills following a decline due to the pandemic.

"The empowerment zone is not resting on its laurels, though, Curran said. "The one thing that is constant is change," she said.