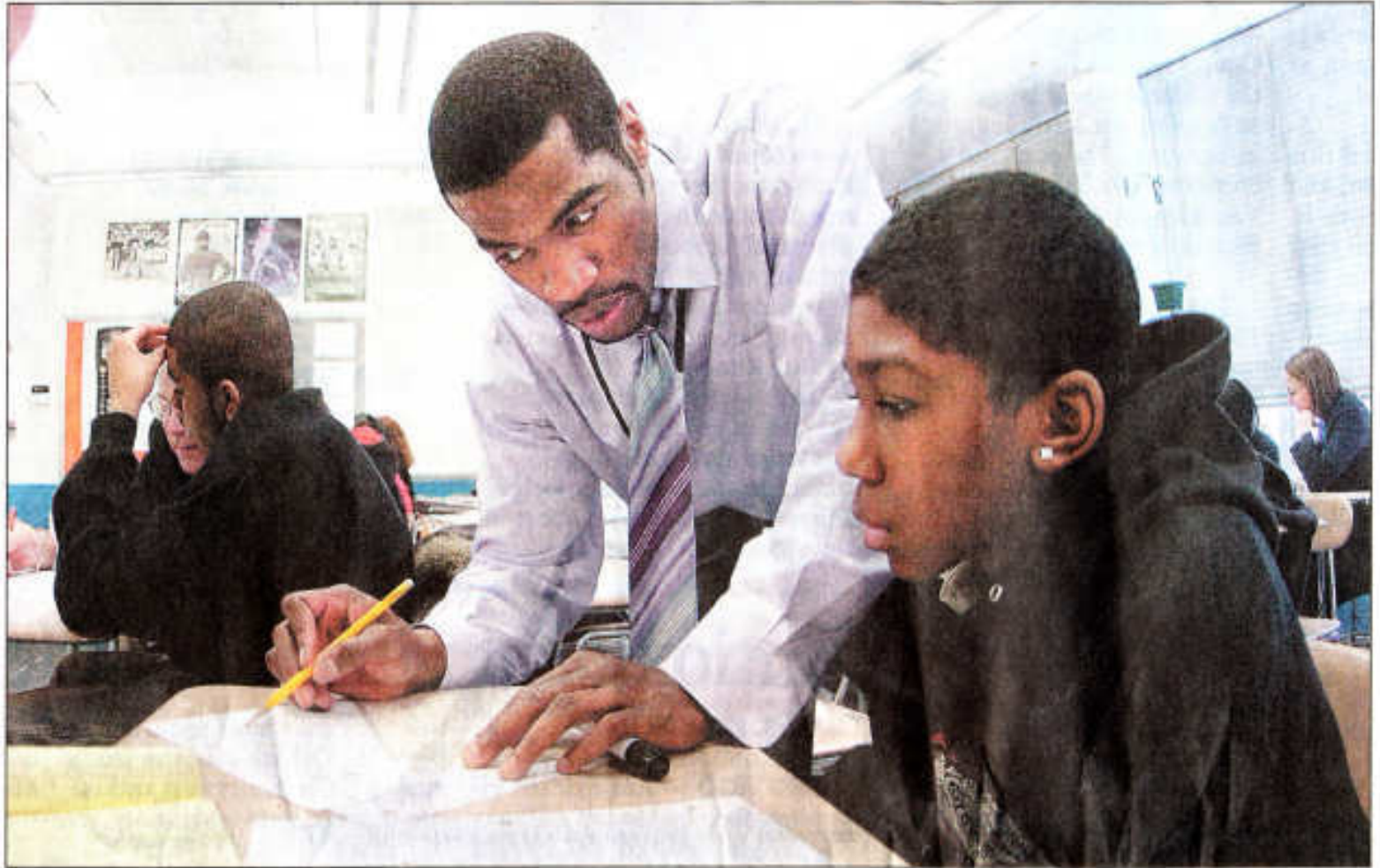


Call for help at East High answered loud and clear



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

Math teacher Arkee Allen helps eighth-grader Denzel Williams of Rochester with a problem Tuesday at East High School. Allen sent about 500 e-mails earlier this month asking for volunteers to help students one-on-one.

Hundreds begin to help eighth-graders as math tutors after teacher seeks volunteers

GARY MCLENDON

STAFF WRITER

This week has been one rarely seen at East High School.

Since Monday, more than 100 adults have answered a public call from math teacher Arkee Allen, giving part or all of their work day to tutor eighth-grade students.

Earlier this month, Allen sent about 500 e-mails asking the recipients to help a student one-on-one.

He got the names from family, friends, educators, community leaders and school board members.

"It started this whole stir ...," Allen said about the response. "All of a sudden, this thing was larger than life."

Allen, who gathered 455 pledges of help, had enough volunteers Monday to help his students and those of four other teachers, a total of 25 classes.

What's at stake

Eighth-grade math test results at East High School. The school is seeking to increase math skills before statewide tests next month.

To volunteer

Any adult wishing to volunteer in a city school is asked to fill out a request form at the City School District's central office, 131 W. Broad St. To find out more about volunteer partnerships, call (585) 262-8729.

Tutors

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The pattern was repeated Tuesday, with 49 additional volunteers. The innovative volunteer teaching drive will continue each school day through March 9 in preparation for the state's eighth-grade math exam.

Allen worked for about eight years at Irondequoit High. He's in his first year teaching in the City School District and said he called for volunteers because he wanted to make a difference in the lives of urban youths.

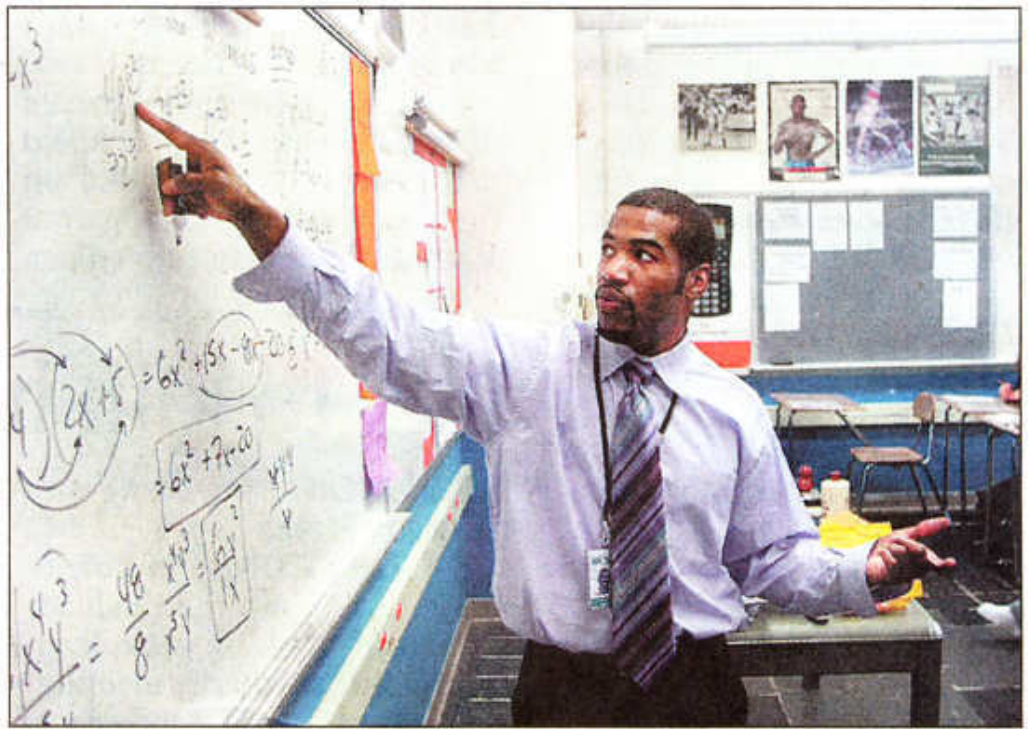
While in the West Irondequoit district, he grew used to seeing more than 90 percent of his students pass the state test. Recently, it's been just the opposite at East High School.

"I always thought there was too much of a discrepancy in the numbers between the districts. I came here thinking it was the kids, but (then I figured) I bet you it's the teachers, too. But I see it's not really the teachers. I can see a whole lot of issues with the students. The main issue is they don't believe in themselves. It's not that they are not capable."

Allen grew up in Rochester and was motivated to act after discovering only 7.5 percent of East High students passed the state exam. He made a public call for help because he doesn't want that performance repeated.

Allen has said that his goal — with the help of the volunteers — is to help at least 50 percent of the East High eighth-graders pass this year's exam.

"I told the boss, 'I need a day or two.' He said, 'Take as much as you need,'" said Lloyd Pryce, a design engineer at Xe-



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

Arkee Allen works through a math problem on the board. "The main issue is (students) don't believe in themselves," he says.

rox, after his fifth mentoring session on Monday. "Some of the students need just a little bit, just a little bit to get over the hump. It's a very good thing. They should do this all year."

Stephanie Metzler, an inclusion teacher at East, said she fought off tears when she saw the volunteers.

"I said 'Oh, my gosh. All of these people are willing to come in and help our kids.' That's not something that happens very often. There were multiple classrooms full of people."

It's too soon to know how the students will do on the state test. But, teachers, volunteers and students agreed that the sessions were a good first step.

Eighth-grade math teacher Stephanie Karns said the volunteers have "been wonderful, wonderful. I'm actually very impressed with their math skills, too."

Even the students liked it.

"It helped me. I'm already strong in math, but it's getting

stronger. The lady really listened to what I needed help with," said Devlyn Bagging, 13.

"I learned to slow down and go over it," said Danny Rodriguez, 13. "Because I kept missing stuff, like where the negatives are. It kept being the wrong answer."

"It helped me with my weak points, like negatives and polynomials," said Willie Marshall, 14.

Jaluan Erskine, 13, said he appreciated the mentoring because his teacher "has to work with 20 other kids."

Allen, school staff members, volunteers and students seemed to agree it sometimes takes a different voice to motivate kids.

"We definitely do need something where we can get a buddy school or a buddy hospital or a buddy college to come here and work with these kids," Allen said. "We can definitely use it. ... That's how we even this playing field." □

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