

## Today's 4-H, about more than farm life

### POLI-TICKS

## What is wrong with this picture?

There was a recent article in the Providence Journal (Feb. 15, 2018) by Linda Borg that should cause all citizens to shake their collective heads. Providence Superintendent of Schools Christopher Maher announced a five-year plan. His goals were as follows: To raise English proficiency from 20 to 33 percent, math from 14 to 25 percent and to cut teacher absenteeism from 58 to 54 percent. Say what?

What is heaven's name is going on with a 58 percent teacher absentee rate (defined as 11 or more days absent)? Traditionally, Providence has had the shortest school days of all the districts. No wonder the academic scores are woeful. Superintendent Maher has to cease being a pussy cat and turn into a roaring lion demanding accountability of teachers on the payroll. It should start with showing up for work!

Whether you live in Providence or not you should be outraged. All taxpayers have the "touch" put on them. More importantly, however, is the social justice issue involved here. A lot of folks care about the education of the poor. There cannot be any progress with helping them as long as the teachers are changing as often as people change their socks.

Mr. Maher noted that between 2010-2015 Providence experienced a 54 percent increase in the number of non-English speaking students. How much longer can these numbers grow without totally overwhelming the system, particularly with the lack of continuity of teachers? The schools are a glorified dumping ground. The problem is intractable as long as the mayor and education leaders ignore the elephant in the room, i.e. missing teachers.

Fortunately, I must know the "good guys" i.e. the 42 percent of teachers who do their jobs every day. Some have told me that many of the non-English students have parents that are illiterate even in their own language. Some of these children never attended school where they came from. They don't stand a chance of full integration unless at a minimum they have continuity.

How can it be that this state of absenteeism is tolerated and that the "goal" of



Arlene VIOLET



Glynn Smith, 13, of Tiverton during a break from practicing her 4-H speaking presentation, with the help of group leader Jennifer Bristol.

## (Though there's always room for animals!)

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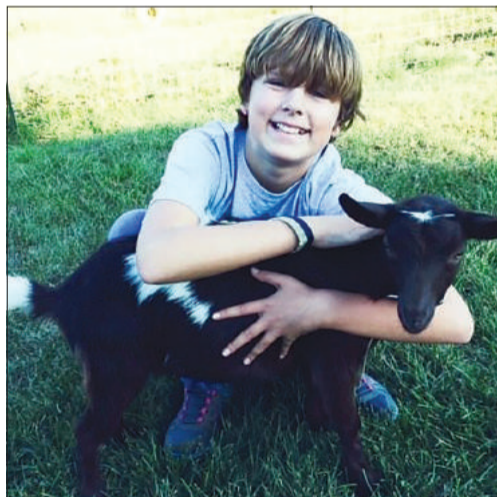
Glynn Smith, age 13 and a seventh-grade student at the Westport Montessori School of the Angels, spent time last week preparing for one of her biggest 4H projects of the year....and there was not a animal to be found. The daughter of Sonya and Steve Smith of Tiverton was practicing for her third consecutive 4H public speaking presentation in as many years, and the topic — music of the 20th century — is broad and far-reaching.

The idea that 4-H is exclusively about animal husbandry is one of the biggest misconceptions about the group, according to Jennifer Bristol, who, along with Kelly Carr-Sobriero and Kevin McCarthy, leads the 4-H "Home Insteaders," one of two Bristol-Warren affiliated 4-H clubs

"We help the kids decide what activities they want to get involved in, and if we don't know much about a particular activity, we learn along with them," said Ms. Bristol.

The Home Insteaders focus areas include cooking, home improvement and repair, leadership, caring for goats and chickens, and vegetable gardening. Re-established locally at Mount Hope Farm in 2013, the current group ranges in age from 5 to 14, and these days they meet at a private home-stead near Mt. Hope Bay in Bristol.

Most 4-H activities include an element of



Glynn, shown here in 2015, has been a member of 4-H for five years, and is now one of the group's leaders.

healthy competition, whether it's public speaking, animal husbandry, or the arts — and the most successful competitors progress from the district level (East Bay) to the States at URI (the event that Glynn is preparing for.) Success at States will earn you a trip to the Big E in Springfield, to which the Home Insteaders usually travel on "Rhode Island day."

Nationally, there are more than 7 million

young people participating in 4-H activities across the country. Founded more than a century ago, it is the nation's largest youth development organization, and though its foundation is in agriculture and homemaking, today's 4-H is just as likely to feature activities encompassing STEM learning, healthy living, or citizenship. Internal studies of 4-H'er outcomes bear out the benefits of the group, which claims their membership is four times more likely to give back to their communities and twice as likely to make healthy lifestyle choices.

For Glynn, whose confidence and delivery improve with each run-through, public speaking is more than just a challenging opportunity for personal growth — it's fun. She particularly enjoys the camaraderie of the presentations, even though public speaking ranks high on the list of fears for people three times her age. "I just really like listening to everything that everyone else is into," she said.

Glynn enjoyed a very successful competition on Saturday, March 3, at URI, bringing home a blue ribbon for her presentation on 20th-century music.

If you are interested in having your son or daughter join the Home Insteaders, they can be reached at 4hhomeinsteaders@gmail.com. For more information on 4-H, visit 4-h.org.

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