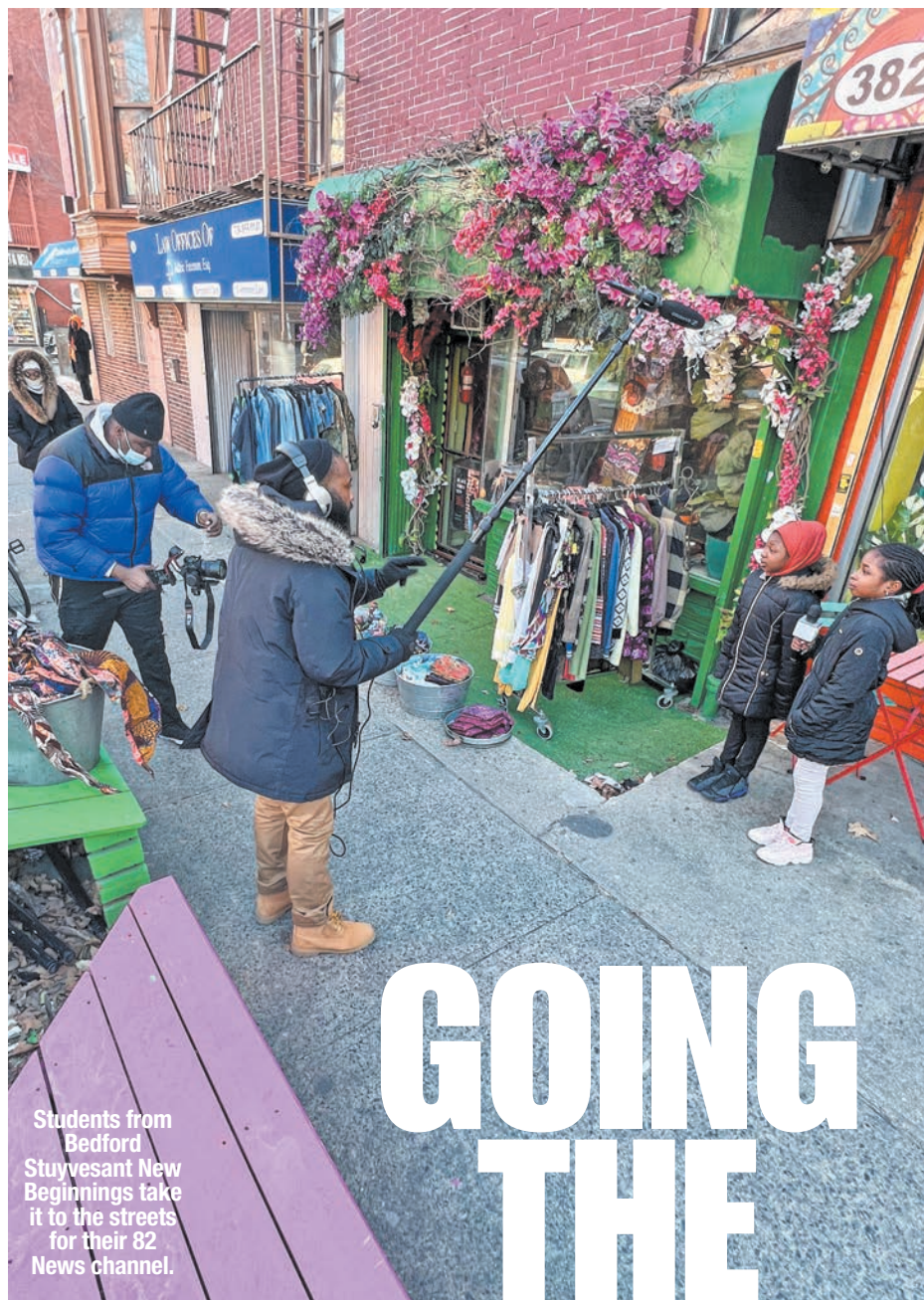


Charter Schools Directory



Students from Bedford Stuyvesant New Beginnings take it to the streets for their 82 News channel.

GOING THE

EXTRA MILE

These schools offer rewarding extracurriculars

By LAMBETH HOCHWALD

ONE perk of attending a charter school is the wide range of extracurricular activities students can tap into. The goal is to keep students engaged even after the final bell rings.

For the leadership at Bedford Stuyvesant New Beginnings Charter School in Brooklyn, it was a no-brainer to invest in professional camera equipment,

a green screen and lights to be used by the K-8th grade anchors and reporters at 82 News, BSNBCS's student-run news channel, founded in 2021.

"Some of the kids write scripts, others are doing the lighting behind the scenes and then there are the students who want to be in front of the camera," said Shanté Brickhouse, the school's community engagement and partnership manager. "We train them on how to read from the teleprompter, and

it's incredible to see how this experience brings them out of their shell."

In addition, the students get to see their work broadcast far and wide, as each episode is uploaded on the school's YouTube channel, which now boasts 51 videos and 560 subscribers.

"We also share our newscast with the entire school and our community partners if we're doing a special episode or segment in the neighborhood," Brickhouse said, pointing to a recent



newscast featuring the bodegas located near the school. "We thought a bodega appreciation segment would be a great theme, as they're always open — and they supply our kids with breakfast and snacks." What's more, most of the students at BSNBCS, founded in 2010, are invited to participate in the newscast in some way.

"We started out offering this to our middle graders, but we very quickly realized that we wanted to include all of the kids," Brickhouse said. "Now some of our staff members make appearances, too. We always say that if you want to do the news, we can find a way."

And, despite the school's full slate of after-school activities in the arts, music and sports (fencing is a new addition), 82 News is a student favorite.

"The kids are so proud when they see the broadcast come together," Brickhouse said. "Our goal is to give our kids as many opportunities as we can. It's a testament to what we do here — we never want to limit our students from pursuing their dreams."

At Valence College Preparatory Charter School in Rego Park, Queens, the 450 middle school students can sign up for a full-fledged after-school theater program, or join the school's award-winning debate team. In fact, about 30 aspiring actors per year have signed up for the extracurricular theater program since its inception in 2020, said Nicole Kone, executive director of Valence, founded in 2019.

"Our first two productions occurred over Zoom during the pandemic, and since then, we've produced four one-act plays and



The Valence Prep debate team (top) won New York City Urban Debate League's top team award last spring, while the theater troupe, the Narwhal Players, performed the musical "Descendants" last May.

three musicals," she said, adding that Valence's after-school drama students are currently in rehearsal for "Beetlejuice," officially the school's fourth musical.

Best of all, students who participate get hands-on experience with writing, direction, production, set design and costume design.

"We're running a mini-Broadway here," she said.

For Kone, the goal is to help the students develop their sense of self and take comfortable risks in a supportive environment.

"In middle school, it's hard to get up in front of your peers and sing, dance and act," she said. "But it's amazing to watch the kids come together to support each other and push through their fear, insecurity and doubt."

And for the past four years, Valence students who want to fine-tune their public speaking abilities can join the school's after-school debate team. About a dozen students represent the school in New York City Urban De-

bate League tournaments.

This experience teaches students how to collaborate with a team of fellow students as they research and analyze their own arguments about big-ticket issues of the day while under pressure.

"Debate is such a powerful academic experience, and it requires commitment as the students spend some of their weekends traveling around the city and competing against other schools," she said. "We have some incredibly bright kids who needed an outlet for their passionate desire to express themselves — this is a great option."

And while Valence offers lots of other after-school options, Kone said these two programs are extra special.

"Both provide skills and experiences that will come in handy for our students in high school, college and beyond," Kone said. "Middle schoolers are at a critical juncture. We want them to learn as much as they can in a safe space and continue having exciting new experiences."