

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

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Rally for Success celebrates diversity



CRAIG S. McKIBBEN JR./Sun-Gazette

The Mansfield University dance group "Mix-Up Step and Dance Team" performs an original dance routine during Thursday's "Rally for Success."

During her presentation, Edwards bombarded the audience with inspirational and thought-provoking quotes such as one from Mildred Barthel: "Happiness is a conscious choice, not an automatic response."

After the rally, Edwards told the Sun-Gazette that one of her goals in working with the district will be to understand what level of educational preparation parents provide their children at home and to identify what happens to students during the 17 hours they are not in school.

"No Child Left Behind put a lot of accountability on teachers ... now we need to hold parents accountable," she said. "I think it's time we negotiate with families. School is not a babysitting service. Parents need to participate."

Just as doctors gather family histories and lawyers take depositions, educators need to know a child's literacy history and life development if a well-rounded education is to be provided, Edwards said.

"This is not 'Little House on the Prairie' where everybody knows everybody. It's important for our practice to collect data," she said. "Every parent has a story to tell."

Edwards believes that schools should schedule parental involvement time at the beginning of the school year, just as football games, swim meets and cheerleading practices are scheduled.

Parents should schedule times to focus on literacy with their children. If a student's parents can't read, the district needs to find a mentor for the child who can, she said.

"There is a close correlation between illiteracy and crime," Edwards said. "And it costs more money to send someone to the state pen than to Penn State."

David Stone, school board president, said the board believes students, parents, dis-



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Dr. Patricia Edwards serves as a consultant to the Williamsport Area School District.

trict personnel and the community all share responsibility for education.

Several community organizations were honored with letters of recognition for their after-school programs that provide safe places for district students.

Loni Gamble, executive director of CAPP, the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, took time to honor several students from area colleges who mentor district children in his program.

Rally performers included the Williamsport Area High School Cheerleaders, the Mix-Up Step and Dance Team and the Zodiac Stance Step and Dance teams from Mansfield University, the Uptown Music Collective and the CAPP Showcase choir.

The evening ended with the giveaway of numerous gifts from area merchants, including five autographed footballs from Philadelphia quarterback Donovan McNabb.

"All of us here tonight want our students to be successful," Kathy Eshelman, Jackson Elementary School principal and master of ceremonies for the rally, said. "Let's take the energy that was created this evening and use it to rally for the success of all students."