

## A living legend, Geraldine Johnson, awes students

Linda Conner Lambeck, Staff Writer

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BRIDGEPORT -- Often when [Geraldine W. Johnson](#) comes to the school named after her students passing by in the halls will turn around to stare and wave.

Sometimes there is a hug.

"When that happens I know their teacher has said 'That's Mrs. Johnson,'" said the 92-year-old Johnson in a whisper from the two-year-old school's library Friday before the start of a History Makers Day assembly.

A program designed to bring young people face to face with African-Americans who have made history, Johnson seemed to relish the role of living legend, answering questions and telling the pre-K through eighth grade school's upper classmen that teaching seventh and eighth grade was always her favorite.

A lifelong Bridgeport resident Johnson, was the city's first African-American school superintendent, a position she held from 1969 to 1976. She later served as an Interim Superintendent of Fairfield schools and Associate Dean of [Fairfield University](#). In retirement, she has served in many roles, including director of the [Council on Adolescent Pregnancy](#), and has received honorary doctorate from [Sacred Heart University](#), Fairfield University, and [University of Bridgeport](#).

The [Board of Education](#) broke with tradition in 2008 when it decided to name the new school being built on the corner of North and Lexington Avenues after someone who was alive. Johnson comes to the school as often as someone will pick her up from her home at 3030 Park Ave. and bring her there. Next week she will be there to do a read aloud. Friday was about telling students the secrets to her success.

"I am absolutely certain that if students work hard and focus on their education not only will they succeed this year and the rest of their lives, but America will succeed too," said Johnson. As a child growing up on the city's East End, Johnson was the third of seven children. Her idea of fun was playing hopscotch, and especially school.

Destiny Douglas, 12, asked if it was hard to become a teacher. Johnson told her about commuting by train every day to the [New Haven Teachers College](#) -- now [Southern Connecticut State University](#) -- to get a degree and competing for the job with others. Destiny confided her dream is to become a singer.

Johnson came to the program with [Barbara Clemons](#), who was one of her seventh students at [McKinley School](#) in 1949. From the front row in the cafeteria, Clemons called Johnson a strict teacher, in a very kind way.

Denajha Bogle asked Johnson why she decided to stay in Bridgeport.

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Johnson said for her, its always been a good place to be.

Malaysia Douglas asked what the "W" stood for. Johnson told them Whiting, her mother's maiden name.

"How hard was it to achieve your goals?" asked [Gabriella Moss](#), a seventh- grader.

Johnson said it wasn't easy to go to school or to college. "Yes it's hard ... but there are things you have to do to achieve whatever it is you want to do. I would say its worth the journey."

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