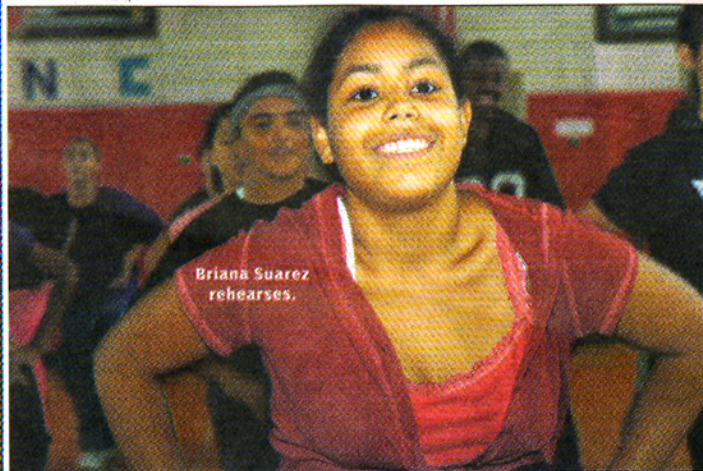
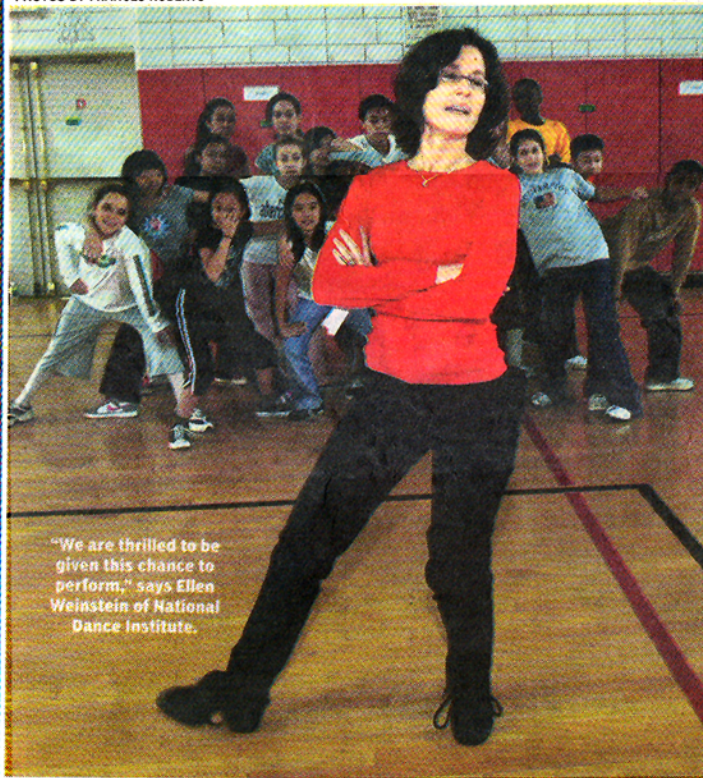


## MACY'S THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE



Briana Suarez rehearses.

PHOTOS BY FRANCES ROBERTS



"We are thrilled to be given this chance to perform," says Ellen Weinstein of National Dance Institute.

Dance  
Dance  
Dance

By Jane Ridley



John Hines

With his wide smile, limitless energy and stellar sense of rhythm, John Hines is bound to stand out when he performs with the New York-based National Dance Institute during Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The lively 15-year-old is so gifted, it's remarkable to think that he is profoundly deaf. "I won't let my handicap get the best of me," says John, who has been with the group since he was 8 and would love to become a professional backup dancer for one of his favorite hip-hop stars, Missy Elliott.

"I'm really excited to be in the parade, because it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," he says.

John is set to join 99 other youngsters from the institute's elite celebration team, who were recruited mostly from public schools within the five boroughs.

The not-for-profit teaching organization holds weekly dance sessions in selected establishments to foster kids' interests in music and movement.

The handpicked team — the kids are between 9 and 15 years old — will march along the parade route before performing its meticulously choreographed Appalachian clog dance outside Macy's in Herald Square.

It's an exhausting routine that will be televised around 11 a.m. on WNBC/Ch. 4 for an expected audience of more than 50 million people.

"It's the biggest-ever audience imaginable, so we are thrilled to be given this chance to perform," says Ellen Weinstein, artistic director of the National Dance Institute.

"We chose the Appalachian clog dance because it is a wonderful mixture of Irish stepdancing and African and Native American

Indian rhythms," Weinstein adds. "It's perfect for Thanksgiving and New York City because of the melting pot [here]."

The children have been practicing the high-energy routine for the past seven weeks.

"It's worth every minute, because it's an honor to be part of this huge event," says Alison Synder, 11, of Manhattan. "I'll be wearing really high pigtales so my friends and family will be able to recognize me on the TV."

"I feel pretty happy to be included because I love dancing," says Ben Korman, 10, of Manhattan. "Everyone will be watching us on TV, and I really can't wait for Thanksgiving Day."

It will be a long day for the kids, who will meet outside the American Museum of Natural History at 6:30 a.m. and won't leave the parade until the middle of the day.

"They don't mind getting up so early at all," says a laughing Angel Gardner, the institute's director of communications.

"It's great because the whole purpose of our program is to build kids' confidence and commitment, and it's so rewarding for us to see their excitement and enthusiasm in this Thanksgiving Day project."



Youngsters from the National Dance Institute rehearse for their parade performance — the Appalachian clog dance — at Public School 130 in Chinatown.

Andrea Ting, 11, of downtown Manhattan, practices routines.

