

PMSD CONNECT ON

Our Mission: To Prepare All Students for Tomorrow's Challenges and Opportunities

2023-24: Issue 2

District Music Education Program receives 8th national recognition

Pocono Mountain School District (PMSD) was honored with its eighth consecutive Best Communities for Music Education designation from The NAMM Foundation for the district's outstanding commitment to music education.

To qualify for the annual Best Communities designation, Pocono Mountain SD answered detailed questions about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program and community music-making programs.

Responses were verified with school officials and reviewed by The Music Research Institute at the University of Kansas.

"I am extremely proud of Pocono Mountain School District's K to 12 music programs," said Dr. Elizabeth Robison, Superintendent of Schools. "Our K-12 Music and Fine Arts programs continue to thrive thanks to the hard work and dedication of our entire music education team, and the support of our parents, Board of Education, Administrators, community



Students from the Pocono Mountain East and West Junior High Schools participated in the Marywood Honors Band Festival in Scranton, Pa., in December. The Festival culminated with a public concert showcasing the talented young musicians. Honors Band Festival student musicians were as follows: (East Junior High School) William Crosby, Hayden Christman, Benjamin Farda, Harmony Plywaczewski, Melody Plywaczewski, and Jasper Shelton; and (West Junior High School) Andrew DeVita, Justin Carter, Mya Aragona-Young, and Mia Gilmore. Andrew DeVita (West) placed first overall on French Horn, Hayden Christman (East) placed first overall in Percussion, and Benjamin Farda (East) placed first overall on Tuba. In addition, Justin Carter (West) and Melody Plywaczewski (East) made the Top Ensemble at the Festival.

partners, and booster clubs. Most importantly, our students are excelling in these programs."

Pocono Mountain SD was one of 830 school districts out of 13,515 across the

nation to receive the Best Community for Music Education recognition, which puts the district's program in the top 6% across the country.

"It is an incredible honor to have our

K-12 Music and Fine Arts program recognized by NAMM as one of the best," said Dr. Catherine Sweeney, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum. "While many school districts have reduced their Music and Fine Arts offerings, we continue to improve and expand these opportunities for our students. Our team of music educators and administrators developed a topnotch Music and Fine Arts curriculum to help our students grow and achieve artistically and academically."

Research into music education continues to demonstrate educational/cognitive and social skill benefits for children who make music shows: After two years of music education, researchers found that participants showed more substantial improvements in how the brain processes speech and reading scores than their less-involved peers and that students who are involved in music are not only more likely to graduate high school but also to attend college as well.

In addition, everyday listening skills

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PMSD's Visual Arts Program recognized as Outstanding

The Pennsylvania Art Education Association (PAEA) recently recognized Pocono Mountain School District (PMSD) for its commitment to visual arts education with the endorsement of Outstanding Visual Arts Community 2023, the district's 3rd consecutive award.

PAEA empowers its members to transform their practices, students, colleagues, and communities to build a strong art education culture and citizenry.

Districts receiving this endorsement demonstrate the importance of their visual arts programs with:

- **Rigorous and Inclusive Programs:** Arts programs demonstrate rigor using standards based curricula taught at every level by highly qualified and certified art educators.
- **Highly Accessible Programs:** Arts programs are offered to all students at every level of education with a sustainable budget for the visual arts.
- **Highly Visible Programs:** Schools and districts identify their programmatic accomplishments, curriculum for all levels, art staff, mission statements, and arts events using their school websites and social media.



Clear Run Elementary Center students from Mrs. Shelly Grillo's Art Class show off their entries for the Kindness Poster Contest. Pocono Mountain School District offers students in grades K-12 a nationally recognized related-arts curriculum and programming to help students develop their artistic talents and thrive.

Students in PMSD celebrate the importance of a well-rounded education with opportunities to engage in arts education courses at all grade levels, K-12. "The term 'well-rounded education' means courses,

activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience." (ESSA, Title VIII, Section 8002)

These opportunities prepare students for robust futures in the creative industries as well as prepare them for skills needed across all aspects of life such as problem-solving, flexible mindsets, team and collaboration skills, creativity, and more. These are the cognitive skills young people will need to find their place in a globally competitive workforce.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector is a \$699 billion industry, which represents 4.3% of the nation's GDP—a larger

See VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM...Page 3

From the Superintendent...

By Dr. Elizabeth Robison
Superintendent of Schools

Educating students on the importance of making positive contributions in their community is about more than just classroom instruction and civics curriculum.

Across the district students are experiencing the excitement and positive feelings that come from taking what they learn in their civics classes and applying those skills to making a difference for others in their schools, in the surrounding community and across the nation, sometimes even around the world.

Pocono Mountain School District's (PMSD) passion for making a difference, whether it's through volunteerism, fundraising or community service, starts at the top and can be seen at every level throughout the school district.

I am very proud of our district's philanthropic efforts and how much our schools do to help others throughout the school year.

Each year, the district holds several districtwide dress-down days for local non-profit organizations that need our support to continue their important work of helping others, especially families and children across Monroe County.

To date this school year, we have conducted two districtwide dress-down days, and we have two more planned. Our widely successful dress down days for the Pocono Mountains United Way and Toys for Tots have already taken place.

Pocono Mountains United Way: PMSD raised \$11,629.88 in October to support programs for children and families sponsored by the United Way. As with many of the non-profits efforts the district supports, our assistance to the United Way went beyond the districtwide dress down day fundraiser to include school-organized activities to raise additional funds for the United Way. Schools organized additional activities to raise funds in creative ways.

Thanks to the efforts of our entire PMSD school community, we were able to increase our donation to the United Way by more than \$2,000 from the previous year. The funds were raised through the annual employee contribution campaign, the dress-down day, and school fundraisers such as Smencil sales, coin collections, other fun student activities, the Panther



Dr. Elizabeth Robison, Superintendent of Schools, along with students and staff from Tobyhanna Elementary Center presented a check from the district for \$11,629.88 to the Pocono Mountains United Way. Pocono Mountain School District has partnered with the Pocono Mountains United Way for more than 35 years.

Pounce, etc.

It's amazing to see the energy and excitement our students and staff generate through their commitment to helping others. That energy and excitement has remained strong throughout the more than 35 years the district has been supporting the United Way.

Monroe County Toys for Tots: PMSD raised more than \$4,117.98 in November for the Monroe County Toys for Tots program. The district has been a partner with the Monroe County Chapter of the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation for more than 20 years.

Each year the district holds a districtwide toy drive in addition to the districtwide dress down day. In addition, PMSD annually hosts the toy sorting and distribution event each year that ensure thousands of children in Monroe County receive toys for the holidays.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Catherine Sweeney, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction who acts as the district's liaison for Toys for Tots, we have expanded our support of Toys for Tots even more and now host a Karate Tournament fundraiser that this year raised \$8,000 for Monroe County Toys for Tots.

Pocono Mountain's efforts contributed to 4,135 Monroe County children, many of them families from PMSD, received 18,423 toys, stocking stuffers, books, and crafts for the 2023 holiday season. Our district's efforts have also helped make the Monroe County Toys for Tots program the best

in the nation.

When our students, faculty, staff, administrators and schools aren't supporting the district-wide fundraisers and community service efforts, they are busy supporting other causes near and dear to their hearts.

Our schools are huge supporters of our local food pantries. In addition to their pre-planned food drives throughout the school year, the local food pantries reach out to our schools whenever their supplies are running low on specific items that families need. At any time throughout the school year, our schools are called upon to organize cereal, pasta, or canned food drives to help fill food pantry shelves.

All of our schools, parents, students, PTOs, faculty, staff and administrators deserve a big round of applause for their efforts at making a positive difference in the lives of others in our community.

I wanted to highlight two causes that our high school students are passionate about and have been supporting for many years.

East High School Mini-THON: Pocono Mountain East High School (EHS) Student Government Association will hold its 10th Mini-THON fundraiser from April 19th at 7 p.m. to April 20th at 7 a.m. The students' goal this year is to raise \$17,500 through this one event. Over the past nine mini-THONS, EHS has raised more than \$100,034 to donate to Four Diamonds.

"The Four Diamonds mission is to conquer childhood cancer by assisting children and their families through

superior care, comprehensive support and innovative research," (from the Four Diamonds website at <https://www.fourdiamonds.org/how-we-help/child-life-specialists-pediatric-oncology/>).

West High School Make-A-Wish: This year will be Pocono Mountain West High School's (WHS) 20th year supporting the Make-A-Wish Foundation by raising money to grant the wishes of children with cancer. Student Council runs the Make-A-Wish fundraising efforts and grand wish reveals.

Over the past 19 years, WHS has raised more than \$60,000 for Make-A-Wish and has granted almost 14 wishes of children with cancer. WHS's next Make-A-Wish fundraiser is scheduled from February 28 to March 27.

These are just two examples of the ongoing support our schools provide to non-profits and community members in need.

As I mentioned earlier, PMSD still has two districtwide dress-down days to complete this year for worthy causes.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeastern PA: On Friday, February 23, 2024, PMSD will hold its districtwide dress-down day for Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Northeastern PA. The donations collected will be donated at BBBS's 2024 Bowl for KIDS' SAKE fundraiser, which will take place at five locations throughout April, the nearest being Skyland in East Stroudsburg on April 6, 2024.

Thanks to efforts of Dr. Mark Wade, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, a former Big Brother, and member of the Governing Board of BBBS of Northeastern PA, the district's support of BBBS remains strong. PMSD will have the dress-down day donations check ready for Dr. Wade to present to BBBS at Bowl for KIDS' Sake.

Monroe County Relay for Life: On Friday, May 10, 2024, PMSD will hold its districtwide dress-down day for the Monroe County Relay for Life.

In addition to the many years of hosting Relay for Life events on our school campuses and teams from our schools participating in the events, this year PMSD will hold its first districtwide dress down day to raise additional funds for the Monroe County Relay for Life.

Civic responsibility can take many forms. I am extremely proud how our schools continue to focus so much of their efforts on the civic responsibility of helping others and making a difference throughout our school community.

PMSD Board welcomes new director, elects officers

The Pocono Mountain School District (PMSD) Board of Education welcomed a new school board director at its reorganization meeting on December 6, 2023.

Ms. Patricia (Patty) Rinehimer was elected to serve on the school board for Region 2. Mr. Ronnie Byrd, Region 3; Mr. Michael Stern, Region 3; and Mr. Stephen Watto, Region 1 were reelected to continue serving on the school board. The Honorable Judge Jonathan Mark, Monroe County Court of Common Pleas, was present to swear in the newly-elected directors prior to the start of the reorganization meeting.

Each year school boards in Pennsylvania are required to hold a reorganization meeting to elect the board's president and vice president and to appoint board directors to various important committees.

The PMSD Board of Education reelected Mrs. Marion Pyzik, Region 2, as the board president for a third consecutive year. Mr. Nathan Strunk, Region 2, was reelected as the vice president for a second consecutive 1-year term by the majority of the



Meet the Pocono Mountain School District Board of Education: (Row 1, left to right) Ronnie Byrd, Marion Pyzik – President, Nathan Strunk – Vice President, and Michael Stern. (Row 2, left to right) Stephen Watto, Chris Grape-Garvey, Patty Rinehimer, Anna Lopez, and Bert Rinehimer.

board.

Ms. Rinehimer, Region 2, will serve as PMSD's representative to the Monroe Career and Technical Institute (MCTI) Joint Operating Committee (JOC) for a three-year term. The other school board directors (Mr. Byrd, Ms. Anna Lopez, Mrs. Pyzik, Mr. Bert Rinehimer, Mr. Stern, and Mr. Strunk) will serve as alternate representatives to the JOC. Ms. Christina Grape-Garvey and Mr.

Watto presently serve on the JOC.

Mr. Strunk was also appointed as the PSBA Liaison to the Pennsylvania School Board Association to represent PMSD as a legislative representative to keep the board informed of developments in the PA General Assembly on educational issues impacting schools.

The board also approved its meeting schedule for 2024. Upcoming board

meetings are as follows:

- February 7, 2024
- February 21, 2024
- March 6, 2024
- March 20, 2024
- April 3, 2024
- April 17, 2024
- May 1, 2024
- May 15, 2024
- June 5, 2024
- June 26, 2024
- July 10, 2024
- August 21, 2024
- September 18, 2024
- October 2, 2024
- October 16, 2024
- November 6, 2024
- November 20, 2024
- December 4, 2024
- December 18, 2024

School Board meetings are held at 7 p.m. in the district Administration Building on the Swiftwater Campus. Community members may attend meetings in person or virtually by registering through the link available on the district website at www.pmsd.org.

THE MONROE COUNTY CHILDREN'S ROUNDTABLE PRESENTS:

COMMUNITY NIGHT

APRIL 30TH 2024

WE PUT THE
UNITY
IN
COMMUNITY



**FREE
ADMISSION**
6-8PM
NORTHAMPTON
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MONROE CAMPUS
POCONO HALL

BLOOD MOBILE
STUDENT ART CONTEST
SCAVENGER HUNT
KIDS INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES
RESOURCES FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Music Program earned accolades...Continued from Page 1

are stronger in musically trained children than in those without music training.

Significantly, listening skills are closely tied to the ability to: perceive speech in a noisy background, pay attention, and keep sounds in memory. Later in life, individuals who took music lessons as children show stronger neural processing of sound: young adults and even older adults who have not played an instrument for up to 50 years show enhanced neural processing compared to their peers. Not to mention, social

benefits include conflict resolution, teamwork skills, and how to give and receive constructive criticism.

About The NAMM Foundation

The NAMM Foundation is a nonprofit supported in part by the National Association of Music Merchants and its approximately 10,300 members around the world.

The foundation advances active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs.

Visual Arts Program is Outstanding...Continued from Page 1

share of the economy than transportation and agriculture. The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$135 billion in economic activity annually (spending by organizations and their audiences), supports 4.1 million jobs, and generates \$22.3 billion in government revenue (Americans for the Arts, 2015).

Technology innovations such as digital literacy, data analytics, and visualization will simply increase the importance of visual and spatial learning skills.

The Pennsylvania Art Education Association commends PMSD for its active role in providing arts education opportunities for your students and receiving the endorsement of



East High School (EHS) National Art Honor Society students won the "Fan Favorite" in the PennDot Paint the Plow contest designed to promote winter driving safety. EHS Art Teacher, Dawn Hallenbeck, and East Junior HS STEAM Teacher, MaryKay Citera, are the co-advisors of the EHS National Art Honor Society.

Outstanding Visual Arts Community 2023. Congratulations!

Clear Run Elementary Center is laying a foundation for the future

By Mrs. Heidi Donohue,
Principal
Dr. Jessica Loverdi, Principal
Clear Run Elementary Center

Clear Run Elementary Center (CREC) is trying to do its part to help solve the teacher shortage.

CREC teachers, Denise Cummings and Arlene Fette, have introduced a new club this year to second grade students. It is called the Future Teachers Club. Students who signed up for the club are interested in becoming teachers.

The 32 students who participate in this club were chosen, based upon teacher recommendation, attendance, and faithfully following the school motto – Caring Kids at CREC are Respectful, Responsible, and Trustworthy. In other words, students must be role models among their peers.

Members of the club assist teachers with cutting and preparing materials for teaching. Prior to the holidays, students helped set up Auntie Claus's Closet, which included wrapping gifts as props.

They decorated trees throughout the building, prepared gift bags for teachers'



Clear Run Elementary Center (CREC) forms new Future Teachers Club for students who have already expressed an interest in becoming teachers. The goal of the club is to introduce students to the teaching profession.

students, and organized scarves for our building-wide giveaway.

Right now, they are in the process of designing a bulletin board in the cafeteria. Later this year, they will work with younger students on skills like rhyming, letter/letter sound identification, counting, math facts, etc.

Students have their own clipboards, wear special lanyards, and, at the

beginning of each session, come together for a "faculty meeting."

The goal of the Future Teachers Club is to introduce children to the teaching profession.

As Mrs. Cummings shared, "The activities and special projects we plan let them get a feel for all of the many things teachers do, in addition to teaching."



Students help organize donated scarves for building-wide give away during the holiday season at CREC.



Future Teacher Club students decorate holiday trees to spread joy throughout their school. The club encourages students to pursue their dreams of becoming a teacher one day.

PMSD Cyber Program: Always Open for Learning and Playing

By Ms. Nora Wandalowski, Director
PMSD Cyber Program

Working closely with the secondary teaching staff, Pocono Mountain School District (PMSD) Cyber Program Director Nora Wandalowski was able to successfully submit and have approved the core courses in ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies to be used in the NCAA initial-eligibility certification process for student-athletes.

So, what does having NCAA approved courses in PMSD Cyber Program really mean for student-athletes?

Students who are enrolled in the Pocono Mountain Cyber Program and are interested in competing in college sports will be able to select Pocono Mountain Cyber Program core courses from the list of requirements in the NCAA Eligibility Center.

In order to meet amateurism standards and demonstrate academic preparedness, an athlete must complete all core courses and meet all Pocono Mountain School District graduation requirements.

One student-athlete that is currently taking advantage of these NCAA approved courses is Pocono Mountain West Panther basketball player, Sophomore Kyon "KJ" Coles. KJ wears #1 and is working diligently both on and off the court to live up to that number. Regularly being named to the honor roll while taking NCAA approved courses in English Language Arts, Geometry, Civics, Biology and Psychology, KJ is checking off requirements for Pocono Mountain Graduation, Pennsylvania Graduation Pathways, and the NCAA.



(All Photos) Students and families had a wonderful time at the annual PMSD Cyber Program Fall Festival. The Cyber program offers students activities throughout the school year to attend in-person, so they can connect with other students and Cyber Program families and their teachers.

The PMSD Cyber Program has highly-qualified teachers dedicated to providing daily, live instruction and support as students work on Imagine Edgenuity content. Many of these teachers are also coaches throughout the district, both for East and West Athletics.

PMSD Cyber Program teachers and coaches understand the need for a flexible curriculum and schedule to support all students; and now with all Pocono Mountain Cyber Program core courses cleared and approved for NCAA eligibility our program is Always Open for Playing!



Swiftwater Intermediate SGA making a difference

By Ms. Kristine Kunsman, Principal
Mr. Daniel Higgins,
Assistant Principal
Swiftwater Intermediate School

The Student Government Association at Swiftwater Intermediate School has been very busy with fundraising, honoring our veterans and community service opportunities.

United Way Fundraiser

Each year the Pocono Mountain School District assists the United Way with their fundraising campaign. The United Way helps many organizations which help the families of Pocono Mountain. This year the Swiftwater Intermediate School SGA sold Smencils, with all profits going to the United Way.

Smencils are graphite pencils made from 100% recycled paper. They come in very fun scents that students enjoy. Each Smencil is \$1.00. Students purchased the Smencils during lunch time. The SGA raised \$720.00 for the United Way.

Honoring Veterans

On Thursday, November 9, 2023, Swiftwater Intermediate School recognized veterans while educating students about military service. Swiftwater Intermediate School students in grades 5 and 6 participated in stations. They were able to learn about jobs in the military and various pieces of military equipment.

The boot camp stations were run by some veterans, including ARMY SGM(R) Kevin Bittenbender, Derek Wolford-USMC GySgt, Donald Freeman-TSgt USAF and one of our SIS parents, Michael Tumminelli, SFC US ARMY. The students were also taught about foods served in the military. Grade 6 teacher, Mrs. Kim Cox directed this station with the help of Ryan Packard-USMC SSgt. Students were encouraged to dress in patriotic clothing. Next year, Swiftwater Intermediate School hopes to expand this program for all of our students.

Annual Food Drive

Led by the students of the SGA, Swiftwater Intermediate School held their annual food drive on Friday, December 1, 2023. Students and staff were encouraged to dress down and bring in food for a holiday basket. Once the food was collected the SGA created food baskets to help families have a holiday dinner.

The two classes from each grade level that collected the most canned food received a popcorn party. Eighteen food baskets were prepared and provided to area families, with over 500 additional non-perishable items going to a local food pantry. On Friday, November 17, 2023 staff and students at Swiftwater Intermediate School were once again encouraged to dress down, this time to support the Toys for Tots program. The SGA collected the toys and got them ready for pick-up. Swiftwater Intermediate School was able to collect over 200 toys to help children have a happy holiday season.

Anti-Bullying

Swiftwater Intermediate School students celebrated Anti-bullying during the week of November 13th – 17th. Each Day represented a different theme to stop



Swiftwater Intermediate School Teacher Mrs. Cox explains to students the contents of an MRE, Meal-Ready-to-Eat meal during the Veteran's Day program.

bullying and utilizing prevention techniques.

Students started the week by filling out slips to tell how they would fill someone's bucket by showing kindness to them. They placed their slips in a large bucket in the lobby for a chance to be chosen to win a pencil and Class DOJO points.

Students and staff participated in various dress days during the week to show their support against bullying. They wore crazy socks to "Sock it to Bullying", spirit wear to show that "We're All on the Same Team", boots to "Stomp out Bullying", gym attire to "Take an Active Stance Against Bullying", and hats to "Put a Lid on Bullying". Students were also reminded to ask the adults during their day for help if needed.

Health & Wellness

The Weller Center partnered with Swiftwater Intermediate School to provide educational programs to students that target concepts and skill development that are important in developing a healthy lifestyle.

Students in grades 5 and 6 participated in the Vaping 101 Program, an introduction to the dangers of vaping and the associated health risks. Students learned about the harmful short and long-term effects of vaping, including how vaping can impact academic and physical performance.

Fourth grade student's presentation was Bully Busters, an interactive anti-bullying presentation in which students learned how to recognize, prevent and respond to different forms of bullying. This complemented the school-wide anti-bullying week.

Coding

The Coding Club is an extracurricular activity run by Mr. Tom Eisler. Meetings are held on Wednesday and Thursday mornings until the end of April.

The Coding Club provides fifth and sixth grade students with the opportunity to explore computer science concepts and develop basic programming skills and knowledge. Students accomplish this by working at their own pace through a series of sequential modules.

The modules incorporate the use of a block coding program called Scratch. Scratch was developed to introduce young learners to the concepts of programming. Throughout the program students are afforded the opportunity to collaborate and share



Students Ella Leonard, Renesmee Cruz and Jonathan Garcia wear boots to school to stomp out bullying during SIS anti-bullying week.

ideas with peers.

Learning how to code benefits students in a variety of ways. It helps students develop logical thinking skills, computational skills, problem solving skills, communication skills, creative thinking skills and digital literacy.

Chirping Cardinals

The Swiftwater Intermediate School Chirping Cardinals are an extracurricular chorus group run by Mr. Miles Orfanella and Mr. Brendan Michels.

It is a club open to any current chorus members in 5th or 6th grade. They meet once a week before school at 7:30 am and it runs until the end of May. The purpose of the club is to continue to build students' foundation of musical knowledge while also providing more musical and performance opportunities for these students. As of November, the students in Chirping Cardinals have learned, rehearsed and recorded performances of Monster Mash to be shared on the morning announcements, as well as a collection of patriotic music for Veteran's Day.

In December, these students performed live in the community at the Pocono Township Tree Lighting Ceremony, the Mount Pocono Tree Lighting Ceremony and onstage at the SIS Winter Concert.

TEC provides well-rounded education for students

By **Dr. John Kevra, Principal**
Ms. Jessica Grebb,
Assistant Principal
Tobyhanna Elementary Center

When most of us consider what occurs inside an elementary school, we probably remember our own experiences of learning to read, memorizing basic math facts, or coloring maps of foreign countries.

Of course, these things are still very much integral parts of the important events at Tobyhanna Elementary Center. However, the educational experiences our students receive at Tobyhanna Elementary Center go far beyond the traditional subjects. We also instill an appreciation of art and music through classes, chorus, and instrumental band lessons. Furthermore, our students learn the importance of a fit and strong physical body in our gym and health classes, as well as, extracurricular activities such as Field Day and Athletic Club.

Future television and stage stars start their budding careers participating in our daily televised morning announcements and the ever-popular crowd-pleasing year-end play.

For students who like to improve their math and science skills, we also offer a Robotics Club, a Math Club and an Imagine Math Club.

Additionally, budding professional educators can experience first hand what it is truly like to be a teacher if they are members of the Future Teachers of America Club. Finally, aspiring leaders of industry and our country are honing in on the necessary skills as members of the Student Government.

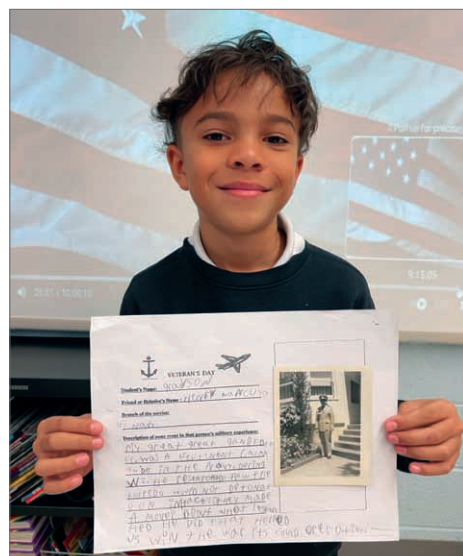
At Tobyhanna Elementary Center we feel that an education isn't complete without instilling a strong sense of community and patriotism. We realize that goal in numerous ways. For example, we sing the Star-Spangled Banner and pledge allegiance to our flag every morning. Additionally, students visit the Clymer Library, take field trips to local nature preserves such as the Cranberry Bog, and participate in numerous area charities such as Toys for Tots and the local United Way campaign.

All of these clubs and events are very important to us at Tobyhanna Elementary Center but one of the very most important events every year is our commemoration of Veterans Day.

Veterans Day is everyone's opportunity to show our appreciation



Tobyhanna Elementary School students show their appreciation for our brave Veterans on Veterans' Day.



3rd grader Grayson Godwin

for the personal sacrifices made by anyone who is, or was, a member of the armed forces. More importantly, as an elementary school, it is also our chance to demonstrate and teach that appreciation to our young students. Therefore, each grade level is required to commemorate Veterans Day with age appropriate learning activities and projects.

These requirements must encourage understanding and gratitude for the tremendous contributions made by the men and women who serve in the various branches of the armed forces. For example, our younger students read books about soldiers, the Star-Spangled Banner, and what it means to be a hero.

They also completed an acrostic poem with the word veteran and coloring sheets of soldiers. Finally, they watched



3rd grader Sophia Sargent

videos of the changing of the guard at the tomb of the unknown soldier. Our older students wrote letters and sent cards to students' family members who are veterans. They watched the movie, Taking Chance, about a fallen soldier's trip home and wrote a reflection paper about their feelings. The older students also listened to an actual veteran read a prerecorded patriotic story utilizing a website, United Through Reading. An activity that the entire school shared is called a Remembrance Table.

A Remembrance Table or White Table was placed in the front lobby for all the students and visitors to see. Each item on the table is symbolic of something associated with a veteran. For example, the white tablecloth symbolizes the purity of motive. A black napkin represents the prisoners of war.

A lit candle reminds us that the United States is a light in a dark world and a red rose represents the hopes and prayers of



1st grader Brayden Ross

the people at home. A red ribbon tied to a vase represents the determination in finding prisoners of war and a lemon represents the bitter fate of many of the missing.

A pinch of salt represents tears and an empty chair is waiting for a soldier to return. The Remembrance Table was discussed in an age appropriate manner during library class to ensure understanding and to teach respect.

Tobyhanna Elementary Center is committed to our district mission of "Preparing All Students for the Challenges of Tomorrow."

We know that in order to do that we need to reach beyond the classroom curriculum and offer creative approaches to education that promote citizenship, creativity, and self-confidence.

With the continued support of our parents, we know our goals will be met and our students will move forward well prepared !!

Generation Next prepares students for life after West HS

By Ms. Michele Connors,
Assistant Principal
PM West High School

Students at West High School have been very excited about a new opportunity to assist with the college planning and admissions process which is sponsored by the Pocono Mountains United Way in partnership with Community Action Lehigh Valley.

“Generation Next is a college readiness, access, and completion program created to correct disparities in education,” and started helping students at West High School during the 2022-2023 school year.

Students have been enjoying the benefits of this opportunity since its inception at West High School and recently created their own video to explain the program and the benefits of it. Our Generation Next students meet about twice per month throughout the school year and enjoy frequent field trips throughout the year as well. In 9th and 10th grade, students focus on lessons and activities related to the following topics: Exploration of Self, College + Career Readiness, Interpersonal Skills, and Societal Context.

Through these lessons and activities, they learn about self-esteem, leadership styles, time management, organizational skills, conflict resolution, healthy relationships, and so much more. The 11th and 12th grade Generation Next students focus on topics related to Skill Development, College Readiness, and Financial Literacy.

They learn about decision making, networking, resume building, SAT prep, college class prep, banking basics, and more, and they receive support in completing college applications and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students in the program receive one-on-one mentoring, learn from local guest speakers, work on social justice projects, and visit college campuses.

Most recently, Generation Next students visited Centenary College in Hackettstown, New Jersey in December, and in October, they received the royal treatment at East Stroudsburg University when they participated in the presidential tour. They toured the campus, met with the president of ESU, had lunch with deans of various colleges, and listened to great feedback from the ESU student panel (which consisted of four West High School alums).

In August before even coming back to school this year, a group of Generation Next seniors visited Penn State University’s main campus to learn about the academic, extracurricular, and athletic opportunities available. They also met with the admissions office staff to learn about the application process, financial aid, and other important information before taking a tour of the campus and of course enjoying ice cream



Generation Next students receive the royal treatment on an East Stroudsburg University Presidential Tour.



Generation Next students tour Penn State University's Main Campus.

at the famous Penn State Creamery.

To be eligible for Generation Next, students must meet two of the three requirements: identify as a person of color, be a first-generation college student, and/or qualify for free and reduced lunch. Applications and other information are available in the West High School guidance office.

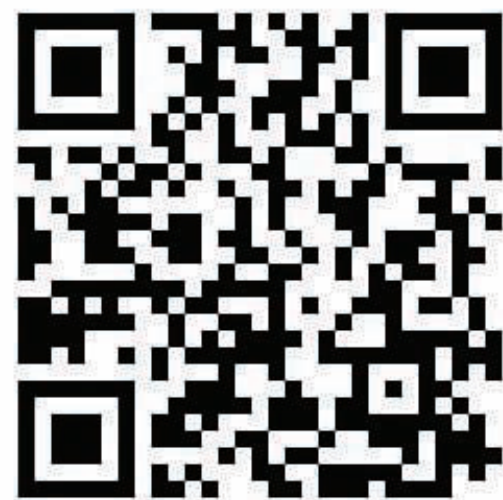
Generation Next currently serves 60 students at West High School, and students have many positive things to say about the program. Senior Jaylon Duncan said that Generation Next is fun and that he enjoys going on the trips. He stated: “I like the community, and we do a lot of good planning and stuff which is very important. And we talk a lot about mental health.” Jaylon said that Generation Next opened the idea to college for him. Senior Alexandra Quine admitted that, “as a junior it was scary trying to figure out the whole college process.” She said that Generation Next helped her make new friends and find out who she really was. Sophomore Isabella White said that Generation Next, “represents coming together as a whole.” She stated that she wants to keep bettering herself because of the program.

For more information about Generation Next,



Generation Next students enjoy ice cream at the famous Penn State Creamery.

please contact the West High School guidance office or go to the Generation Next website: <https://www.communityactionlv.org/generationnext>.



(Scan the QR code to watch the video or go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMuUXMRENeE>.)



**All Pocono Mountain School District Schools
will be Closed in observance of Presidents Day
February 19, 2024**

Swiftwater Elementary Center celebrates Future Educators of all ages

By Dr. Krislin Ofalt, Principal
Ms. Karen Doughton, Principal
& Mrs. Kate Lesoine,
Instructional Support Teacher
Swiftwater Elementary Center

Swiftwater Elementary Center is proud to celebrate future educators of all ages by implementing programming to garner the interest of young people who wish to become part of the teaching profession. It all started with a partnership between East Stroudsburg University Education Department and the Pocono Mountain School District.

Swiftwater Elementary Center has hosted East Stroudsburg University (ESU) Professional Development School (PDS) students for the past five years and counting. The collaboration between our local university and Pocono Mountain School District is a step toward addressing our national teacher shortage.

This program has allowed ESU students who are interested in becoming teachers to connect with current teachers and students at a variety of grade levels very early on in college.

Dr. Gina Scala, ESU Professor of Special Education and Rehabilitation and ESU Program Coordinator has partnered with our District and shares, "The Professional Development School (PDS) model has been praised over recent years as being one of the most effective models for furthering educational goals and exemplars of school university collaboration."

Dr. Jaclyn Kessel, ESU Director of Field Experience and Partnerships echoes the importance of the strong connection between ESU and SEC stating, "The partnership between East Stroudsburg University (ESU) is a strong example of educational collaboration at its absolute best. This robust partnership uniquely combines academic theory with real-world classroom application, benefiting pre-service teachers and students."

Dr. Kessel continues by sharing, "Central to this strong partnership are four key goals: nurturing the development of future educators at East Stroudsburg University, emphasizing continuous professional development, encouraging an inquiry-based approach to teaching, and ensuring the success of students from Pre-K-4."

She continues with, "The success of these objectives is largely due to the dedicated roles of liaisons, administrators, and mentor teachers. Liaisons are the cornerstone of this



East Stroudsburg University PDS/Student Teachers Class of 2022 with Mrs. Lesoine, PDS Elementary Liaison.

partnership, facilitating seamless communication and integration between ESU and the SEC. Their role makes academic learning relevant and applicable in practical teaching settings. Faculty from both ESU and Administrators at Swiftwater Elementary Center play a strategic role in creating an environment that nurtures this partnership, setting the stage for effective collaboration and resource sharing. Mentor teachers are vital in this alliance, providing pre-service teachers with hands-on, practical guidance. Their mentorship offers a valuable perspective on the realities of teaching, directly influencing ESU's future educators' professional growth and readiness."

Each year, Swiftwater Elementary Center hosts between 8-12 ESU PDS students. They begin part one of their field experience by spending one day a week in a classroom. This includes actively participating in small group instruction, teaching formal lessons, and implementing educational case studies.

The following semester, the PDS students return for part two, in which they are in the classroom two days per week. Again, they are actively engaged and teaching with their mentor teacher during this time, also continuing to build relationships in the classroom.

This 'gradual release' into teaching responsibilities allows PDS participants to move into part two field experience that include their two-part formal student teaching experience. Mrs. Kate Lesoine, SEC Instructional Support



Spring 2023 East Stroudsburg University student teachers at Swiftwater Elementary Center.

Teacher coordinates and supports our programming at Swiftwater Elementary Center along with our administrative team.

Our teaching mentors at SEC provide supervision for the PDS students and co-teach with the PDS students. In addition, the mentor teachers reflect on progress with their students, and they share and model successful strategies for instruction and learning.

ESU's PDS program is about building a community of educators and future educators. Partnering with district mentors allows for authentic learning experiences, shared roles with the learners and educators, as well as ongoing growth. While working together with the mentor teachers, students are able to have a smaller student-to-teacher ratio, providing even more attention to students' individual needs.

School districts need substitute teachers. Many of our PDS students apply for our daily substitute positions within the Pocono Mountain School District during part two of their



The Spring 2024 Swiftwater Elementary Center student teachers from ESU PDS program.

placement. Overall, this unique opportunity benefits the PDS students as well as the school district. Many continue to graduate and apply for future teaching positions as they continue their experiences as substitute teachers across the school district.

Each year our administrative team tries to improve upon current practices and increase connections between ESU college students and SEC staff members.

Our goal is to continue to "spread the word" to young educators about the importance of putting students first in education. To increase this connection, we have implemented an additional choice for teachers not only to formally mentor new teachers but also to act as for a shortened period of time to allow for ESU students to experience a greater variety of classrooms, grade levels and subjects. Swiftwater Elementary Center is proud to "raise the bar" each year.



Clear Run Elementary students enjoyed a visit from a team of guest readers including local officials and business owners, who are supporting the America 250 PA Keystone Project.

America250 PA Keystone visits Clear Run Elementary

By Mrs. Heidi Donohue, Principal
Dr. Jessica Loverdi, Principal
Clear Run Elementary Center

Clear Run Elementary Center was selected to participate in the America250PA Keystone Classroom Initiative.

On Wednesday, December 13, 2023, as part of the initiative, a team of guest readers visited the schools. These special guests included local officials, law enforcement officers from the Pennsylvania State Police, officials from the PA School Boards Association, and even Miss Wilkes-Barre.

In addition to the 25 guest readers, students were visited by Tricky, the Pocono Raceway fox, as well as mascots from Kalahari - Kenya and KYA the elephants, Louie the lion, and Benny the monkey.

The purpose of the Keystone Classroom Initiative is to teach students about Pennsylvania's integral role in the founding of the United States and the impact of its people on the nation's past, present and future.

The volunteer partnership has been working hard to educate students prior to the 250th anniversary of the United States, known as the Semiquincentennial, which will take place on July 4, 2026.



Ms. Franz's kindergarten class had Kya a Kalahari Mascot as a guest reader in their classroom

Cashing In on Math at East JHS

"Khan Cash" is a hot word in Ms. Dyshuk's 7th grade math class, where students have the opportunity to earn money for practicing their math skills.

Using an online program called Khan Academy, students are assigned skills that coincide with each unit.

Upon completion of the unit, students have their payday. Students are responsible for filling out their paycheck with assignment scores and how much money they earned for the unit.

Students may use their Khan Cash to purchase things like fun pencils and erasers, a 100% on a test of their choice, early to lunch and front of the lunch line passes, or free time on their Chromebook.

At the end of the marking period, students may also purchase a ticket for a classroom movie incentive. When asked why she loves "Khan Cash", Izabella Manfredi said, "It's great to get rewarded for my



Pocono Mountain East Junior High School students earn Khan Cash for practicing their math skills. Pictured here are students (L to R): Jillian Pratt, Izabella Manfredi, Kiley Figured, Nevaeh Key-Hargrove, Zachary Heckman, Francesca Leon

hard work!". When asked what the best part of Khan Academy is, Jillian Pratt said, "It's better than a boring worksheet and the program helps you through a question if you get stuck."



Clear Run Intermediate students are excited to participate in the new Future Teachers Club.

CRIS starts new club to develop Future Teachers

The Future Teachers of America is an intramural club run by Mrs. Nicole Lemoncelli and Mrs. Lindsay Kulenich. Meetings are held on Monday and Wednesday mornings prior to the start of school.

Students are each given an assignment that they report for each day during homeroom or at the end of the day. Some students are assigned to a homeroom and assist students with math fact or vocabulary practice.

Others assist in the special area classes with set up or other tasks and others assist in the library to help organize the Clear Run Intermediate School closet and assist with the reshelving of books.

To date the CRIS Future Teachers of America Club has been involved in: input into our PRIDE program at school as well as cutting tickets for teachers, written positive notes to place on student lockers, decorating teachers' doors for the holidays, held discussion and debate regarding the pros and cons of being a teacher, created and displayed a "Kindness" bulletin board, wrote kind and encouraging saying on the sidewalks leading up to our building.

This club is very big on understanding not only the role of a teacher but the importance of the heart behind the work. Our CRIS Future Teachers of America Club are shining stars!

School Closures

ALERT!
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Go to the
PMSD Website
under Helpful Links
to sign up!



East High School starts the school year off strong

By Mrs. Tamala Toleno, Principal
PM East High School

University of Scranton Honors East High School Alum and East High School Teacher

Pocono Mountain East High School (EHS) alum (Tabitha Berger, class of '20) and EHS teacher (Kyleen Newlander-Jones) both received the Rose I. Kelly Award at the University of Scranton. Tabitha was recognized as the outstanding senior in the College of Arts and Sciences. In part, the recipient of that award recognizes an educator who they identify as having a significant impact on their life and pre-college preparation. Tabitha has had many accomplishments at the University of Scranton and after graduating with her degree in Biochemistry, cell and molecular biology, she is planning to transition to medical school.

East High School Senior Sunrise

Sixty-six EHS seniors participated in a senior sunrise event on Friday, September 8, 2023. Seniors gathered at the EHS football stadium at 5:30 am to make connections with their classmates and enjoy the beautiful sunrise, Krispy Kreme donuts and Panera Bagels. Ms. Allhouse, Ms. Defazio, Ms. Shanaberger, Mr. Gilroy and Mrs. Toleno enjoyed making some great memories with the seniors.

East High School Unified Track Team Captains Attend Special Olympics Youth Summit at Kutztown University

East High School Unified Track Coach Marianne Paige and Coach Karen Dey took the Unified Track team captains to the Special Olympics Youth Summit at Kutztown University on October 11, 2023. It was a great day at the Special Olympics Youth Summit for Unified Champion Schools. Coaches and team captains learned different ways to spread inclusion at East High School and across the Pocono Mountain School District.

EHS Students Attend PA Association of Student Councils State Leadership Convention

East High School Senior Class President Sam Nyakundi, Junior Class President Nicholas Ingrassia, Junior Class Vice-President Emily Olenick, Junior Class Representative Emma DeLuca, and Sophomore Class President Daniel Cunningham attended the Pennsylvania Association of Student Councils State Leadership Convention in Altoona on September 22nd and 23rd. Students attended sessions consisting of motivational speakers, student-led workshops, and leadership activities. Four-year cast member Nick "Sunshine" Tokman as seen on Deadliest Catch spoke to students about motivation, peer pressure, student retention, self-esteem and adversity.

Senator for a Day

Students from East and West High Schools participated in Senator Rosemary Brown's Senator for a Day Program on Friday, October 20, 2023. Students had the opportunity to participate in activities to get a glimpse of how government functions and how it reacts to public policy issues.

PMEA District Chorus

Congratulations to East High School's Kayleigh Schmidt! Kayleigh qualified for PMEA District



One hundred fourteen Pocono Mountain East High School students were inducted during the induction ceremonies for the Art Honor Society, Math Honor Society, Music Honor Society, Science Honor Society, and Spanish Honor Society.



Students from East and West High Schools participated in Senator Rosemary Brown's Senator for a Day Program on Friday, October 20, 2023.

Chorus.

Veterans Day Celebration

East High School students celebrated Veterans Day on Tuesday, November 7, 2023. Students showed their appreciation to our veterans by recognizing their service during a student assembly. Veterans also received breakfast and a goodie bag while visiting East High School. Students learned a great deal about the significance of Veterans Day and the sacrifices made by the veterans that visited East High School.

Congratulations to the East High School Esports Team

Both East High School Red & White Esports Teams were undefeated in the Super Smash Brothers Ultimate (SSBU) High School Pennsylvania Scholastic Esports League (PSEL) Fall Season in our region where they competed against Nazareth Area High School, Parkland High School, Pocono Mountain West High School, Jim Thorpe High School, and Selinsgrove High School.

The Pocono Mountain Esports Team qualified for the High School Pennsylvania Scholastic Esports League State Tournament held at Harrisburg University on December 1st. We are very proud of their 3rd place finish in the State Tournament!

East High School Night of Honors

Congratulations to the East High School students who were recognized during the Night of Honors on Thursday, November 16, 2023. One hundred fourteen students were inducted during the induction ceremonies for the Art Honor Society, Math Honor



The PM East High School Esports Team qualified for the Pennsylvania Scholastic Esports League State Tournament.



Team Captains attend the Special Olympics Youth Summit at Kutztown University

Society, Music Honor Society, Science Honor Society, and Spanish Honor Society. Students and their families had a great time celebrating their accomplishments.

East High School Holiday Chorus Concert

The East High School community enjoyed a wonderful holiday concert performed by the East High School Chorus on Friday, December 1, 2023.

East High School Holiday Band Concert

The East High School Band showcased their musical talents at the holiday concert on Friday, December 15, 2023.

Upcoming Event: The EHS Student Government Association will hold its 10th Mini-THON fundraiser from April 19th at 7 p.m. to April 20th at 7 a.m. Contact the school to offer your support.

East Junior High interacting in the digital world

By Mr. Charles Herman,
Computer Teacher
PM East Junior High School

We all know today's students have grown up in a much different environment than what their parents went through.

A major change is how much technology is intertwined in our students' everyday lives.

There are many positives and negatives with the use of technology, but one thing for sure is that these things change rapidly with new apps, AI (artificial intelligence), and other media updates.

Being able to stay on top of these changes and keeping track of what students are doing on any digital device is almost impossible for parents and teachers. This is where teaching Digital Citizenship at PMSD comes into play as a tool for our students to use as they interact daily in today's digital world.

Digital citizenship is the ability to navigate our digital environments in a way that's safe and responsible. Digital citizenship also teaches students how



Pocono Mountain East Junior High School students in Mr. Herman's Computer Class are learning about digital citizenship in addition to learning other computer skills.

to actively and respectfully engage in these spaces. Some of the topics taught include media balance, digital footprints, communication, online privacy/security, digital drama, and news/media literacy.

Each digital citizenship lesson takes on real life challenges and digital dilemmas that students face today.

These lessons produce some very interesting, engaged discussions in the classroom, with the goal of giving



them the skills they need to succeed as digital learners, leaders, and citizens tomorrow.

Buddy Program is in full swing

By Dr. Kathleen Fanelli,
Principal
Dr. Eric Vogt, Principal
PM East Junior High School

The East Junior High School Buddy Program is once again helping students to form friendships.

Seventh and eighth grade regular education students involved in the program spend time bonding with the life skills students in Mrs. Bryer's Life Skills class.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, a group of Buddies join Mrs. Bryer's class during period 9. They play games and work on a variety of friendship building activities. The Buddies also helped their new friends make ornaments for the Buddy Christmas Tree.

The Buddies are selected by teachers to be part of the program. These students are chosen because they show PRIDE consistently. They also have been selected because they have been identified as students who show compassion.

Kemora Raphael is the student assistant for the Buddy Program. She organizes the Buddy Program schedule. She also makes sure that the students have passes for the days that they attend.



PM East Junior High School 8th grader, Kemora Raphael, is the student assistant for the Buddy Program. She organizes the Buddy Program schedule and assists other students.



The Buddy Program fosters positive and supportive interactions between regular education and life skills students.

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Beyond the screen: Connecting & learning with PMSD Cyber Program

By: Ms. Nora Wandalowski,
Director
PMSD Cyber Program

For parents seeking a unique and personalized learning experience for their children, the Pocono Mountain School District Cyber Program offers a compelling alternative. More than just online classes, it fosters a vibrant community where students connect, explore, and thrive.

Daily live instructional lessons breathe life into the Accelerated Ed curriculum, with teachers tailoring explanations and enriching concepts to fit each student's needs. This dynamic approach goes beyond textbooks, bringing seasonal themes, cultural celebrations, and real-world connections into the classroom.

Cyber learning is not only about earning credits, but helping students develop crucial life skills like responsibility, time management, and independence. They learn to navigate technology confidently, conducting research using trusted resources and mastering essential digital tools.

Forget the limitations of physical boundaries. PMSD Cyber brings students together through an array of in-person events, from pumpkin picking at the Fall Festival to cheering on the Penguins at a STEM event. These experiences nurture friendships, allowing children to bond with classmates and teachers outside the virtual space.

The flexibility of online learning empowers students to learn on their own terms. Whether attending live sessions,

working one-on-one with PMSD teachers, taking hybrid courses in the physical building, or earning credit recovery credits to meet graduation requirements, students are in control of their schedule, pace and learning environment.

This personalized approach caters to individual needs, fostering focus and minimizing distractions. For students who may struggle with traditional classrooms, PMSD Cyber Program offers a safe haven. Shy or anxious children can participate comfortably without turning on their cameras, while a focus on positive reinforcement creates a welcoming atmosphere for all.

PMSD Cyber Program is more than just a program; it's a family. Teachers, students, and parents come together, building a supportive community that extends beyond the screen. From field trips and carnivals to casual chats and shared experiences, Pocono Mountain School District Cyber Program fosters a sense of belonging and connection, making learning a truly enriching journey.

If you're seeking an education that goes beyond the textbook, where technology empowers personalized learning and community bridges physical distance, then the PMSD Cyber Program might be the perfect fit for your child. Come explore a world where academic excellence thrives alongside social connection and personal growth, all from the comfort of your own home. Contact Director Nora Wandalowski at (570)839-7121 extension 75400 or email nwandalowski@pmsd.org.



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KEEPING EAST SAFE: OFFICER MICHAELS

THE LOVE OF DANCE
An Interview With Senior Kaylei Anderson

INSIDE: INTRODUCING THE CRIMSON ECHO

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ESU Spotlight: Student teachers at SEC

Alexis Masker, who was a part of the East Stroudsburg University Professional Development School (PDS) and student teaching program at Swiftwater Elementary Center from 2022-2023, shares her experience.

Alexis is now a kindergarten teacher at Swiftwater Elementary Center. She is also a 2019 Pocono Mountain West High School graduate.

"The benefits, experiences, and positive interactions that I had as a PDS student and as a student teacher within the Pocono Mountain School District, prepared me for my current career as a kindergarten teacher at Swiftwater Elementary Center," said Ms. Masker. "These experiences have provided me with valuable opportunities and have allowed me to learn hands-on experiences within the classroom."

Ms. Masker also stated, "At East Stroudsburg University professors want everyone to strive to be their best and to give specific feedback on ways to improve, as well as the positives that all of the teachers are doing."

The mentor teachers, staff and students at Swiftwater Elementary Center were an amazing part of my experience. Having a school that supports you in whatever way possible



is the best feeling.

Coming back to my alma mater to teach was such an honor and made me feel like I was home. My mentor teachers have guided me in the right direction, supported me with everything, were very welcoming into their classrooms, and allowed me to try new things.

At Swiftwater Elementary Center everyone is welcomed, included, and seen. I am beyond thankful for my experiences and being a teacher at Swiftwater Elementary Center."

Vaping 101 at CRIS

By Ms. Amy Haynes, Principal
Clear Run Intermediate School

The Weller Center partnered with Clear Run Intermediate School to provide educational programs to students that target concepts and skill development that are important in developing a healthy lifestyle.

Sixth Grade students participated in the Vaping 101 Program, an introduction to the dangers of vaping and the associated health risks.

Students learned about the harmful short and long-term effects of vaping, including how vaping can impact academic and physical performance.

Our Fourth Grade students had the chance to practice identifying and understanding their feelings by identifying sources of stress within their lives and how to cope with feelings of nervousness or sadness that are often associated with stress in a safe manner.

Handmade scarves bring CREC students joy

By Mrs. Heidi Donohue,
Principal
Dr. Jessica Loverdi, Principal
Clear Run Elementary Center

What started out as a kind gesture has become an annual tradition. Mrs. Fette, one of the kindergarten teachers at Clear Run Elementary Center, has a very special mom.

Mrs. VanHine and several of her friends over the last few years have made it their mission to make sure the students at Clear Run Elementary Center are wrapped in love during the winter months. They do so by crocheting scarves for each and every child who attends the school. That's well over 700 scarves!

Students love picking out their own special scarf during the holiday season, and wear it proudly. The staff and students of Clear Run Elementary Center thank Mrs. VanHine and her friends for their kindness, talents, and generosity.



Students in Ms. Thomas's kindergarten class received new handcrafted scarves made by volunteers.

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PM East High School student athletes participating in East Athletics Red Nation volunteered to help out with the Swiftwater Elementary Center Family Fitness Night in November.



EHS Senior Evan Murphy

Cardinal Sports Spotlight

By Tamala Toleno, Principal
PM East High School

**Congratulations to
PM East Golfer
Senior Evan Murphy**

Pocono Mountain East High School senior Evan Murphy is the 2023 District XI Golf Tournament Champion. As District XI Golf Tournament Champion, Evan qualified to play in the PIAA State Tournament. Through 36 holes of competition, Evan finished 3 over par and finished 21st in the State Tournament.



**East High School Student Athletes
Making Connections with SEC
Students and Families**

Ten East High School student athletes participating in our new student group, East Athletics Red Nation (EARN), had a great time assisting Swiftwater Elementary Center families during their annual Family Fitness Night on Wednesday, November 29, 2023.

**Congratulations to
PM East Girls Tennis
Freshman Elizabeth Trott**
Freshman Elizabeth Trott placed 3rd in



EHS Freshman Elizabeth Trott

the District XI 3A Girls Tennis Singles Tournament held at Freedom High School.

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astoner@pmsd.org (Professional Staff)

West Jr. HS shows its school PRIDE

By Dr. Ann Marie Vaughn, Principal
PM West Junior High School

West Junior High held their first ever contest for students to design their PRIDE T-shirt. Students were challenged to design a print which exemplified our PRIDE behaviors and showed school spirit.

Odin Plunkett designed the winning shirt and it is available for sale to students and staff. Thank you to everyone for submitting designs. The goal is for the design to also be added as a mural throughout WJHS as well so it can live on for many years to come! Congratulations to Odin!

Ms. Ludka and Ms. Venneman continue to operate the PRIDE School Store during homeroom Monday through Friday, every other week. All students have the opportunity to spend the PRIDE tickets.

PRIDE tickets are handed out by staff members when students are observed to be exhibiting their PRIDE traits of - Prepared, Respectful, Involved, Dependable, Empathetic - throughout their school day and in all areas of the school. Each month, students have the opportunity to purchase tickets to participate in monthly incentives.

In September, students celebrated with Juice and Donuts. October, students had the chance to enjoy Philly Pretzels and juice. Thank you to Philly Pretzels for supporting our students.

For November's 10-ticket incentive students had the chance to use their PRIDE tickets to enter into a



Nothing brings out school spirit better than the Pocono Mountain West Junior High School's Fall Carnival Karaoke. The Fall Carnival is one of the schools' celebration events to reward students for demonstrating their PRIDE traits - Prepared, Respectful, Involved, Dependable, Empathetic.

"Tricky Tray" Raffle to win a variety of prizes. Finally, to finish out 2023, students celebrated their PRIDE by decorating Winter Cookies, with Hot Cocoa of course. A special group of recommended students had the chance to bake with Dr. Vaughn and teachers after school. Those cookies were then used for the incentive. Thank you to the teachers and parents who donated dough, icing, and decorations!

Every year, WJHS hosts a holiday door decorating contest. This year, Ms. Williams' homeroom won



Students and staff had a great time decorating their classroom doors for Pocono Mountain West Junior High School's annual holiday door decorating contest.

donuts for the best decorated door during the Holidays. Their design included fun holiday themes along with key algebra concepts.

East Jr. HS shines the spotlight on educational activities

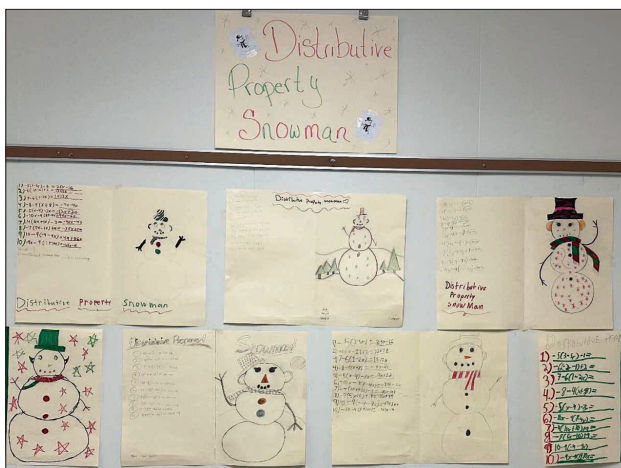


Mr. Nicastro's Tech Ed Class

Leading up to the winter break in Mr. Chris Nicastro's Technology Education class, students were creating coasters for possible holiday gift giving.

Students designed their coaster and personalized them with pictures, 3D prints, or even fresh flowers. Using epoxy, the students seal in their designs into the block for permanent protection for years of wear.

The students all enjoyed the activity and came away with a gift that can last for quite some time.



7th Grade Math Class

In Ms. Stacey Nalesnik's 7th Grade Math class, students have been working on Algebra.

They have learned how to combine positive and negative integers, as well as like terms, to create simplified equations.

Students were given the challenge of solving 10 problems using the distributive property. To make things more interesting for the students, their distributive property problems included a snowman.



EJHS Mock Trial

After reading The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allen Poe, Mrs. Marlena Gocsek's English Language Arts (ELA) classes conducted a mock trial. After examining the legal definition of "insanity," students chose prosecuting and defense attorneys.

Each side consisted of four attorneys. In addition, the students participated in the voir dire process for jury selection. Each juror was given life scenarios in which to research and prepare for questioning. Their scenario may or may not have rendered them biased.

The prosecution and defense both sought textual evidence from the story to write their opening and closing statements. Finally, a judge and bailiff were selected and given skits to follow. At the conclusion of the trial, the jurors deliberated and reached a verdict, which was read by the foreperson.





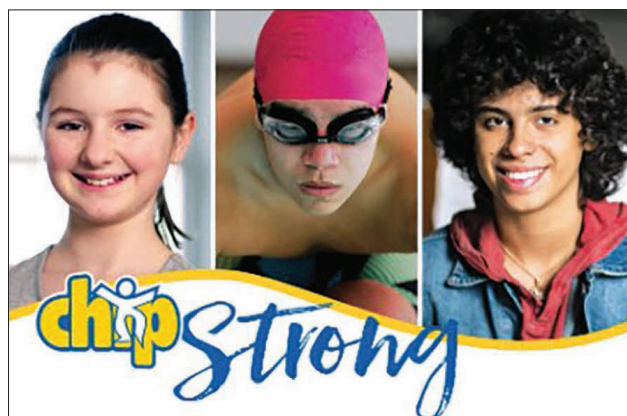
Students learn it's healthy to eat carrots.

CREC students learn healthy eating habits

By Mrs. Heidi Donohue, Principal
Dr. Jessica Loverdi, Principal
Clear Run Elementary Center

Registered Dietitian Monique Mazaika and Chef John Kelly visited Clear Run Elementary Center to host a special event through their Mood Boost program. This event featured Orange Glazed Carrots as a menu item that students could try in the cafeteria during lunch.

Once all the students were seated, Monique educated them about the health benefits of carrots; how these veggies can help you feel more alert, focused, and energized. Students watched a video, featuring the "Alert" Moodie. Students received Orange Glazed Carrot recipe cards, a Carrot Fun Facts handout summarizing the lesson, and as well as a coloring page featuring "Alert."



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CRIS: Big Panther/Little Panther continues

By Ms. Amy Haynes, Principal
Clear Run Intermediate School

Research has shown that mentoring programs have a direct impact on academic success. In mentoring programs, mentors talk with students about their experience in school, and come up with ways and tips in which they can use to become better!

According to research, students who are in mentoring programs are:

- 59% more likely to earn better grades
- 52% less likely to skip school
- 81% more likely to participate in extracurricular activities

The Big Panthers come to Clear Run Intermediate School once a month. During their time in the building, Big Panthers are requested to meet with teachers to discuss students in need or who they should pay extra attention to that day.

The Big Panther should ask for the agenda for the day and assist with all classroom activities.



The Big Panthers after being chosen are coached on what the responsibilities are for being a mentor to Clear Run Intermediate School students. They are asked to circulate the room, approach students in a welcoming manner, and engage in appropriate conversation while showing active listening skills.

The Big Panther should show interest in what they are doing by assisting students with schoolwork, not providing them answers, but rather guiding them to reach their conclusion.

The Big Panther in the classroom should get to know their students by asking open-ended questions. They should always be friendly to the students, support the teachers when asked, and demonstrate PRIDE at all

times.

The Clear Run Intermediate School students look forward to the once-a-month visit with their classroom Big Panther. Most teachers will plan an activity so that the students and the Big Panther are engaged and able to work collaboratively together.

SEC's Future Teachers is more than just a club

The Future Teachers of America Club is a new club at Swiftwater Elementary Center. Led by first year teachers Ms. Lynzi Binder and Ms. Alexis Masker, this club offers a unique experience to third grade students with a developing love for teaching.

Students are provided with the opportunity to build lessons, form relationships, and help with a multitude of other teacher duties such as making bulletin boards and helping to spread positive messages throughout the school.

The Future Teachers of America Club will be offered in the fall of each school year. The goal of the club is to allow students to participate in education-based activities that help to foster the love of learning. The hope is that the interest in this club continues to grow so that it can be offered to the lower primary grades as well.

Graduating from Pocono Mountain and returning to their Alma Mater and teaching is like a dream. According to Ms. Binder and Ms. Masker, having a place to call home away from home and to feel the



Swiftwater Elementary Center 1st year teachers, Ms. Lynzi Binder and Ms. Alexis Masker, are leading the new Future Teachers of America Club, to help 3rd grade students develop an interest in pursuing teaching as a future career.

love and support is the best feeling ever; being able to start a club that can reach out to students who have a passion to become a teacher in the future is an honor.

PM East HS School Counselor named Outstanding Secondary School Partner

Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine recently presented the Outstanding Secondary School Partner Award to Renee Garvey, School Counselor and Career Educator at Pocono Mountain East High School (EHS).

The Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine partners with Sanofi Pasteur to offer high school students the Geisinger Biomedical Program. This program is enabling 22 EHS students, who are interested in pursuing a medical career after they graduate high school, to be mentored by current medical students.

This opportunity includes a monthly in-person educational learning experience on Geisinger's medical school campus in Scranton, Pa. Recently, the EHS students participating in the program dissected

pigs, operated tools used in laparoscopic surgery, and learned about skin cancer.

This program would not be possible without the generous funding from Sanofi.

"It is reassuring to know a global healthcare and pharmaceutical company values the local community," said Ms. Garvey. "Based on the students participating, Geisinger and Sanofi will certainly be getting a great return on their investment."



Here's what you need to know about the PA State Assessments

By Dr. Catherine Sweeney
Pocono Mountain SD
Assistant Superintendent of
Curriculum & Instruction

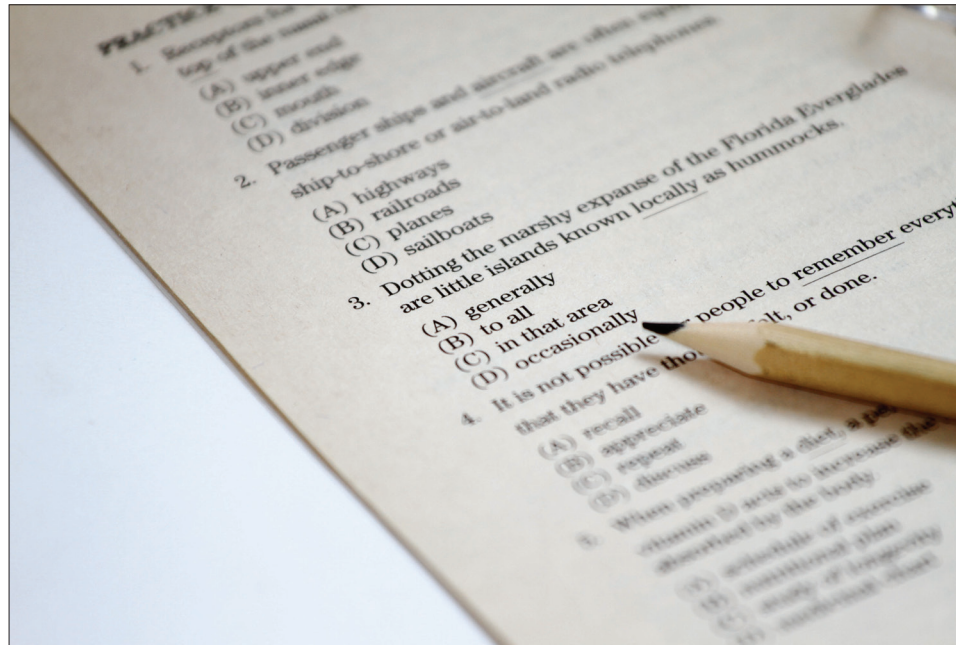
The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requires Pennsylvania public school students to take two types of standardized assessments: the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in grades 3-8, and the Keystone exams in grades 8-11. These federal assessment requirements began with the 2001 ESEA Reauthorization, called the No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB). The current version of ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), does nothing to reduce the number of required tests or the number of grades or content areas that must be tested.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) aims to support schools, teachers, and principals; provide students with equitable learning opportunities; and strengthen the communications between state and local education agencies (LEAs) and the communities they serve. Assessments, required by ESSA, are a tool to help identify students and schools who may need additional support, thereby informing investment and programming decisions to ensure equitable outcomes.

PSSAs are secure, in-person standardized tests, and results are used for required federal accountability purposes. Students in grades 3-8 are tested in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and students in grades 4 and 8 are also tested in Science.

The Keystone exams are capstone tests for core courses in Literature, Algebra I, and Biology, typically taken by students in grades 8-11 the same year they complete the associated course; however, students can repeat an exam if desired. For accountability and reporting, PDE uses the highest Keystone score received by the end of grade 11, known as "Best by 11th." The Keystone exams are utilized for required federal accountability purposes.

Note that, nationwide, COVID-19 disrupted the administration of state standardized tests in both the 2019-20



and 2020-21 school years.

In spring 2020, the administration of PSSAs and Keystones was canceled entirely in Pennsylvania. In spring 2021, PDE administered PSSAs only to students who had returned to in-person hybrid learning, under guidance from PDE that the results would not be used for accountability purposes. In fall 2021, students who returned to school in person took the Keystones.

The 2021-22 school year was the first year that the PSSAs and Keystones were administered normally since 2018-19 (pre-pandemic) and results were utilized by PDE for district/school for accountability purposes.

Participation in the PA State Assessments

The school's participation rate can potentially have a negative impact on the school's accountability status.

The United States Department of Education (USDE) requires 95% participation on federally mandated assessments to ensure a relevant sampling of students and valid, reliable data. Student subgroups, including students with disabilities and those with limited English Proficiency, must also have a participation rate of at least 95%.

When participation rates fall below 95%, each subsequent non-tested student must be counted as non-proficient. Participation and performance are connected to various processes, including potential eligibility for federal funding.

In accordance with Pennsylvania's Consolidated State Plan, school

entities not meeting the 95% threshold are required to submit a plan for improvement to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

Please Note

When school participation rates fall below 95%, each subsequent non-tested student is designated as non-proficient. Therefore, the district will incur a negative impact on student participation rate for district/school federal/state accountability measures for every student who does not complete the assessment. Therefore, it is important that your child/children participate in the PA State Assessments.

Chapter 4 Guidelines for Parent Opt Out from PA State Assessments Section 4.4 of Title 22, Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Guidelines for Parent Opt Out from State Assessments Section 4.4 of Title 22, Chapter 4 provides for the right of any parents/guardians to excuse their child from state assessments if, upon inspection of the testing materials, they find the assessment to be in conflict with their religious beliefs.

This is the only basis for which a parent/ guardian can excuse his/ her child from the PA statewide assessments.

In compliance with this statute, parents/guardians are required to follow the process below when requesting their child be excluded from statewide testing (PSSA/Keystone Exams):

- Two weeks prior to the testing window, parents/guardians should contact the child's school to request to review the statewide

assessment in question. The school will schedule a convenient time for the review to occur in the presence of district personnel.

- Parents/guardians must sign the Parent Confidentiality Agreement, which will remain on file with the school. By signing the agreement, parents/guardians agree not to photocopy, write down, or in any other manner record any portion of the exams, including directions. Parents/guardians also agree not to discuss the contents of the test they review with any other individuals.
 - If, after reviewing the test, parents/guardians find the test to be in conflict with their religious beliefs and wish to request that their child be excluded from the assessment, the parents/guardians must submit a written request to the Superintendent stating their objection.
 - Upon receipt and review of the request, parents/guardians will be notified of the decision regarding their request. This process must be completed for each assessment and for each child for which parents/guardians wish to submit a religious objection to the child participating in a PA statewide assessment. The process, as established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), requires a review of the actual assessment, a general exemption from all assessments across all grades and subjects cannot be requested by a parent/guardian.
- ## Important Dates
- PSSA**
 - The 2024 PSSA testing window begins Monday, April 22, 2024.
 - Tests can be viewed from April 8-19, 2024.
 - No opt-outs will be accepted after April 19, 2024.
 - Keystone Exams**
 - The 2024 Keystone testing window begins Monday, May 13, 2023.
 - Tests can be viewed from April 29, 2024-May 10, 2024.
 - No opt-outs will be accepted after May 10, 2024.

Spring Recess - March 28, 2024 thru April 1, 2024 - Schools Closed



How to help your child with Social Anxiety

By Dr. Catherine Sweeney
Pocono Mountain SD
Assistant Superintendent of
Curriculum & Instruction

Social anxiety disorder (social phobia) isn't simply a fear of making or interacting with friends. It's actually characterized by an intense fear of social situations in which the child might be judged or scrutinized by others.

Children with social anxiety disorder experience intense feelings of anxiety about a number of different triggers including speaking in front of others, reading out loud, fear about being evaluated by others, fear of offending others, fear of embarrassment, and fear conversing with unfamiliar individuals.

Children with social anxiety disorder worry in a lot of social situations (school, teams, play dates, enrichment classes, and even family reunions.)

Social anxiety disorder can cause significant distress for children and has a negative effect on academic performance, social relationships, self-confidence, and other areas of functioning.

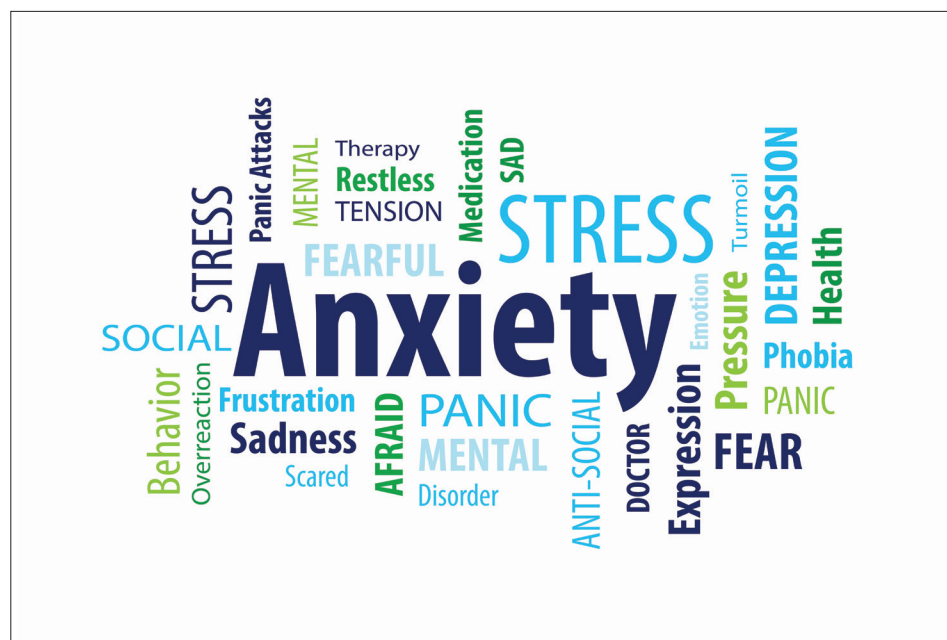
Children with social anxiety disorder are likely to avoid engaging in things like sports or other group activities with their peers for fear of negative scrutiny or embarrassment.

Parents can help children with social anxiety disorder by understanding the nature of the disease and teaching them how to cope with their symptoms.

How to help your child cope with social anxiety disorder

The best first step to help your child cope with it is to name it.

Children with social anxiety disorder know that they feel fearful and anxious in social situations, but they don't always know why. Helping them connect the dots between emotional responses, physical symptoms, and triggers is an important first step



toward learning to cope. Educating your child about the ways in which anxiety impacts thinking and behavior is a powerful lesson in learning to work through negative emotions.

Teach relaxation strategies

Kids need to learn a variety of tools to use when feeling anxious and overwhelmed. It's nearly impossible to use adaptive coping strategies when you're dealing with intense physical symptoms of anxiety, so the first step is to work on learning to calm the anxious response.

- Deep breathing is the best way to calm rapid heart rate, shallow breathing and feeling dizzy. Teach your child to visualize blowing up a balloon while engaging the diaphragm in deep breathing. Count your child out to help slow the breathing (4 in, 4 hold, 4 out).
- Guided imagery: Your child can take a relaxing adventure in their mind while engaging in deep breathing. Tell a quick story in a low and even voice to help your child find their center.

Progressive muscle relaxation: Anxious kids tend to tense their muscles

when they're under stress. Teach your child to relax their muscles and release tension beginning with their hands and arms. Make a fist and hold it tight for five seconds, then slowly release. Move on to the arms, neck and shoulders, and feet and legs.

Teach cognitive reframing

Kids with social anxiety disorder are often overwhelmed by negative beliefs that reinforce their anxious thoughts. Their beliefs tend to fall into the following categories:

- Assuming the worst-case scenario
- Believing that others see them through a negative lens
- Overreacting
- Personalizing

Teach your child to recognize negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones. If your child tends to say things like, "My teacher thinks I'm stupid because I'm bad at reading," help them recognize the negative thought, ground it in reality (a teacher's job is to help kids learn not judge them on what they already know), and replace it with a positive thought ("I'm having a hard time reading but my teacher will help me get better.")

Teach problem-solving skills

Children with social anxiety disorders tend to become masters of avoidance. They do what they can to avoid engaging in situations that cause the most anxiety. While this might seem like the path of least resistance, it can actually make the social anxiety worse over time.

Teach your child to work through feelings of fear and anxiety by developing problem-solving skills. If a child fears public speaking, for example, they can learn to practice several times at home in front of a mirror, have someone videotape them and watch it back, find the friendly face in the room and make eye contact, and use deep breathing to calm anxious feelings.

Help your child identify their triggers and brainstorm potential problem-solving strategies to work through those triggers.

Work on friendship skills

While you can't make friends for your child, you can help your child practice friendship skills. Practice these skills using role play and modeling to help your child feel at ease with peers:

- Greetings
- Sliding in and out of groups
- Conversation starters
- Listening and responding
- Asking follow up questions/ making follow up statements

Seek professional help

If social anxiety disorder negatively affects your child's ability to attend school, socialize with peers in or out of school, or affects other areas of functioning, it's time to seek an evaluation from a licensed mental health professional.

The good news is that social anxiety disorder is very treatable and kids can learn to cope with their symptoms and implement strategies that work across a wide variety of settings.



**Act 80 - Parent Teacher Conferences -
Grades K-12 Schools Closed**

Feb. 16, 2024

8:00 AM - 3:30 PM

The importance of unplugging and communicating

By Dr. Bethann McCain

Pocono Mountain SD

Director, English Language Arts
& Reading

We've all seen it. Honestly, I would say that most of us have done it. Families and friends, out to dinner together, and yet, not together. Everyone in the group is on a device; some are on iPhones, others on Androids, tablets, or pads. Teenagers are listening to their favorite tunes on their respective earbuds.

We have become an information society. We can access almost anything we want and in any format.

Technology has provided us with easy and immediate access to most information; some correct and some not. With this access, everyone has become an expert in everything, or so they think.

Digital Media has allowed us more opportunities to reach out to family and friends that we haven't seen in years. Cell phones have leveled the playing field for many who haven't had access. Unfortunately, technology has also decreased authentic communication. Rather than talking during dinner, in the car, or while waiting in line, we interact with our phones.

The COVID pandemic made virtual communication a requirement in our lives. As a result, children don't know how to talk to people to resolve conflicts and problem-solve, or are afraid of the outcome.

The early years are a critical time for brain development, but the brain still needs a lot of shaping before it can function as an adult brain. Brain development happens intensively during adolescence and continues into the mid to late 20s. This means children really do need practice talking to each other.

We can't blame technology entirely; however, we can note what technology has done to our brains. So, the question shouldn't be "how do we fight against technology," rather "how do we use technology effectively in our lives?"

Not a big deal, right? I mean, it's only an iPad or a cell phone. What could happen? Since the invention of digital media and technology in 2003 and even more since the COVID pandemic, children are identified at alarming rates with Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADHD) behaviors, such as short attention spans, excessive talking, and acting without thinking. Children and young adults who regularly use



social media, interact primarily through tools such as snap chat, iMessage, and instant messaging, and regular gamers are at a higher risk of exhibiting ADHD behaviors and at greater risk of executive-functioning deficits in organization, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution.

Digital media increases our use of dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter that acts on areas of the brain that make you want to have or do something. Dopamine also plays a role in controlling memory, mood, sleep, learning, concentration, movement and other body functions. Additionally, children are struggling with motivation and overcoming obstacles.

The more often children and adults are engaged in gaming, social media, and interacting via technology, the less comfortable they are with face-to-face interaction. How can technology do that?

Well, technology is fun and most fun things have the potential to be addictive. As with other possible addictions, like drinking, gambling, and food, technology becomes more addictive with increased use. According to multiple studies through the National Library of Medicine; "The past decade has seen an exponential growth in the use of Internet, video games, downloadable television, music and movies, and social networking (Media Awareness Network 2005; Smith et al. 2009). This change in our

culture has had a marked impact on the development and daily activities of children. From a cognitive point of view, it has increased the use of visual relative to auditory communication and placed a premium on short snippets of communication rather than sentences and paragraphs."

Talking with hundreds of children in Pennsylvania about their feelings about digital media and overall technology, I noticed a change in their viewpoint of its benefits. Overwhelmingly, students love computer games for practice of skill; however, this hasn't evolved into a love of learning on a computer. The majority of children still prefer in-person learning.

Additionally, in schools where there is a

cell phone policy that is consistent for all students, they expressed that they have more opportunities to get to know their peers and their teachers. Others shared that it gives them a break from people texting them when they are in school. When all students do not have access to their cell phones, students are less worried about Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).

Students are very aware of their colleagues and their own inability to persevere (work on things when they are hard), get motivated, maintain focus, communicate with people face-to-face, and problem-solve.

Let's consider "how do we fight against technology," and "how do we use technology effectively in our

lives?" by taking students, teachers, families, and research in mind.

The first thing we need to understand is what is happening to the brain. Not to get too deep, but the part of the brain most impacted by technology is the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex (PFC) intelligently regulates our thoughts, actions and emotions through extensive connections with other brain regions. Additionally, the more time spent on digital media, the more people struggle with sleep, memory, learning to read, concentration, and the ability to communicate in person. The PFC is not fully developed when we are in our late 20s. According to the PEW research center, 60% of parents shared that their children started using Smartphones at age 5, with 29% saying that their children were using cell phones by ages 3 to 4.

What we can do to help our kids:

There are many things that can be done to reverse the effect of digital media use. Some are easy, others are more challenging. All are free. Everyone means everyone- as adults, we have to show positive examples. If we want children to be more efficient readers, writers, sleepers, and know how to handle their emotions we can:

- Talk, talk, talk. Communication is critical. We all need to know how to talk to each other. Share yourself with your children. Get to really know your children by talking to them.
- Keep the cell phones out of sight and turn off notifications. Consider a closed basket, a drawer, or another area in the house that removes technology from everyone's sight. It takes about 5 minutes for dopamine surges to dwindle, so expect some arguments the first few times.
- Important: Make sure that you offer other options such as board games, puzzles, reading, biking, hiking, cooking, running, outdoor games and so on. These activities promote communication and problem-solving.
- Set technology limits as a household expectation. Decide as a family what is appropriate for cell phone and computer use.
- Important: If your children don't use technology at home, don't start. Model what the expectations are for everyone. Unless you have a career that

UNPLUGGING provides much-needed mental health break...continued from Page 18

- requires you to always be available, then limit your technology use as well.
- **Determine Sleep Hours:** Everyone needs between 8-10 hours sleep and also time to wind down. We've all talked about how we feel when we don't get enough sleep and the same applies to our children. Set a time to turn off all technology (televisions, phones, computers- anything that lights-up) and set up some bedtime routines, turning off devices at least 2 hours before sleep.
- **Make visits technology free.** My children and their friends would drop their phones in the basket next to the door, so they wouldn't use them while they were visiting. At first, they were resistant, but it didn't take long for them to find other things to do.
- **Don't contact your children during school hours.** Be aware of FOMO. At school, students need to focus on what they are learning. If they believe that you or someone else will be contacting them they can't concentrate. Need to talk to your child? If you call the office, we will make sure that they get the message.
- **Don't answer your child's text during school hours.** I know this is a hard one. Please know that we care about your children and their safety. If your child sends you a text that concerns you, please contact the school. We are here to help.
- **Inform children and young adults the correct way to use cell phones and computers.** If you and/or your children enjoy playing computer games, limit how often you use them. If your children



use social media, make sure you are aware of what they are watching- remember that you are an adult and know more about what is most appropriate. If they are researching, make sure that they know how to research accurate sites. Digital media allows anyone to say anything, so there is tons of information out there. Not sure? Give us a call or email for tips.

- **Choose activities and time that are "just right."** Think of the Goldilocks method: "Daddy bear's bed was too hard, Mommy bear's bed was too soft, and Baby bear's bed was "just right." What activities make your child happy while they are playing, and happy when they are done? How long do they enjoy the activity? Remember that dopamine makes us want to do something, whether we like it or not. Activities should be for enjoyment, not for addiction.
- **Work on changing habits.** Do you find yourself

"doom scrolling?" Do you find yourself picking up your phone when you hear a phone notification? Find ways to change habits. This would be a good time to do some internet research and find what works for you.

It takes a village to raise a child. We can do this together!

Resources:

- **Global Social Media:** <https://datareportal.com/social-media-users>
- **Unmasking the Infodemic: The Impact of COVID-19 Misinformation on Public Health** <https://www.contagionlive.com/view/unmasking-the-infodemic-the-impact-of-covid-19-misinformation-on-public-health>
- **The screens culture: impact on ADHD** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3220824/>
- **Does Heightened Screen Time Cause Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADHD) In Children?** <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/screen-time-and-adhd>
- **Impacts of technology on children's health: a systematic review** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9273128/>
- **'Anti-dopamine parenting' can curb a kid's craving for screens and sweets** <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2023/06/12/1180867083/tips-to-outsmart-dopamine-unhook-kids-from-screens-sweets>
- **Calming Bedtime Strategies to Help Kids Sleep** <https://www.therapyatplay.com/calming-bedtime-strategies-to-help-kids-sleep/>

'But it's only kindergarten' Why Kindergarten is important

By Dr. Catherine Sweeney
Pocono Mountain SD
Assistant Superintendent
of Curriculum & Instruction

Kindergarten is often looked down on as a less important grade in school. When kindergarten students walk into a classroom, that room is often their first classroom. If they didn't go to preschool, a kindergarten class is their first experience of school. It's in these classrooms that students learn what school is like.

Going to kindergarten is an important step for you, and your child. Kindergarten provides children with life skills and opportunities to be successful in all developmental areas, setting a strong foundation for their educational journey.

Kindergarten provides experiences for children to grow and develop through play and interaction. It also allows children to become confident learners in a safe and supported environment, providing a framework of belonging, being and becoming. Kindergarten expands children's knowledge and connection of themselves, family, culture, their environment and the broader community.

Students learn school rules in and outside the classroom in kindergarten. Often, a kindergarten teacher will spend weeks and months training students on expectations.

Where do you think a student learns how to raise

their hand? Or sit in a rug square? Not climb up the slide? It's in kindergarten classrooms that students learn what is appropriate school behavior.

Kindergarteners get an introduction to a school schedule and all the different subjects they'll learn in their school career. When we show them what they'll be learning in different subjects, we help them develop their interests and their strengths in certain subjects.

Kindergarten teachers pave the way to show children that school is an amazing place where you can learn through fun and engaging activities.

Learning social skills is crucial in a little one's life. This is what helps them make friends, learn confidence and be an overall kind and caring human.

Students learn social skills both in the classroom and on the playground. They learn how to express their feelings and how to talk to a friend. They also learn that they don't get everything they want all the time. This is where learning how to share comes into play. Kindergarten students need to learn these skills to be successful, kind, communicating adults.

Kindergarten builds the foundation for other grades.

Students learn many basics like letters, numbers, reading, writing, addition, subtraction, the list goes on and on. All of these skills are necessary for students to learn so they can be successful in first grade, second grade, on and on until the end of their schooling.

Kindergarten teachers help build this strong foundation and it's no easy task because there is so much to teach, academically and socially.



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Child must be age 5 on or before Sept. 1st

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Board continues enhanced senior citizen property tax rebates

The Pocono Mountain School District Board of Education continues to offer eligible property owners enhanced property tax rebates.

The district's Board of Education approved the enhanced property tax rebates in April 2016, and has continued to offer the enhanced rebates each fiscal year since to provide qualifying property owners with additional tax relief. The current Board approved the continuation of the enhanced senior citizen property tax rebates through a vote at a public meeting on June 21, 2023.

For many years, the district matched the state rebate program established by the PA Senior Citizen's Property Tax and Rent Rebate Program Act. That changed in April 2016, when the School Board passed its first resolution for the enhanced tax relief.

With the enhanced rebate resolution, qualifying property owners may receive their state rebate of up to \$650 and then up to 200 percent of that amount in a rebate from the school district.

Who Qualifies?

The guidelines for individuals to qualify for the PMSD property tax rebate programs are as follows:



Must own and have occupied their home as their primary residents during the school year of which the tax rebate is being requested;

- They or their spouse must have been at least 65 years old as of December 31 of the tax year;
- They were permanently disabled during all or part of tax year. Must be 18 years or older and were unable to work because of a permanent medically determined physical or mental disability;
- Their total tax year household income must have been \$ 35,000 or less. Fifty percent of social security/railroad retirement income shall

be excluded in determining eligibility income limits;

- Pension Annuity and IRA distributions are considered income;
- They or someone on their behalf must have paid the school taxes in full on the residence by December 31;
- They were a widow or widows during all or part of the year and 50 years old or older as of the end of the year;
- Only one member of each household may file a claim even if more than one person is qualified to receive a rebate.

The application to apply for a property tax rebate and other information on the program are available to qualifying property owners from PMSD on the school district's website at www.pmsd.org, under the Helpful Links Tab, click on the Senior Citizens Property Tax Rebate Program link. Individuals who do not have access to the Internet may call the Pocono Mountain business office at (570) 839-7121, extension 10163 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. for more information.

Understanding changes to state's property tax rebate program

Information compiled from the PA Department of Revenue website.

Thanks to the expansion of Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate (PTRR) program, thousands of older Pennsylvanians and people with disabilities are now eligible for the first time for this program.

The Department of Revenue (DOR) is encouraging everyone who is newly eligible for the PTRR program to submit their applications as soon as possible. Doing so will help the Department more quickly verify and process applications from first-time applicants, who are required to submit supporting documentation to verify their age and eligibility.

The PTRR program is now open for eligible Pennsylvanians to apply for rebates on property taxes and rent paid in 2023.

What should first-time filers expect?

When someone files for PTRR for the first time, DOR takes additional steps to verify the applicant's information is accurate to prevent fraud and to ensure that rebates are going out only to those who are eligible.

Specific examples of required documentation for first-time filers are listed in this year's instruction booklet for the Property Tax/Rent Rebate program.

The Department is committed to being responsible stewards of this vital program and of taxpayer dollars, including protecting against fraud.

When will I get my rebate?

Rebate payments for the PTRR program are typically distributed starting on July 1. Due to the historic expansion signed into law by Governor Shapiro, DOR expects an unprecedented number of Pennsylvanians applying for this program in 2024. While DOR will move as quickly as possible to process every rebate application, first-time filers should anticipate that it may take additional time to review their rebate applications.

First-time filers who have filed by June 1, 2024

ELIGIBILITY TABLE FOR HOMEOWNERS & RENTERS	
INCOME	MAX REBATE
\$0 - \$8000	\$1,000
\$8,001 - \$15,000	\$770
\$15,001 - \$18,000	\$460
\$18,001 - \$45,000	\$380

should expect to receive their rebates between July 1 and September 1, 2024. Some rebates may take additional time if DOR needs to correct or verify any information on a rebate application. This time frame for first-time filers' rebates is only for this year, due to the expansion resulting in a high number of new applicants.

The best way to ensure you receive your rebate on time is by filing as soon as possible at myPATH.pa.gov, and opting to receive your payment via direct deposit. Applicants can also receive a paper application by calling 1-888-222-9190.

You can follow the progress of your rebate on myPATH after you file by visiting myPATH.pa.gov and selecting the Where's My Rebate? link on the homepage to check the status of your rebate.

File Your Application Online through myPATH

The Department strongly encourages all PTRR applicants to file their applications online by visiting myPATH (myPATH.pa.gov). This is a user-friendly system that provides instant confirmation that an application has been successfully filed, allows access to automatic calculators, reduces errors, and includes other helpful features to assist in expediting the filing of an application.

myPATH also features a Spanish version of the online application for the first time this year to assist Spanish-speaking applicants.

DOR is Working to Process Rebates as Quickly as Possible

DOR has been preparing for the unprecedented

number of applicants and working to ensure the Administration can deliver for Pennsylvanians.

About the PTRR Expansion

Governor Josh Shapiro signed into law a historic expansion of the Property Tax/Rent Rebate (PTRR) program.

More Pennsylvanians will now qualify for rebates and — at the same time — the vast majority who qualified in prior years will see their rebates increase. This is the first time the program has been expanded since 2006. The expansion:

- Increases the maximum standard rebate from \$650 to \$1,000.
- Increases the income cap from \$35,000 to \$45,000 for homeowners.
- Increases the income cap from \$15,000 to \$45,000 for renters.
- Automatically increases the income cap to grow with inflation in years to come.

PTRR Eligibility

The rebate program benefits eligible Pennsylvanians age 65 and older; widows and widowers age 50 and older; and people with disabilities age 18 and older.

Since its inception in 1971, the PTRR program has delivered more than \$8 billion in property tax and rent relief to some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents. The PTRR program is supported by the Pennsylvania Lottery and receives funding from gaming.

It's free to apply for a rebate, and applicants are reminded that free assistance is available at hundreds of locations across the state, including Department of Revenue district offices, local Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers, and state legislators' offices. As a reminder, applicants must reapply for rebates every year because rebates are based on annual income and property taxes or rent paid in each year.